MY LIFE AS A DOG
~ Prologue ~

It was days like this that I loved. There was noise, so I knew they were all here, all together. But it wasn’t always like this.

There was a time when things weren’t so loud, and the lady with the food was no longer around. It was lucky, really, that feeding me was so simple; or I would have starved. The male leader had trouble with it at the start; things weren’t all so good for a while there.

Things are alright now, it’s loud and things feel warm again.

~ Puppy ~

This place was all new, and there was more space here. From when I woke up, to right now, I had spent the time running around a space so big that at first had scared me.

Every now and then, there’d be a loud cry. It was coming from somewhere beyond the tall stairs. But even with being here only one day, I got the impression I shouldn’t go up there. I almost felt like I needed to see
what it was. But I couldn’t, shouldn’t and probably would.

When that bright thing in the sky disappeared, I’d be able to see. That’s when the human’s went to sleep, I knew that much.

I huffed into the grass, the strange strands of tickly stuff brushing up against my nose. I had flopped down on this patch, thinking that it looked warm and soft. It wasn’t as soft as I thought it’d be, but it was alright. I hadn’t yet investigated the little kennel in the back of the yard. Maybe that would be more me. It looked similar to the thing that the one who looked like a bigger me, lived in. She was warm and I missed her; I wondered if I’d ever see her again.

On instinct, my ears perked up when, suddenly there was a noise behind me.

“Cocoa,” a high voice with a soft undertone to it sounded from the same place that other noise came from, “come ‘ere boy!”

I knew that tone, it always meant one of four things.

Though I had hopes for food, I’d already eaten today. Maybe I’d have my fur combed and petted. That would be nice, I love it when that happens. And I hadn’t done anything wrong. Not recently, at least.
There was the fourth option, and that had happened not long ago, when the big bright ball was high in the sky, one sleep before.

The female who petted me and cooed at me had called my house name, and hooked a round circle thing around my neck. Many rectangular bits of paper were handed over, and the next thing I knew, I was in the back of a big thing with wheels. The seats smelled of leather and I wasn’t allowed on them.

I don’t think I like that option all too much. And the big thing with wheels made me feel sick. I knew that if I was sick all over the leather smelling chairs, it’d be much a different tone calling my name.

Thinking it pretty safe, I pushed off the ground with a jump, and ran over to the lady by the door. She had a big smile on her face, and as long as she gave me food again tonight, just like she did this morning I could trust her.

In fact, she might even end up my favourite human. I trotted up to her feet. I gave a small whine, because I knew it always made humans rub the spot behind my ear. Maybe I could go without food, I thought, if I could have someone do that for the rest of my life. But no, food was important, and I loved that more.

The female human crouched down, and just as my magic whine had intended her to do, she gave my fur a stroke, and I loved her.
“Hey boy, what’re you doing?” There was that high tone again.

I whined again seeing it work so well.

She made a weird noise, it was high pitched. But it wasn’t speaking. I knew what human speech sounded like. No idea what they were saying, but I knew it.

This wasn’t speech, but I decided that it sounded fun, and safe.

“You’re so gorgeous, you know that? Just like my Tommy, so cute,” she crooned. My ears perked up and the naming word. Every human had one. And she said this one like ‘Tommy’ was her pride and joy. I reckon my kennel could be my pride and joy, once I get to know it better. And my feeding dish.

The female stood and called “come on Cocoa,” before walking away.

I followed, because maybe, just maybe, she was heading for food.

Nope, not food, this wasn’t the way to the place with food. The big door at the front of the kennel was open, and the male leader was standing in it. He was smiling, too.

His voice was deeper, “Come on boy, come greet the girls.”
And just as he said that, the big V-line pulled up to the curb. I could see lots of little humans. They were all making noise, yelling, singing and making that funny sound.

Two of the little humans that I had seen in the big kennel got off the big V-line, talking really fast and glancing back at the bus every few steps, those fun sounds getting louder and louder as they got closer.

I gave a loud bark, and jumped off the short steps. I leapt past the flowerbed that I’d look into later, and pounced onto the little humans. My tongue flopped out and I breathed all over them. The taller one was louder, she was squealing and shouting my house name. The smaller one smelt of flowers, and I loved flowers. Recently I’ve learnt that flowers mean gardens, and gardens mean dirt. And I loved all of those things.

“Cocoa, down!” that tone, I knew it. The little humans were making the fun sound and shouting that in between. I put my front paws back on the ground, and the two girls walked towards the older humans, going in for a hug.

“Cocoa!” that was food giver. And I followed them all inside. The loud girl threw her bag into the place where the food was kept and ran upstairs shouting, “Is Tommy awake?!”

There was that name sound again.
“Well if he wasn’t, he is now!” the food giver yelled back, and she didn’t seem happy.

The loud one ran back down the stairs and whispered, “Sorry,” her face scrunching up a little.

The male leader said something back and the food bringer mumbled something in a low tone, “no point whispering now.”

I wanted to follow the loud one up the stairs, because that’s where this ‘Tommy’ was.

But I couldn’t, not yet.

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They were all finally asleep. At first, I thought they’d never go. The male leader had stayed in the kitchen with the food giver for ages. They’d talked and talked and talked. I couldn’t understand how humans could say so much, and yet still have more to say the next day.

But never mind that. They were asleep and I was finally, after a whole day of waiting, going to find what and who this ‘Tommy’ was.

With my nose to the ground, I followed the smell of something fresh and sweet. All the way up the tall stairs.

I had to be quiet, because I knew from experience that humans woke up from loud noises.

The floor was soft here, not like downstairs. Downstairs smelt of wood and something odd. It smelt clean. I
followed the smell to a room. The door was opened and there was this strange bed thing in the corner of the room.

I trotted forward, curious. My nose was in the air, and I had found the source of the soft, sweet swell.

I was too short to see over the wooden base of the bed thing, so I reared on my hind legs and put my paws on the side of the bed thing. My nose just came over the top, and I could see through the bars.

The similarities of an older human’s bed and this one were big, so at the least I expected to see a small sleeping human. But instead, I ended up looking right into the wide open eyes of a tiny human. This was Tommy, I knew it. He was silent now. Not like earlier, when he was crying really loud.

And this time, I didn’t even have to give a whine to get a pat. Tommy landed a tiny, chubby paw on my nose, and made a quiet, weird noise. This one wasn’t a funny sound, nor was it speaking. It was just a noise. And for now it was Tommy’s noise.

And I decided that Tommy was mine.

Over the next couple of weeks, I got into lots of trouble and I heard the angry tone lots of times. I did end up investigating that blower bed. I’m a little sad about that, because the flowers aren’t there anymore, and the Food
giver didn’t let me inside for a while and I had to stay in the big open space at the back of the kennel. And the flower smelling human got a new pair of chew toys. From the way that she cried, I don’t think they were actually chew toys. I felt bad for a while, but then she got another pair and I felt good again. At least that was until she left them outside again, and I just couldn’t help myself. I don’t like the chew toys anymore, they’re too tempting to be likeable. The one thing I never get in trouble for is going upstairs at night, to watch Tommy. But that’s because they’re all asleep, and they don’t know. I hope they don’t catch me, because then I won’t be able to keep Tommy safe when the bright round thing is gone, and all the humans are asleep. If all the older humans are asleep who’s going to keep Tommy safe, if not me?

But despite all the bad noises I hear sometimes, when I do something I don’t think they like, I also heard the fun noises and the warm ones. The female food giver fed me when she was supposed to and the whole family would take me on long walks, though I didn’t like the thing that they hooked onto the round circle on my neck.

The flower smelling one was alright, I thought. She gave me food under the table at the big feeding time. This is when only the humans eat, but when I look right at the flower smelling one, with a sad look, she feels sorry for me and gives me her left-overs. I like that a lot.
Tommy, who I found didn’t make many barking noises, made many other sounds, and I recognised the fun sound whenever I licked his face and the weird paw things on the bottom of his legs. He always latched onto my nose and fur with his chubby paws and made sounds. I pretended I could understand him. The older humans seemed to nod and speak back at him whenever he made loud noises.

I felt warm and safe around Tommy, and I think that, as long as I had Tommy and the Male leader and the Food giver and even the loud one who always picked on the flower smelling, I’d be alright if I never saw the older me. As long as I had my family, I’d be happy.

~ Growing Up ~

The house is quieter now. Tommy leaves not long after the big bright ball appears in the corner of the sky. I spend my days exploring the garden, searching for new adventures. Sometimes I manage to squeeze through the small hole at the back of the garden, hidden behind the disgusting red fruit that I learned to avoid long ago. Today is one of those days. I am bounding through the park not far from the kennel, snapping at birds and chasing my tail. I will catch it one day. I lose myself in these small adventures, forgetting about Tommy’s
absence for a while. When I return I will be met with loud noises and angry faces, but I can’t worry about that now, I am too busy finding new foods to eat. Today is one of the good days.

A new scent enters the park, it smells like food. Not just any food, the food-that-runs-away. I rise and grin, letting my tongue loll out. The smell gets stronger, closer. I start to run towards it, my feet hitting the soft dirt firmly with every step. Finally I see it, small and scruffy, its fur matted with dirt. It sees me and growls, but instead of running, as the other food usually does, it stands its ground. I bark happily, accepting the challenge from this strange new creature. I keep running towards it, but as I get closer it still doesn’t move. I slow down and reach out to pat it with my paw. The food springs up and latches its claws into me. I whine in protest. Why is it doing that? We’re playing a game, and this isn’t how you play. They run, I follow. I’ve never actually caught one before. I shake off the pain-bringing monster and run back towards the big kennel. My day has taken a turn for the worse.

Tommy isn’t back yet, and it’s getting dark. Usually he’s back before food time, but I have eaten and the bright ball is leaving and he still isn’t here. Male leader is missing too, but food giver doesn’t seem worried. Instead she is in the food room, making strange noises. They are happy noises though, so I am content to sit next to Tommy’s chair and wait. The big noisy thing that I can chase like the food that runs is here. Tommy comes
through the door and I run up and greet him.

“Tommy! Tommy! Where were you?”

“Hi Cocoa, come on, we’re going upstairs.”

He didn’t answer my question, but that’s ok, I’m just glad he’s here. He goes into the cleaning room and I sit at the door patiently. When he comes out he doesn’t smell like the park anymore, but a bit like flower girl instead. We go back to the noisy place and he sits in his chair. I go back to my place at his side. Tommy makes strange barking noises as he looks at the moving people behind the glass, and in the excitement of him returning I bark along. Male leader walks in and growls at me. I whine and stop. Tommy speaks to him but I am too tired from today’s adventure. It’s warm and I am with Tommy, it’s time to sleep.

Noisy Kennel ~

Today food bringer is staying at the kennel. I try to keep out of her way and stay in the garden. If I’m quiet she will take me on a walk later. So instead of leaving the garden I just stay, lying around in the grass. Eventually I hear her yell in that special voice she uses when it’s time for a walk. I try to stay calm but the thought of exploring makes me far too excited. She makes a few angry noises as I squirm into to round circle thing that keeps me close to her, but doesn’t get as annoyed as she usually does. I try to run as we walk down past all the other kennels.
We usually run together, but today she looks tired and sad, so try to cheer her up by chasing the birds and running through leaves. I turn to see a small smile on her tired face, and I know I have done my job.

Food bringer sits on the bench and lets me loose. I run around chasing various sizes of food for a while, but when I return her face is wet and she is making sad sounds. I jump up next to her and lie down with my head in her lap.

“You’re sweet Cocoa, but I’m ok.”

I raise my head and gaze into her eyes. She wipes her eyes and rewards me with a scratch behind my ears. We sit like that for a while, until a leaf falls over my eyes. Food bringer laughs and stands up. She lets me run on the way home, jogging beside me. For a moment everything is the same. Until we get home. That’s when the angry noises start to fill the kennel.

When we arrive at the kennel, male leader walks out with his legs-that-aren’t-legs waving about. He yells in his angry voice, and I cower, thinking that he was angry about the flower beds where I buried the bone the other day. He isn’t yelling at me though, instead he walks towards food giver.

“I thought you said you were going to pick up the girls!”

Food giver drops my leash and I run inside to Tommy. He’s sitting in his chair looking sad, he can hear them fighting too. I jump into his lap, even though it’s strictly forbidden, and try to comfort him. He wraps his arms around me pulls me closer.
“I don’t like it when they fight Cocoa, please make them stop.”
I lick his hand and he smiles sadly. I’ll protect him from the loud noises, I don’t know how, but I will.

After a while the noise stops and Tommy calms down. Food giver walks back in first and hurry’s into the next room without looking at us. I know I should move, but I am so tired, and Tommy is still sad. Perhaps if I just go to sleep…

“Get that damn dog off the couch!”
I scramble to the ground as male leader growls at Tommy. I want nothing more than to growl at him like he is at Tommy. I don’t though, he is the pack leader and I am not. Tommy looks like he’s going to growl too, but he gets up instead.

“Come on Cocoa, let’s go play ball.”
I follow him eagerly out the door into the garden, and he smiles. Things are almost normal again.

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It’s getting colder, and Tommy is coming home before the great ball leaves the sky again. There has been a bit more yelling since that night, but not as much. Whenever the leader and giver start making loud noises he runs upstairs to his room. I always follow, and we sit on his bed. He talks to me. I don’t always understand, but it calms him down. Today he’s talking about the place he goes during the day.

“We wrote a story today.”
“Can we go play ball?”
“I played chasy at play lunch.”
I can’t understand him anymore, but I don’t mind. He keeps talking and I slowly fall asleep. The noises all fade and I find myself chasing the food-that-runs through the park.

The yelling has stopped. This doesn’t mean that things are better now. There’s a fog in the house, not like the fog that I play in during the mornings, but it feels the same. Everyone is cold and blurry. They don’t talk to me as much anymore. Apart from Tommy of course. He still tells me about his day when he gets home. He’s sadder now though. He never yells at me, everyone else does, but not him. The loud one yells all the time now, and runs out of the room, throwing things and making loud noises. Even the flower girl yells sometimes. She’s usually in her room though, and only comes out for food time. Tommy and I play more though. He doesn’t like being in the house, there’s too much noise. So we go outside and explore.

It’s too cold to be outside, but we run around the garden and soon we’re warm. There’s many new smells now that it’s getting colder, every time the water falls from the sky there’s new scents to examine. Sometimes when the kennel is quiet I sneak out the hole in the fence and go to the park. I haven’t seen the monster-food-that-runs since last time, when it attacked me. Sometimes I can smell it though, and I feel like it is watching me, waiting to strike. I lie under a tree, thoroughly exhausted after
chasing my tail. I swear, one day I will catch it. The monster-scent has returned, but I try not to think about it. Dozing is much more appealing than worrying about being attacked. So I just sleep away the day under that tree.

I am torn out of my dreams by the monster-food. It is hissing and growling as if I am in its territory. I whine and try to fight back, but it hangs onto me. I roll over and hear it wail. Finally it lets go and I run away, crying. The kennel isn’t too far away, but it seems further. I hope that creature isn’t following me. If it follows me it might hurt Tommy, and it’s my job to protect him. He’s my best friend.

When I return to the kennel the air is tense again. No one yells at me for escaping. I pad slowly up to Tommy’s room. He’s sitting on his bed, his face all wet, just like so many days before. He looks up when he sees me, but doesn’t greet me. I jump up on his bed and lie next to him.

“Have you been out of the yard again?”
I try not to look guilty but he sees right through me.
“We’ll at least you’re back now. They’ve been yelling again.”

I nudge him to let him know it’s ok. Together we sit there, just like old times. For a moment that is. Then the voices grow louder again and his face grows wet once more.

~ Lost ~
I don’t stay inside the big kennel much these days, it’s too noisy for my liking. The leader and the food giver, they yell all the time. Sometimes at each other, sometimes at the litter… sometimes at me. It seems as if someone’s hid all the bones and won’t give them back.

But Tommy, Tommy is always sad. Before, when we used to play, he would run around with me, full of energy and excitemnt. His eyes would light up when he climbed out of the big, moving box, labelled “V-Line”. It makes me think of cats… I hate cats…

The noise starts again. I sigh and put my head on my front paws. Then I hear it. Is that Tommy? Is Tommy doing that sniffily thing? The one wear his eyes leak? I lift my head and soon my body follows as I trot through the kennel towards Tommy’s room.

As I enter I’m surrounded by his scent, his warm, soil-like scent. It reminds me of many afternoons, digging in the garden and many nights, keeping the end of his bed warm in the cold. I sniff again. He smells like the outside world, like that round bouncy thing we play with and like boy.

I jump up onto Tommy’s bed and my tongue fall out of my mouth. Tommy looks up, his eyes red and drops on his cheeks. He smiles at me, but the sadness is still there, in his eyes.

“Did you lose your bone?” I try to ask with my eyes. Of course what else could make a boy so sad?
“They’re just so angry, Cocoa.” Tommy talks, but I do not understand his human noises. So look at him lovingly and hope he knows that I’ll help him find his bone.

Tommy just stares at me with a sad smile. I don’t understand… so I lick his face. He makes a strange noise, that I know means he is happy, and I know I have cheered him up. “Let’s find your bone!” I say with my eyes. I jump down from Tommy’s bed and we head out to the garden.

“Where’s your ball Cocoa.” Tommy talks something again, and just stands in the middle of the yard. I assume he doesn’t know where to start. After all finding a lost bone is a daunting task. Especially for one who has a nose that does not work.

“Well… let’s begin where you last had it.” I reply, with encouragement.

“Come on Cocoa. I’ll give you a treat.” He talks as he holds up a liver treat.

“Tommy sometimes you can be very silly,” I say with all seriousness. “How will food help us find your bone? We need to remain focused. Start digging!”

I sigh and run off to the back. Picking a spot with soft dirt, that comes up easily.
“Cocoa, what are you doing?” Tommy talks, with what I think is encouragement. I dig more furiously, trying to make Tommy happy. I like making Tommy happy.

“Cocooooooo!” Tommy sings. Maybe he has found the bone. I look back, but he is still just standing there with the treat in his paw.

Then the noise begins again. The male leader talks, “TOMMY! Where are you?”.

As I watch Tommy sighs, drops the treat and drops his shoulders. He is sad again.

“Don’t worry, Tommy. I’ll find your bone. Leave it to me.” And he does.

I dig through that garden until the big bright ball in the sky sinks to the other end of the sky. Dirt is everywhere but I don’t find much. No bones. Only my old chew toy. It smelt weird.

Then I realise, that perhaps Tommy did not lose his bone. There must be something else that’s wrong… But what?

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For days Tommy has been moping around the house. You would think he has lost a thousand bones but no, he hasn’t lost one. The food giver has been gone for a few days now. At first I thought she was foraging… but she has not come back yet. The kennel is beginning to smell less and less like her.
I think Tommy is missing her. He does the eye-leaking thing every night now. Licking his face doesn’t help anymore and he never plays with me.

Tommy’s litter-bedes are sad too. The loud female isn’t so loud anymore. She locks herself in her room and doesn’t come out.

The female who smells like flowers, just sits around and watches images on the moving box. Her smell isn’t fresh anymore, it is decayed like the happiness in her life.

Even my old chew toy in the garden is sad.

I think I know why everybody is so sad; since the food giver is gone, no one has been foraging. They must all be starving! That feeling of rumbling, when you know you need food but you don’t know where to get it from. I would offer the pack some of my own food, but I do not think they would like it. Humans eat the oddest things known to dog!

Perhaps a nice game of ball will cheer up my poor Tommy. I jump up from where I was sprawled on the floor, and race to his room. But upon bursting through the door I realise Tommy isn’t there! Where is the little pup? Why is he not laying on his bed? I drop the ball from my mouth, something is wrong. Tommy is never gone at this time, the big whit V-Line does not come on this day, Tommy is at home, and he plays with me. But he isn’t here, he isn’t on his bed…
~ Big Long Walk ~

I search the whole of the big kennel, the garden, the porch, even the garden in front of the porch! But I cannot find Tommy anywhere! Where is he? Tommy never leaves without saying goodbye! He comes and finds me, he talks at me like humans do and he leaves, but not this time, he’s just gone… Now the male leader and the loud one who is not so loud anymore have started saying Tommy’s name. They must have realised that Tommy isn’t here! Yes! Maybe they can find him, maybe they can help me get my Tommy back!

The not so loud loud-one and the leader have been searching for a long time and still they haven’t found Tommy. Both of them are being very noisy and I think I saw their eyes leak, like Tommy’s do when he is sad, I think they are sad because they can’t find Tommy.

It must be bad, the food giver, Tommy’s food giver is back, she is yelling at the leader. Yelling very loudly, there is so much noise, so much anger, it makes me want to bark as loud as I can, but I won’t. I know they are sad, their eyes keep leaking and their voices keep rising, louder and louder! I’m scared of the food giver, I’ve never seen her so angry.

The food giver keeps yelling at the leader, her eye’s leak more and more and she puts her face in her paws. I know she loves Tommy, its why she’s so sad, right?
I’m sad that I can’t find Tommy too. Tommy is my friend, my little pup and now he is gone! I have to find him I have to! I miss his scent, the scent of outside and the bouncy thingy we play with, the scent of Tommy. Wait! That’s it, his scent! That’s how I’ll find Tommy, the humans, their noses are broken, they can’t smell Tommy like I can, can’t pick out that Tommy smell from all the different smells around them, but I can, I can find Tommy, I can make them happy! Then, I can make Tommy happy too.

I race to Tommy’s bed, I’ll start there, follow his scent and find him! I start sniffing, I can smell him strongly her, all around this room and so I begin to follow his scent out. Through the room with the all the food where the food giver would make yummy things for the pups, before she left. Through the room with the big soft rock and the moving pictures box, out the entrance to the kennel and to the porch.

But Tommy’s scent doesn’t stop there, it keeps going, across the front garden and through the tickly green stuff. It goes even further still, but I haven’t been past the tickly green stuff since the pain-bringing monster attacked me, what it does again? I didn’t like it last time it did. No! Cocoa get yourself together! This is Tommy, I don’t care how dangerous or far the places are that Tommy has travelled, I must go after him, I have to find him.
So I take one step, then two onto the grey rock past the green tickly stuff, I can smell Tommy, I must be on the right track! I begin to run, my excitement is building, I can smell him, I can smell him! I pass so many trees and I have to stop myself from stopping at them, no I tell myself, Tommy is more important than some trees, I just have to find him.

I run and I run and I never stop! Tommy’s scent is getting more potent, he must be closer, I will find him soon I know! The bright ball is getting lower in the sky now and I’m scared, if I don’t find Tommy soon, it will be too dark to look and then what? What will happen to Tommy? Tommy can’t be by himself in the dark, something bad might happen… Tommy is my friend, I can’t let anything bad happen to him, I have to find him before the big bright ball goes away.

But my paws, they hurt, they hurt so much, I can’t keep running much longer and I still haven’t found Tommy. But I can’t give up, his scent, it gets more potent with every stride and I know, I just know I’ll see him soon. I’ve ran past trees and through green tickly stuff, up hills and past those big moving boxes and… Wait! What’s that noise? It sounds like a human, sniffling, like Tommy does when his eyes leak. I look up and poke my nose towards the noise, that’s Tommy’s smell on the wind! Tommy’s smell, I race towards the smell, towards the sound, past the big, twisted tree on my right and there he is, behind the tree. Where are we? Why did Tommy come here?
I just stand there for a while, watching Tommy, his eyes, they’re leaking so much and he sobs and makes awful noises, sad noises, like he is in pain. I can’t bare it any longer, why is Tommy so sad? Tommy shouldn’t be sad, I have to let him know I’m here.

“Tommy, what are you doing here?!” I say to him sternly, I’m so happy to see him, I just want to lick his face, but he’s so upset, I don’t know if even a face licking can make him smile this time… Tommy turns around and I see his smile grow on his face, wet with the leaks from his eyes. If just seeing me can make him smile, I know everything will be ok.

Tommy is my best friend and I’m supposed to protect him! From now on I will, I will make sure nothing bad happens to him and he never goes on such a long walk again, ever!

“Cocoa! What are you doing here boy?” He exclaims, he sounds surprised, yet happy, he must have known I’d come find him! Maybe he just wanted sometime alone with me, he should have just asked! Humans can be so silly sometimes!

I walk up to him and lay my head in his lap, I can feel his body release its tension, he’s happy to see me and I’m happy to see him too, I missed you so much Tommy, I hope you know that.
We sit there for hours, Tommy talking away, sometimes his eyes start to leak again, and sometimes he just holds me tight and doesn’t talk at all.

“I was trying to find Mum’s house Cocoa, I miss her you know?” Tommy was talking again, I look up at him, I have no idea what he’s saying, but if I look interested he’ll keep talking. Tommy always feels better after talking to me a lot, so I’ll let him. Wait, did he say mum? Isn’t that the naming word that the pups give to the food giver?

“Tommy, Tommy! The food giver is at the leader’s kennel! I know where she is, come on!” I nudge Tommy to get him up and keep barking, at first he is very reluctant, but I just keep nudging and jumping and barking. Eventually he makes a happy noise like humans do and follows me. Maybe seeing the food giver will make Tommy happy!

Besides its getting dark, the bright ball is fading and I know it’s dangerous when it’s dark outside the kennel.

“Come on Tommy! We have to be back in the kennel before dark or else your leader’s eyes and your food givers eyes will leak!” I talk as commandingly as I can, I think he understands, because he picks up his pace.

“I hope you know the way home Cocoa, because I’m so lost, I have no idea where we are.” Tommy says to me, I think he’s telling me something about that game he and his friend-pups play. It doesn’t matter though, we have
to get back to the kennel and Tommy has to see the food giver.

“Do you know the way back to the kennel Tommy?” I say back to him, he just smiles at me and keeps walking. Poor kid, he must be pretty dumb, he never understands a word I say. Oh well, I know the way back, after all my nose isn’t broken like the humans. I can just smell my way back to the kennel.

I was right! As soon as we walked into the kennel, Tommy’s face broke into a massive smile when he saw the food giver. The leader even stopped yelling, for the first time in a very long time, no one was yelling. Sure many, many eyes were leaking but I think this was a good leaking, if there is such a thing?

Today has been very different, first Tommy went on a very big, very scary walk and now, the food giver is back. She is staying for one sleep I think, she is in Tommy’s bed, with Tommy, and they both look so peaceful sleeping there. Tonight I will watch them like I used to watch Tommy, back when he was just a pup. Back when I first realised Tommy would be mine and I will watch him until I know he is safe again.

But I am not the only one who watches, every now and then the leader comes and stands at the entrance. He watches the sleeping pair, cuddled up amongst the sheets and he smiles, I know he loves them, but I know that tomorrow the food giver will leave tomorrow. Things
will never be the same again, but for tonight, just one sleep, they seem the way they used to.
~ Love ~

Life is more quiet now. It’s not normal, I’m starting to think it never will be normal again, but that’s ok because Tommy is back! He hasn’t disappeared for very long since last time. He only goes away on the big vline, but he comes back every day. I like it when he’s home, because sometimes he comes out and throws the ball I love so much, or rubs my tummy and it seems to feel like how it used to. When he was still a little puppy.

The big kennel is quiet now as well. The loud one lives at food givers kennel now, it’s not as big as leader’s, but I still like going there with Tommy. The yard is smaller, but there’s always new smells! I love smells, some of them even smell like flower girl! I think I like having two kennels now, but only when Tommy isn’t going for really long walks and not coming home. The one thing I love about all of this though is Mitsy! Oh sweet sweet Mitsy, she is like me, but her fur is bouncier and it curls! I’ve never seen a dog like her, when I see her I can only sit and stare. I feel so stupid. What is this? Is it like when Tommy came home the other day and was talking and talking, and then this female arrived and they came out the back and Tommy went all quiet and couldn’t stand up straight and when she talked he just stood there and stared. I feel like that’s what I do around Mitsy. She belongs to the leader’s new food giver. I think I like the new one, she doesn’t really give me food, but he holds her like he did the other one. The new one is different.
too, her face has less lines on it and she has more energy, some days she comes around and runs with me! No one else in the pack will run with me, but she takes me for long runs, sometimes with Mitsy. I love it when Mitsy comes along.

Today is the day Mitsy comes to our kennel. I don’t know where she comes from, but I’m glad she’s here. “Hey Mitsy!” I yell out when I see her, but that doesn’t feel like enough, not for this beauty that is in front of me. “Your nose looks really wet”. Where did that come from? What was that Cocoa? Your nose looks really wet? I want to dig a hole and hide, I just can’t get it together around her. It’s like all my thoughts just run away as soon as I see her. “Aww you’re cute, thanks”. Oh my god, she spoke to me. She actually spoke to me. My brain is in overload, how can I possibly think? I just sit down and stare at her as she walks past, how can I ever have a conversation with her if I freeze like the cold time whenever she speaks to me? I think I might just walk off and lay by the bush with the red fruit, I can’t bear anymore embarrassment right now.

I can see Tommy walking towards me, I look at him, and my eyes say “Please help me make Mitsy like me”. He starts to talk. “Want to play catch Cocoa?” I can tell he really wants to help, he’s holding the ball. I think he’s got an idea. “Quick, tell me!” I say to him, I need to know. This could be the door way to Mitsy’s heart, her beautiful heart! “Ok boy, get ready!” he picks up his arm and throws the ball all the way over to where Mitsy is.
Of course! God Tommy is such a genius, if I give her my ball, she’ll have no choice but to fall in love with me. It is the greatest ball in the world after all. “Where would I be without you?” I say to Tommy. This is such a great plan! I run as fast as I can over to Mitsy and the ball. She looks a bit puzzled when she sees me coming over, I decide this isn’t a time for words. Love is more than that. I need to show her.

I stop running right in front of the ball and just nudge it over to her. Mitsy props up her ear and looks at me sideways, then she looks at the ball. Maybe this isn’t such a good idea, what if she hates it? What if I’ve ruined everything? Next thing I know Mitsy is right in front of me, with my ball in her mouth. My heart is pounding and my blood is rushing so fast I can feel myself about to faint. Mitsy drops the ball, she walks past me, brushing up against me with that luscious fur of hers, and then it happened. I never knew why this happens, but today it was the sign I needed. She smelt my butt! I get her scent and start to sniff hers, it’s as if in that moment I know Mitsy and she knows me. This is what love is. When the smell of another’s behind makes your heart flutter and you know there is no butt you would rather sniff. Mitsy is definitely the one, there’s no doubt in my tail.
Life has been good since I met Mitsy. I miss her when she’s not around. Sometimes I cry. She is becoming a big part of my life, now that Tommy isn’t around as much. He still throws the ball, and every now and then he rubs my tummy, but now he goes to food givers house without me a lot. When he goes he takes flower girl with him, and then it’s just me and leader, by ourselves. Which isn’t so bad, he lets me inside the big kennel when no one is home. He even lets me lay on the big soft rock! Then we watch the moving box, with all the different people on it. I enjoy this very much. Tonight is one of those nights. Leader is off making food, which he seems to do a lot now that food giver is gone and his new one isn’t around every day. It is weird. It’s like leader is becoming the food giver, but if he is the food giver, then who would be the leader? It isn’t something I like to think about, so I still call him leader, it’s easier that way.

The food smells amazing! My nose is itching with excitement at the scent. Leader is smiling too. The food must be good if even his nose can smell it, I hope he hurries up and brings it to me. **BANG!** I jump straight off the rock and onto the floor, the window is shaking, the night is not dark enough for it to be sky lights. I walk up towards the window and look out and there he is, or her, I can never really tell with birds. They flew right into the window! Can you believe it? What a silly bird. I
think I should probably tell leader, silly bird might be hurt and need his help. Leader can do anything, so I’m sure he can help silly bird.

“Leader, there’s a silly bird, I think he might be hurt, please come help!” I say as loud as I can.

“Oh be quiet Cocoa” I’m pretty sure he wants me to tell him what’s wrong with the bird, that way he’ll know what to do, oh how smart my leader is. I yell as loud as I can to tell him that it flew into the window. He comes out to take a look and sighs and walks outside to go help silly bird.

Silly bird joins us for tea. He doesn’t say much (I think he is a he), but I think his head is a bit sore, so I let it go. The food is as amazing as it smelt. I love it when pack leader cooks for me. Our nights together are always great. After tea, leader goes to the top of the kennel, to lay on his bed. I think I should probably talk to silly bird, he looks a bit lonely.

“How’d you fly into the window?” I hope he understands me.

“I was flying, just gliding along and then bam, some light from the ground hit my eyes and I was smack bang into your window!” He practically whispered it to me, maybe his head still ached.

“So tell me, where are you from?” I want him to feel at home, and it looks like he does, because he has just opened his mouth and won’t stop. He’s talking about his
family, and the tree he was born in and all the places he’s seen. It’s amazing! I can’t believe anyone could ever do so much!

Time is flying and silly bird is still talking, he doesn’t really stop, which is ok. I’m a good listener. It’s almost bed time now. I feel very sleepy, but I don’t want to be rude so I think I should just wait until silly bird stops talking before I say good night. To be quite honest I’ve been awfully tired lately, I don’t know why. I can’t run as much either. It might have something to do with my sore hips, but they’re ok. I can deal with those. Silly bird is talking less now. I think he might let me sleep soon.

“I think I may have talked enough, I’ll go to sleep now, night Cocoa”.

“Night silly bird”. I say. Tonight I will sleep inside the big kennel on the soft rock, like I always do when it’s just me and leader, and now silly bird.

~

It’s all foggy, I think I’m waking up. Yes I’m definitely waking up, I can feel the burning light from the ball in the sky. I think my sore hip is also making me wake up slower, it takes me a lot longer to get up now, but that’s ok. I don’t do much anyway. I can hear a noise next to me. It’s Tommy, he’s sleeping. I can’t remember him coming home last night, but I nuzzle up to him. I like laying with Tommy, I can feel his warm breath on my coat. It makes me feel safe and loved. Not like the love I
feel with Mitsy, but a different love. Like you can only feel for your pack. That’s how I love Tommy, and he loves me too. I can’t see silly bird, he must have left. I think I’ll miss him, but he has more places to explore, that’s what he does.

Tommy is starting to come awake, I sit up and look at him as he opens his eyes. He looks a bit confused, but I think all humans do when they wake up, how strange. I think he’s less confused now, because he’s smiling at me. Now he’s patting my head, I love the feel of him patting my head. It’s almost as good as when he rubs my tummy. I lick his face, because I know he loves that. We just lay on the comfy rock after that and watch the moving box until leader wakes up and cooks us breakfast. Today is going to be a good day. I think we’re going to do nothing, which is what I like to do now, nothing is a good thing to do when your hip gets more sore every day, walking isn’t.
~ Epilogue ~

It was days like this that I loved. There was noise, so I knew they were all here, all together. But it wasn’t always like this.

There was a time when things weren’t so loud, and the lady with the food was no longer around. It was lucky, really, that feeding me was so simple; or I would have starved. The male leader had trouble with it at the start; things weren’t all so good for a while there.

Things are alright now, it’s loud and things feel warm again.

The loud one was away now, I never saw her anymore. But I think she was okay. The male leader showed lots of pictures to other humans all the time. And she was smiling in them, standing really close to a male human. They were both happy, at least, they looked it.

The flower smelling one spent a lot of time with other flower smelling girls. They squealed and made fun sounds a lot. She was happy too, even more so when she returned to the kennel with lots of bags filled with new things. I wanted to ask her what was in them, but I’d grown to realize that they really couldn’t understand what I said to them, so I didn’t bother.

The kennel was really, really loud now. It was full of humans, they were my families, family. Everyone was talking in the food room, and I was resting underneath
the table. My nose was resting on my paws, and I was warm.

“Dad, have you seen the picture of me and . . . “

“And then there was this really big building, it was so cool, Mum.”

That was Tommy, he’d just got back from a trip the other day, and I’m not sure where he went. He was gone for a couple of days, and he brought back pictures with lots of humans and buildings.

He was excited, so I was excited. In fact, it was one of those holidays where the big green tree stood tall in the loud room with the talking box, so everyone was excited.

I knew from years of experience that the big tree meant lots of toys and new things, so I loved that big tree. Not as much as Tommy, but almost.

Everyone was eating, and it was that time where only human’s eat, but the flower smelling one is still giving me foo under the table. I’m pretty sure everyone knows now that she does that. But it’s alright, because I don’t hear any of those angry voices. There used to be lots of those, but not so much anymore.

It’s good, and life is good.

Though the food giver still lives somewhere else, she is here more than she used to be. And Tommy spends a lot of time with both of the older humans.
Misty is still here, though her owner isn’t, the male leader got rid of her a while ago, and that made me really happy. I see Misty every day, we sniff and talk to each other through that gap in the fence all the time. She is older now, like me.

I’m not sad that I’m older, just happy that my family is all here today, in the one kennel.

Tommy doesn’t leak from the eyes much anymore, and that make me feel warm and safe.

~

The bright round thing in the sky is gone, and once again, the house is quiet. I find myself somewhere familiar, somewhere I used to be often.

In Tommy’s room. He doesn’t really need me to keep him safe anymore, he is big now and can do that himself, but I still like to watch and make sure he’s okay. I still remember a time when he wasn’t okay, and he needed protecting. I hope things are never like that again.

Tommy’s arm is hanging off then side of his big human bed, and I crawled forward, my nose still to the ground. I nudge his hand a little, not whining. I remember the first time he did this, though it feels like so long ago.

I was just as small as him when he first saw me, and now we’re both bigger, but he’s the biggest.

Tommy’s hand tightens a little, and I hear him stirring.
Then his head pops over the side of the bed and he gives me a sleepy smile.

“Hey boy, comfortable?” his voice is soft and sleepy.

I whine a little, and as intended, it makes him move over a little on the bed, and I know this is the sign that I’m aloud to hop on.

It takes a bit, because I’m not as energized as I used to be, but eventually I jump on to the bed and cuddle up to his side, just like Tommy used to cuddle up to me when he was younger. He’s always do that when he got tired, it’d always make him fall asleep.

It was warm again, and it was safe. Tommy was safe, and so was the whole family.

I was closing my eyes, in for a sleep when I heard “Thank you.”

It was Tommy, and I didn’t know what he said, but I knew that it was something nice, because it was in that soft, happy voice.

And if I could, I’d say something back.

Maybe a “You’re welcome”, would do.