

CANINUS ORALIS

CHAPTER ONE---Who I be, and why should you care?

Hey there! My name is Maayrly, with an extra a and a y of course. The humanoids who gave me that name insisted on it being spelt that way, and of course are so stupid that think that I'm too dumb to be able to handle a name with more than two syllables in it. And thought I didn't know who they were talking about when they spell it out...incorrectly or course, even according to the idiot who named me. Why is it that humanoids are so ignorant? Suppose it makes it easier for them to be assholes. Ignorance, after all, is the most essential ingredient for cruelty. Intelligence, when it is balanced and well informed by intuition and heart, is the seed for the inevitable fruit of Enlightenment, which in its blooming stage is called Love, by some anyway. Of course, being a dog, I'm not supposed to be intelligent and have been assigned the job of being 'blissfully ignorant', content only with the soul-satisfying jobs of stuffing my face with food, licking my balls with my tongue, 'going potty' (since I'm not intelligent enough to enjoy the pleasures of a good dump) and nuzzling up with the kid who is supposed to be taking care of me, but I know fully well I'm looking after her.

They call her Jennifer...like there aren't enough 'Jennifers' in the world. She's older than she should be for the amount of time she's been using her humanoid body. She discovered boys a week after she discovered her breasts. She worries a lot, mostly about people things. 'Who likes me?' on most days. 'Who loves me?' on bad days. But never 'Who respects me?'. Maybe because she really doesn't respect herself. Her parental units don't seem to. 'Brad and Carolyne' are are hip and 'cool' morons who are overpaid and probably underchallenged at work. They have everything 'artistic' in the living room. Sculptures, paintings, DVDs of the latest 'hip and cool' films, and CDs from the 'coolest' bands around. But not a single book, except of course the phone book, which they never use except to smack me with when I try to look into their eyes and tell them something that will help them. Sometimes in dog talk, sometimes with telepathy. Such an inferior species, humans, not knowing even the most basic vocabulary in 'Telepathy'. Suppose they breed us to do that for them.

Yeah, Brad and Carolyn are 'beautiful people' who are the sometimes-proud parents of a not so bad looking daughter. But because Mommy looks more attractive than her daughter, it's created some problems. Not that 'Jen' isn't attractive, to a human's taste anyway. She's got some extra pounds on the thighs, but it's not like she waddles into the room. I'd 'do' her if I were unfortunate enough to be born into a 14 year old boy's body, or even a girl's bod. Jen is hotter than she thinks she is. Even warm inside. But she just ain't 'cool'. Maybe that's why she still likes me, I suppose loves me or maybe even respects me. But does she really understand me? She still puts on 'The Dog Whisperer' for me when she leaves the house, thinking that I actually like the show. The guy on that show is so, like, trainable by the dogs he 'masters'. Or she puts on the animal shows, where the four legged creatures are all called Muffy, Duffy and Pookie. 'Cause we're all so 'cute'. I'm tired of 'cute'. You can't respect anyone who's 'cute'. But it's got its uses. The first cavemench who learned that you can make an animal do

what you want by feeding it had more brains than bones between his ears. The first animal who decided to be 'cute' got fed really well. And it's good for the humans. Let them go out and get the meat, build the hut, keep the fire going. It's good for them. Just because they walk on two legs they think they can do everything more intelligently than any other species, including doing it 'doggie style' under the sheets. But I digress...

How this whole tail (yes, I'm allowed dog puns!) started was one day when Jen came home from the place where she gets the books she never reads. I think they call it 'school'. She went into the room where the humans take their dumps and leaks, where they don't let me see them doing it anyway. She took out this stick, went 'number one' on it and I heard her scream. All those words that don't make sense. Ya know, the ones that describe taking a dump, putting spermies into a 'Pookie's' hermie, and copulating with a female body that's already popped out pups. Yes, Jen was about to pop a pup out herself. It couldn't have been too much fun for her 'doing it doggie style' a few weeks ago because she called her new situation being 'knocked up'. For a species that takes so much pride in being accurate, these two legged apes (otherwise known as humanoids) do grunt out words that don't make any sense. But a bone by any other name still tastes just as meaty.

Why a dog like me found himself with a girl like this, it was destiny...sort of. Everything is destiny and nothing is destiny. I could never figure it out, but had some ideas about it. I had lots of ideas, when I was a pup. Being a pup, if you have any grey matter between the ears, and haven't been told not to use it, it's impossible to NOT have lots of ideas. I had three new ideas every hour about how the world worked, or should work, for dogs, horses, humans and 'complicated' species (according to humans anyway) cats. There are of course three things about a new idea. Discovering it, expressing it, and having it be heard. Other dogs, and even cats, understood a lot of my ideas, but having it be heard by humans...that was always the problem. You get ridiculed, punished, or, most often, ignored when you discover a good idea. And it's even worse when it's a great one. Of course the idea that is closest to reality is that almost all humans who think they love dogs, and other humans, have NO new ideas. Eventually, you find out it's not only 'fun to be dumb' but you get fed better if they think you're a lovable idiot. You're allowed of course to know a few tricks, as long as those tricks don't threaten the soul-dead 'boss's' ideas. So, as I got older, I didn't express as many ideas. Then I didn't have as many new ideas either. Then, I felt myself getting dumb, but certainly not happy. I'll be glad when this lifetime is overwith, which for a dog, thankfully, is around 14. The age the girl I was looking after turned into a woman.

CHAPTER 2. Jennifer's daze of discovery

So, Jen went into the room where the humans take a shit and piss, and peed on the strip again. It was blue, again. But this time, her face wasn't white. It was meat red. 'Beet' red in her 'vegan to the fans, steak behind closed doors' parents' vocabulary.

I looked at her, asking if there was anything I could do. “I’ll fed you already!” she grunted out, as I snuck into the room with the porcelain watering bowl. “Get out of here!” she screamed.

I wasn’t asking her for food and I wasn’t even hungry. But it made her feel good feeding me, and it really looked like she needed to feel good about something. So I did my ‘feed me please’ whine that we dogs have been using to train humans for centuries, and she took me down to the kitchen. When we got there, she opened the can of dog food and put it into a bowl.

“I didn’t forget to feed you, just like I didn’t forget to put that diaphragm into me and take my pills,” she kept saying, again and again. “I know I was a little drunk that night, but not that drunk,” Jennifer went on. “But I know that I went to the party with Bob and left with Bill. But Bob and Bill are, like, ya know, gay. They were more in love with each other than with me. Why else would they have legs that have less hair on them than mine? And be so ‘responsible’. Fuck, ‘responsible’ is so, like, boring. But I have to find out who’s responsible for this!” she continued, pointing to her belly like she swallowed something poison and was hoping she could take something that could flush it out. Through her vagina, I mean.

We dogs DO know more about biology than you humans do, including that the biology of your brains can’t handle yet all of the things we DO know about you...But, that’s for another book. After we’ve done better jobs breeding you humans to each other. But you DO know that when you go to a park and see someone you really like but are afraid to talk to, it’s US who goes up to them for you. And when you bring home people who are wrong for you, it’s us who growls at them the minute they come through door and show us their real face, when you’re too busy thinking about the one you imagine they have. But this story is about Jennifer, and me... You humans can’t handle more than one story at a time. Maybe a good thing. A thing that is what it is, anyway.

Anyway...Jennifer filled my doggie bowl with veggies from last night’s ‘chastity is cool’ party which was put on by parental units Brad and Carolyn. The press was there, of course, and the conservative funders for their new ‘projects’ Everyone, most notably the ones in the low cut blouses and see-through shirts with the crosses around their necks, had those sex starved looks on their faces. Faces that I KNEW they fed under the sheets after they got home, after they stopped off at MacDonaldis for a hamburger. Thankfully Jen put some REAL food into MY bowl---‘Mighty Hound’ brand. The good stuff. I pretended to be concerned about feeding my stomach while Jennifer concentrated on what was in her belly. She looked more like a woman than a girl, somehow. But she kept calling what was in her gut an ‘accident’.

She sat down at the table and looked out the window, imagining something in front of her eyes. Probably the party she was at when she said she was with the library, and at the park, with me. The night when I had to hold it in for 16 hours...no shit. She would say a name, then get lost in a memory about it, then write it down, sometimes with anger, sometimes with fear, sometimes with fondness, an emotion that looked very good on her.

As for the names, they sounded like guys. Or maybe ‘in between’ guys with names like Taylor. Madison. Lynn with a y. Not that my name, ‘Maayrly’, reeked of brave, bold testosterone. Then again, manhood is between the ears, as any dog who has been robbed of his nuts knows, or has to find out to retain any self-respect.

“What are you doing?” Carolyn said as she came into the kitchen, the limo driver behind her carrying in all of her groceries.

“Nothin, Mom,” Jennifer said, folding up the list of names like it was a confession even worse than ‘I ate all the food in the frig, shit on the carpet and slept it off on your best sheets’.

“Excuse me!” Carolyn said, looking very angry. “What did you just say?”

“Nothing, Carolyn,” Jennifer grinned apologetically back at her mother. “Just ya, know, like, doodling,” she continued.

‘Best gal pal Mom’ smiled alluringly at the limo driver, giving the hot stud with his Great Dane sized balls a twenty dollar bill with a key inserted into it. Meanwhile, Jennifer crumbled the paper with all the names on it and threw it into the garbage. I pulled it out, pretending of course I was more concerned with the pieces of imitation bacon bits under it. Just in time for the front doorbell to ring.

“Hey, I’m home!” Brad bolted out in a voice that sounded tired, and potentially angry. “Raul” (or so he looked like to me anyway) put a subservient frown on his face, and hippie-dippie Carolyn became ‘responsible’ again. Yes, Carolyn always did seem like someone who was more responsible than colorful, when she had to be, but she really didn’t want to be. I knew this about her more than she ever did, and for reasons I could never tell her. Though one day, I really wanted to. It was she who picked me at the pound, after all, when I was there as an abandoned pup. Or was it me who picked her? Or was it a Higher Paw who brokered the arrangement? Yeah, that Higher Paw is something we dogs always connect to. Maybe these humans could benefit from such.

Meanwhile, Jennifer untucked her blouse and buttoned her sweater. She lowered her head and snuck upstairs. “Jen? Something wrong?” Brad asked of his daughter in a fatherly way as he strided into the kitchen, briefcase in his left paw, a big paycheck in his right.

“Hormones,” Carolyn said, rolling her eyes in that ‘men will never understand women or girls’ way that had become her habit over the last few years.

Brad didn’t seem convinced that such was the whole answer. But Carolyn soothed his fire of sincerely-inspired curiosity with a stroke on his chest, then a kiss on his cheek.

“Yeah, hormones,” he said, the frown on his face turned upward into a relieved smile. Then a happy grin.

Yeah, Brad and Carolyn loved to be happy. I guess it was because they couldn't handle being real. A condition they were born with, I suppose. But, for now, I was more worried about the grandchild they would have, or not have.

CHAPTER THREE----Dawg Dazed Afternoon

I buried the list of names Jennifer wrote down in the back yard, and I hung around her a lot for the next few days. Brad seemed worried about her, but I had (if you will excuse the ‘cool’ expression) ‘issues’ of my own with him. He never seemed to really like me, but he pretended to. I guess it made him more likable to Jennifer and Carlyne. Maybe it was because I was a dog, or because I was me. I didn't really connect up to his ‘inner soul’ either, but our futures were connected more than any of us wanted them to be. Of course I couldn't tell him any of my ideas as to why.

Brad was a funny breed of human. He was always so neat, and clean and tidy. Even more than Carolyn and Jennifer, even at the time of the month when they were superfeminine. Was that because maybe he was less ‘manly’ than the men who he called ‘guys’? Or maybe there was a female side of him that was haunting him. I saw it one day when Carolyn took Jen on a catered “Fronteer Femme Ecoscout” camping trip. Brad locked himself up in the bedroom, watching films, the ones he made fun of with the other guys. But this time he was being absorbed into them, and alone with his, yeah, feelings. He sobbed through “Beaches”, laughed longingly to “Eat, Pray, Love” and wet at least ten hankerchiefs with sweat and tears with “Brokeback Mountain”. It was the love scenes that opened him up most. I let him think that I wasn't watching him and really did the best that I could to hold in the ‘detritus’ in my colon after he fed me a new special diet that was more fiber than substance. But, finally, I had to bark something at him, after 10 hours of holding it in. “I'm not a fag!” he yelled back at me. “I'm just, ya know...”.

“A different kind of man than the guys,” I could read in his teary eyes. It was one of the few times when he looked into my eyes, and me into his. It lasted a long time, even as measured in dog-stare time. But it got too intense, for both of us. Men and dawgs ain't supposed to cry, so I put up the wall before he did. There was too much we knew about each other, and it would destroy both of us to share as much as the characters in the movies. Realm life is about knowing what no to say, or feel, and knowing when to close doors so the whole house doesn't come down. Just as long as those doors aren't locked.

The once super-stud Hollywood-action star-turned-producer was a hypocritical dude, but an honest one when it came to life and death issues. Particularly when they concerned Jennifer. He had a caring heart, but one eye that was closed-shut with the eyepatch Carolyn got him for Christmas ten years ago, another that was covered with rose-colored glasses he put on for the world, and maybe himself. But he was a stand up dude, who

always pissed standing up. Must be boring being human, having only one position you can piss in. And not being able to lick your balls. Thinking about those things made me glad I was born as a dog, but that just happened. An accident, sort of, maybe, but then again I know better.

Brad didn't ask Jennifer about her 'accident'. He didn't know about it, and besides, he wouldn't be thinking too clearly if he did.

CHAPTER FOUR

The next few days become weeks really fast. Jennifer told Brad that she was getting fatter because she was eating more sweet shit. Mom 'galpal' Carolyn wasn't so sweet about how she handled it. A lock was put on the refrigerator so her daughter couldn't get into the ice cream, pie and chicken-fried imitation steak. All the good stuff that I got when everyone was finished with it, or when it turned green, brown, or some other color other than the food coloring it originally had in it. I got thinner, Jen got... bigger. To Carylyn it was 'fat', which she handled with more of the 'tough love' thing, then the 'I hear your pain' thing, then the therapist thing, then the accidently drop books about smart eating on the counter thing, then... nothing at all. Except treating Jen like a second class human, or worse, a dog.

As for this dog, I got thinner over the weeks when Jen blimped out. 'Cool Dad' Brad asked if there was anything wrong, but she said 'nothin' enough times so he allowed himself to believe it. He had his own problems, anyway. Strange that when humans have problems of their own they do one of two things. Either they get absorbed in their own problems, or they try to forget their problems by getting pulled into someone else's problems. Sometimes problems go away if you move on to another problem, but Jen's problem got bigger every day, and it wasn't going away. No matter how many waistless dresses she covered it with. But everyone of her so friends noticed it. Some said something. Particularly when Taylor saw me and Jen when she took me to DQ for some fast food goodies. A big dish of vanilla with chocolate icing for her. With sprinkles. A burger for me.

"This one I won't barf up," she promised herself as she took the first bite, then the second one, then had a bite taken out of her by Taylor as he cruised by with his buds.

"Your dream babe is turning into a prize heffer," one of Taylor's friends said to him. "That's a cow," he explained to the buds who were less educated in the humanoid language of American, which bore some resemblance to English.

Taylor's buds laughed. Taylor's new girlfreind, a really skinny chick who looked a lot like Carolyn, rolled her eyes, then pulled Taylor's attention away from Jennifer. But Taylor did look at Jennifer with something resembling sympathy as his 'Carolyn' pulled him away. Or was it pity? Some fear, no doubt. But no remorse. Nothing like the 'yes,

it was me' look I couldn't shake off my face while the turkey bones are in front of me on the turkey platter which found its way into my mouth.

I remember that Taylor used to like Jennifer more than she liked him. Maybe it was that 'love' thing too. But now, Jennifer would settle for even a little respect. And I guess it isn't hip, cool, or socially accepted in the human wolf pack for a guy to like, respect or love a girl who's wide around the belly, and puffy in the face. Unless he's a skinny, slimy Afro-American dude, and she's a hot, expressive, shake your booty Ebony sugar Mama. But white humans like their mates thin, and their dogs 'fit'.

"It could have been him," Jennifer said regarding Taylor. Maybe it was to me. Maybe to herself. Or maybe to the human pup incubating in her belly. She wouldn't let me see which. She just kept feeding me hamburgers and ice cream. She pet me on the head. I licked her on the hand. Taylor's girlfriend sang a punk version of 'You ain't nothin but a fat hounddog' directed at Jennifer, though the buds in her pack seemed to think it was to entertain them. Finally, Jennifer left. I looked at 'mini-Carolyn' and wanted to eat her pretty little head off, but dogs are supposed to be obedient to humans, even bitches like her. I often wondered why the word for a female dog able to be a kind mother, 'bitch', was used by humans to insult each other. Maybe it's just the way 'bitch' sounded, and how well it fit little 'Ms' Carolyn. But for the moment, Jennifer needed me to make her feel better more than I needed, or wanted, to make that bitch who used to be Jen's friend feel my teeth in her arm...Or feel ANYthing at all.

CHAPTER FIVE

Jen couldn't figure out why every time she buried her list of possible 'dads', someone pulled it up out of the dirt again. She thought she was going crazy. A sort of forgetful thing that only old humans did. Or young ones on dope. One thing Jen didn't do was dope, unless you count in the night when that 'accident' happened in her belly. But, most of the time, she thought with her head instead of her hormones. Something I did when I was raising her sunk in, though I made as many mistakes as she did in the past, and I KNOW for sure, in past lifetimes. One thing that did sink into Jen, from somewhere, was a belief in a Higher Paw that was always, in some way, looking out for us, or looking for ways for us to serve a greater good.

But even a lobotomized cockerspaniel stoned out on locoweed could figure out that most humans put that undefinable Infinite Being, that Energy that needed no power to be expressed, which they called God, into a box. Every Sunday they'd go to a big building where no dogs were allowed inside and look at pictures of other humans on stained glass windows and ask them for help. And how they could be better to each other. All that smiling, and singing, and celebrating but so little...thinking went on in that building. At least according to what I saw from the car seat when I compared how the humans went in, and how they came out. One of Jen's English teachers made them write an essay: "Resolved: That which does not kill me makes me stronger. True or False." Most of

Jen's classmates didn't even understand the question. Jen did, being the girl that I raised to be more smart than happy.

But she was not sure of the answer to that concept that Nitchie got from his dog. For real. Even humans know it was a John Steinbeck's dog that ate his first draft of 'Of Mice and Men'. But only super-human species like us know that it was to push Mr. Steinbeck into doing a re-write from memory, from deeper place inside of him that honored rodents and humans more.

But, I was talking about Jennifer. Or should be anyway. It was a Sunday, at the place where the smaller humans in earth worship the bigger humans in their imaginations, or perhaps realities. It was Easter. Brad and Carolyn took Jen to Church, or maybe it was the other way around. It had something to do with that pup inside her. She was still wondering if she should keep it. And if it was an 'it', or a 'he', or a 'she'. The sermon was "Giving Birth to Your Inner Visions".

I didn't quite hear the sermon from inside the building, as I was in the car, with the window half open, and half closed. Though the voice of whoever was giving it kept going low, then coming up high, then easing down into a talk that sounded more like a song than a speech. Whatever it was, there were lots of 'hallaluiahs!'. But not on Jen's face when she came out of the building. Everyone else had these 'yeah, I know what it's all about now' smiles on their faces. But she looked like she just had more questions, with no one left to give her the answers.

One human she could get a clear answer from was Madison. He came to church that day to please his rich grandmother, who looked like she would die by Christmas. But he helped the old woman walk up and down the steps of the building with the big 'plus' sign on its roof, dollar signs going 'caching' in his eyes each time her aching feet crunched onto the pavement, breaking what was left of the cartilage between her bones with nothing but pain between them. He was really well dressed, though, his face freshly shaved around the cheezy mustache that covered the real expression on his lips, and behind his eyes. He used 'thank the Lord' in every sentence he could to whoever looked important. 'Lord willing', too. Lots of 'Lord' talk about someone up there, or in there, who just wanted to talk with his creations, or share a good laugh with them.

I barked his way, to get him to pay attention to Jennifer rather than the important people, or the 'Lord' whose ass he was trying to kiss for extra stuff in this lifetime or the next. Jennifer pulled my collar. "Don't bark!" she yelled at me. How else was I supposed to say anything? Particularly to someone who needed someone to say something to her that was real. So, I nuzzled up to her leg and looked up into her eyes instead.

"I know," she said while stroking me on the side of my neck. "He's a sleeze, and he is on the list of guys who were at that party where my body was there but my mind was, like...someplace else," she stated. "Maybe that somewhere else was, ya know, up there," she continued, gazing up at the stars above the sun-lit clouds. "Maybe I was

kidnapped by a spaceship, and an ET made me feel so, ya know, comfortably uncomfortable. After he took off my clothes. Stroked my cheeks. Cuddled my...”

She stopped there, knowing that I was looking at her. Again, she stroked my head, underestimated what was below the skull. “When you reincarnate into a human, I know YOU won’t become a cock or walk fuckhead like Madison,” she said. “Drive a girl far away from home in his car after he gets ‘lost’, then if she doesn’t give it up, all of it, he makes her walk home.”

“Of course I won’t!” I felt like saying to her. “Because, A, I’m not that kind of dog,” I telepathed back with my heart. “And B, what makes you think that dogs evolve into humans? Maybe humans reincarnate up the evolutionary ladder into dogs, or cows, or cochroaches!” I screamed out in silent dog talk. It was as sound a theory as anything else about the Reality above, beyond and within the Plus Sign on the Church roof. Everyone’s got to work their way from lower realities to Higher Ones, in their own way, anyway. Anyway, Madison stared at Jennifer for what seemed like a long time. They had this conversation between them with words I could feel but not quite hear. The ‘talk’ ended with Jennifer lifting up her blouse and pointing to her big belly, then to him.

Madison froze. His rich and dying Grandma Betty wanted him to pose for a picture for the town paper. The photographer got the picture of Madison smiling again, then left, as a whole bunch of people gave Grandma Betty a bunch of wrapped boxes with Happy 100th Birthday written on them. Jennifer folded her arms, demanding Madison’s answer.

He shook his head ‘no’. Then escorted his aunt into her car. He got in the driver’s seat and drove away. Lots of other cars followed. Including a convertible with the Paster, Brad and Carolyn in the back seat, posing for another picture for the papers.

“So, which ET or humanoid was it, Lord?” Jennifer said, looking up to the sky again. “And if it was an angel, or YOU, wanting to do a Second Coming thing with a second kid, you gotta tell me!!! Please!!!” She waited for an answer, but nothing came. I could feel another friend falling out of her life, one that she trusted more than she thought she did. “So,” she said to me, stroking my neck with shaking hands. “It’s just you and me, kid,” she smiled sadly. “And YOU!” she yelled angrily at her belly. “For the MOMENT anyway.”

At least she called ‘it’ a ‘You’. Then again, the God that still probably did exist for her, and me, was an ‘It’ in Reality, not a He or a She, and certainly not a He-She. But for the moment, it was about figuring out who the father of Jen’s ‘accident’ was, and if there would be a mother. It was still only the fourth month, but the fifth month and the time for final decisions would be at paw (hand) in less than a week.

CHAPTER SIX

Jennifer made some more calls, and sent out some more e mails, but the answer from everyone was the same. “Are you sure?” they all said. “It wasn’t me!” they all claimed. “If there is anything I can do...” they all pledged, but didn’t really mean. And even if they did mean it, could they do anything? These were 15 and 16 year old guys, in dog age, 2 years. I don’t remember wanting to be a father any more than these guys did when I was their age, in human years. But someone has to dog-up, or man-up, to the aftermath of two minutes of pleasure, passion or unbridled love. For dogs that usually lasts 45 minutes, in case you humans are wondering.

The time clock was ticking. Soon the point of no return would happen. Ya know, the time when the brain cells inside the head of that fetus inside Jen’s belly would decide to connect and say, ‘hey, we need a life to control, be owned by and, ya know, work with’. I’m not sure if that timetable is exactly right, but I did remember something from Jen’s Bible that said ‘the soul of the angel entered the womb at 5 months’. I wasn’t sure who the angel was, or the woman whose womb it was, or what that life became after it was born into the world outside its mother’s body, but I think it was someone important. Jennifer was important, at least to me, and I think to the world. Whatever soul or energy or whatever that would come into her womb would no doubt grow up to be someone...important. Maybe even significant. But, maybe there was only one soul within the confines of Jen’s body right now. It felt like that. There was still time for that ‘other’ choice that she never said, but was always thinking.

Deciding to continue being a childless girl made as much sense as being a birth-giving woman, at least for Jen. She was, after all, only fourteen. A child herself. And as for her parents, they were even more immature than she was, in the ways that mattered anyway. I heard Carlyn refer to Jen as ‘her beautiful accident’ after a few drinks with her friends, tokes with her coworkers at the television studio, and boinks with limo driver Carlo, production assistant Niko, and overpaid moronic wannabe-mobstory writer Guido. As for Brad, he was all about business, overworking himself to bring home a few extra dollars so he could expand the business, so he could spend as little time at home as possible. Carlyn called Brad an idiot, a moron, a geek, a eunic, a cold fish, and most often ‘boring’, at least when she was ranting to me about something he did or didn’t do. But he never called him an asshole.

Brad just grunted a lot when Carolyn did something to piss him off, and said nothing about her, or himself. Most of the time when he was doing his ranting time in front of me, it was about his work, that he was so great at. His unfulfilled dreams of being a rock star, NFL football quarterback, or hot looking cheerleader. Or his first love---Jennifer. He never called her ‘my’ daughter, or ‘my’ anything for that matter. But to love something doesn’t mean to own it. He knew that, and for that I was grateful. Maybe because he kept a looser leach on me than anyone else in the house. I owed him for that, and a lot of other things I couldn’t tell him, or Jennifer. Not until it was the right time, anyway.

And when would be the 'right time'? The right time for me to bark up and show these humans that I could read, write and think better than they could? The right time to tell them that the 'what goes around comes around' rule applies for ALL species? The right time to collect money rather than strokes or extra slices of dried out bologna for being a shrink to all three of the humans who thought they owned me? And the right time to tell them all why, and how, I wound up with them? And the right time for Jennifer to make things...right. Whatever that was.

I had a plan. Jennifer trusted cool Dad Brad, and though he was a kid himself, he had a right to know what his daughter was going through. He would be the parent who should know first as the time clock to the fifth month, then the sixth, seventh and ninth was approaching fast.

Jennifer brought home abortion pamphlets. Some said she should do it. Some said she shouldn't. Both advertised their case with really cool graphics, and words that sounded like they were talking down to the mother to be, or not to be. But they did lay out the legal and medical options. When Jen was in the shower, lingering there, letting the water drip down her body as if it could clean away what happened, Brad's car pulled up in the driveway. By the way the clunker masquerading as a luxury sportcar screeched to a halt, I could tell he was angry, and maybe anger was what he needed to make Jennifer do something.

As I hear the door slam downstairs, I opened the door to Jen's room, gathered the pamphlets in my mouth and took them into the hallway. I dumped them there, letting each fall where they would. Maybe, I thought, the one that naturally fell on top would be the one that would have the real answer as to what Jen should do and how to do it. I bowed my head, asking my Higher Paw for an answer. And for Jen to do the right thing, whatever that was. It turned out...all wrong, at least according to the way I planned it out.

"What are you doing!?" Carolyn yelled at me.

I looked up, realizing that it was Carolyn who screeched into the driveway in Brad's car. Then I tried to sit down on the pamphlets and do a cute trick so that she wouldn't see the mess I made, but I did make a mess of it. Particularly after she picked up the pamphlets, saw Jen's door open, and caught a look at her daughter through the mirror, her belly another size larger than it was two days ago.

"Jennifer!" she yelled out. "Come out here. Now. We're going to talk about this."

"Talk about what, Mom, ah, I mean, Carolyn?" Jennifer smiled back at her, a towel covering her chest and belly.

"That!" not so cool Mom blasted out, pulling the towel away from Jennifer's shaking hands, pointing accusingly at her enlarged tummy. "And this!" she continued, grabbing

hold of some pro-abortion and some anti-abortion pamphlets. “Did you think you could keep this from me?” she went on, thinking herself to be understanding.

“Obviously Jennifer did,” I thought to myself. “And obviously you didn’t know anything about your daughter being pregnant because you’re so good at keeping yourself non-pregnant, even after visits with Carlo, Nicko and Guido,” I continued, between my ears.

“Did you think you could keep this from me!!!” Carolyn repeated, her warmth converted into a fiery blast. “Did you?”

“I obviously did,” Jennifer said, sticking up for herself.

“So, what are you going to do about it, young lady?” Carolyn continued, folding her arms. “I’m assuming you know who the father is.”

“No.” Jennifer replied, shaking her bowed head, tears streaming down her face. Desperately wanting an answer as to what to do. Or at least someone else to ask the question with.

Carolyn considered what to do, and seemed to dive deep into her soul. Apparently she DID have one. It was the first time I really realized that. Meanwhile, Jennifer fell deeper into despair, and indecision. Carolyn responded to that fall into the abyss with a slap, delivered across her daughter’s beet red face. “Snap out of it!” she said, firmly. “We have to do something about this. You understand?”

“I’ll...I’ll...” Jennifer said, the jumbled thoughts in her shaken up head finally coming together, forming the words with stuttering and shaking lips.

“You’ll wwwhatttt?” Carolyn answered, mocking Jennifer, but with a real purpose behind her eyes. One connected to her own mistakes, and agonies, so it seemed. “You’ll what?” she asked, again, appending it with another slap.

“I’ll...I’ll take care of it,” Jennifer answered, in a new voice, finally having reached a decision.

Carolyn smiled, hugged her daughter, then opened up a ‘how to get a safe and psychologically-trauma free abortion’ pamphlet. It seemed like a real mother-daughter re-union. Like Carolyn and Jennifer met each other, for the first time. Dogs don’t cry, but inside my eyes, I did. Tears of joy and gratitude. Until Jennifer continued in that new voice of hers.

“If it’s a ‘she’, I’m naming it Carolyn. If it’s a ‘he’, Brad, or Bradley,” she smiled.

“When we get rid of it, you’ll call it an accident that you’re glad to get rid of!” Carolyn barked back. She clenched her fist, seeming like she was prepared to end the ‘life’

incubating in Jennifer's belly herself. Luckily, Jennifer pulled away before that wish was put into action.

"No!" she insisted. "I'm keeping it."

"Not with any financial help from me, or your father!" Carolyn declared.

"I'll find a way!" Jennifer asserted.

"Who's the father?" Carolyn continued in a lawyerly way.

"I don't know," Jennifer answered, but this time as a matter of fact rather than agony. She turned around and looked at herself in the mirror, liking the view for the first time. "And it doesn't matter," she said to herself. "Isn't that right?" she continued, speaking to her belly, and the possibilities inside it.

"Isn't that right?" a very male voice answered back. I looked up, and it was Brad, having just come in. Briefcase still in hand. The affairs of business still on his mind. That look of being done unto rather than doing unto others in his face, yet again.

"My accident had an accident," Carolyn said, showing Brad the pamphlets, then her daughter's enlarged belly.

"I was an...accident?" Jennifer uttered from disbelieving lips, as Brad dropped his head, not letting her see what he was thinking, or feeling. She turned to Carolyn. "You always said that, ya know, you wanted to have me."

"Accidents happen, Jen," the poker faced reply.

"Was I a happy accident, Mom?"

"I did what I was told that I had to do," Carolyn replied, coldly.

"What she wanted to do," Brad interjected. "And what I wanted to do too," he continued.

Carolyn shot a dirty look at Brad worse than any I ever got, for anything. They had an intense conversation between them, reliving some secrets that I knew about them, and revealing others that I didn't.

"Dad? What should I do?" Jennifer asked

"Ask your mother," Brad replied, having given up the non-verbal war of threats, assertions and passions.

"But you're my---" Jennifer said.

“---Talk to your mother,” Brad interjected. With that he turned around and walked downstairs.

Carolyn turned around, smiled like a ‘Mom’ and faced Jennifer. I tried to come between them, but Carolyn kicked ME in the belly. “Go downstairs!” she commanded me. With that she brought Jennifer into her room, closed the door behind her, and turned on some music. I could hear them talking under the music. And I could see Brad downstairs, trying to listen in on them. Even though I had better hearing than a humans, I couldn’t make out what they were saying. But I could hear Carolyn doing most of the talking, and Jennifer doing all of the crying. Then, the door opened up. Carolyn came out, kicked me downstairs again, then locked Jennifer in her room. She made a call to a Doctor, saying that she’d be bringing Jennifer in to him tomorrow morning.

CHAPTER 7

It was a long night for me, and Brad, as we both sat downstairs pretending to watch television. Two Law and Orders:SVUs and one CSI, as measured by 21st century human time. Brad just sat there, staring at something. Maybe it was the tv screen, or maybe the movie of his life. That movie, which was far more real than any cop, lawyer or doctor show that even Brad could get put on the air though his studio connections, was very real. And I was watching it too. Because, I did know him better than he knew himself, for reasons I couldn’t tell him. Hell, it was as unbelievable to me as to him as to why such was so, but...as the overused expression goes in this ‘put up the white flag’ era, ‘it is what it is.’ But was it as it had to be?

Being too tired to go to sleep, and too weary in spirit to wake himself out of the slumber that had become his waking life, Brad decided to stay up a little longer. About half past ‘Raymond’ (that’s 15 minutes for those of you who are enlightened enough to still tell time by the clock, or that most real measure, internal experience and discovery), Brad decided to finally talk to me. “Wanna go out?” he asked, maybe because he had to take a leak himself, or maybe because he was afraid I’d soil Carolyn’s new rug, which he paid for of course. Maybe it would have been a good bonding experience, the two ‘men’ of the house going outside and taking a leak together. But something else had to be put on the table first. Brad had to be informed about something before he informed me about what was going on in his head, and heart.

Being unable to talk to humans created limitations for me my whole life as a dog, but being someone in the room who goes unnoticed let me do things that could make people...take notice in ways that they wouldn’t have otherwise. While Brad got up and fetched a leach for me, and yet another beer for himself, I ‘accidentally’ pressed on the remote, flicking from channel to channel. Lots of news about old stories were on, with droning broadcasters who had no connection to the events they were telling the viewer about. Nothing new, anyway. More stories about how the people on top are pissing on people at the bottom, and how it was such a shame that they did so. Then the Hollywood

news that glorified the people on top. Then syndicated shows with the stars themselves acting like they really cared about and were real people. Some of them shows that Brad approved of and invested in. Great money makers. Then, something that was great, not because it was a great money maker but because it was great, and real.

“Married With Children”, it was. One of the episodes with Buck the talking dog, ranting about how screwed up the humans are around him. MY story! Which is a lot of dogs’ stories, I know. And which I hoped that one day would encourage Brad to make his own sitcom with me, or someone I could write for, as the lead dog. But it was the lead humanoid in this story that caught my attention, and grabbed Brad’s. “Al Bundy!” Brad exclaimed as if seeing an old friend who he had forgotten about. Or written off as dead, or ‘so yesterday’ that he was irrelevant to the ‘hip and cool’ people of today, which coincidentally use old words to describe how ‘cool’ they are.

“I remember this episode,” Brad said, petting me in a manner not unlike Al stroking Buck. “This is the one where Al really gets to find and use those balls under his pant zipper,” he continued, settling into his chair, his left hand inserted under his Dockers waistline, his right chugging back a beer. He laughed with all the jokes whose references were 20 years old but as relevant as the day they were written. Nodded whenever the sage, Al, or his sage in training, son Budd Bundy, told it as should be, the blissful, arrogant and brain-dead women in the show tragically blabbing on comedically about the way things are. Smiled when at the end, Al finally DID get revenge on the women who were making his life hell, and had a shot at controlling his own life, even if the control of that world involved getting his car started, his TV working, and his belly filled with food that he paid for. And feeling proud about who he was in High School as the guy who scored four touchdowns in one game. Feeling good about the touchdowns he was scoring today, despite the fact the he was the only one playing the game. All shared with Buck on the couch.

It was both an informative and bonding moment, for four legged-dog and two-legged beast, which lasted as long as the next two commercials, brought to an end by the next program. Another Cop show about a young, retarded girl getting raped by a psychopath, on her way to the abortion doc, whose clinic had just been blown up by Pro-life activists.

I looked to Brad, who was glancing at the ‘how to get a safe and psychologically-trauma-free’ abortion pamphlet. “She wants the child,” he said. “Just like her mother did. But after she has it, will she become her mother and, not want it?” he said. Seeing that Carolyn’s car was not in the driveway, he nodded to me, and took me out for a walk.

Our discussion as to what to do started with a urinary discourse. I lifted my leg and let it rip on the grass near the garden of overpriced (and very plain looking) roses that ‘production assistant’ hunk Carlo planted to please Carolyn. Brad pulled down his zipper and gave the plants the kind of watering they deserved. Maybe he hated roses, or hated Carolyn for planting them, or knew about what was really going on with Carlo in the bedroom above the flowers when he was away. It wasn’t that Brad was pissed off at Carlo, or Carolyn for that. Just disappointed that he didn’t get what he wanted. And that

he was always that one who took on fixing things that he didn't break. It was like that with Carolyn and him. And maybe him and everybody. "Ya know, Mar," he said to me as he looked up at Carolyn's second bedroom, the one she said she went into when she had to work on lines. "Biology isn't everything. Just because your daughter doesn't have your sperm in her genetics, that doesn't mean she doesn't have your spirit imbedding into her heart. Or your well being implanted into the depths of her soul....Somewhere. Someplace where it will blossom like flowers that aren't just 'nice', but beautiful. Really, ya know, beautiful. And, like, real."

Aside from the 'ya know' and the 'like', it was as literary as a human could get, in print or speech. Worthy of any of the classic authors that Brad read when he was alone. But this time, it came from HIS mouth. Expressed by HIM. In words. Actions followed, preceded by a primal grunt and a deep breath that connected his gut, brain and heart. He gave me a thank you hug, like he knew me for lifetimes, picked up a ball and threw it, all the way across the yard. A longer distance than he ever had before. "Got get it, if you want to, bud. Time to do what I want to do, and have to do."

It was the first time he called me 'bud', instead of 'boy' like he did when he was defeated. 'Guy' when he felt depressed. I thought about getting the ball. And wanted to. Particularly because it was in the garden of lillies that Guido had planted for Caryln, in an area I wasn't supposed to even think about walking into. But I followed Brad the Man in to the house.

He grabbed a hammer from the tool box and strided up the stairs, straight to Jennifer's room. With one swift and defiant stroke, he broke the lock on the door, and tore open a window to his future, and Jennifer's. And, as a result of such, even Carolyn's. "Jennifer. You can do whatever you want about this," he exclaimed. "Whatever it is, I'll support you and love you. Whatever it is..."

His jaw dropped, as he saw her draws open, her closet half emptied, her unused suitcases tossed around, and note written in scratchy print on the bed, crumpled up. "Help me," Brad read. He turned over the note "Please, Daddy."

"Daddy" he said. "In some ways. But your real father, well. I guess that's irrelevant now."

I felt a mixture of emotions going through me when Brad read that, and the reality of Jennifer's as yet unrevealed genetics came to light. But it was time for action now, not feelings. Jennifer's life, and perhaps another that was about to be born into the world, or tossed into the abortionist's trashbin, was at stake.

CHAPTER 8

According to the clock on the highway it was approaching midnight. According to the one that really mattered, it was only minutes to month five, the time when...well according to everything I heard, or read, in this lifetime or perhaps others...something

would happen to the 'tissue' inside of Jennifer. Life would enter its brain once all the right connections were formed. But whose life? Such was something I did have more insight into than most humans, or even dogs, did.

There's an ancient Chinese story. Or maybe it's a traditional Indian legend. Or maybe just an old wives' tale. In any case, the story goes that souls after they 'die', unless they're lucky or accomplished enough to merge with the Great Spirit, linger around to take care of old business and loose ends from the last lifetime, then look for a body to move into so they can deal with the business of moving onward, and upward. There's no way to prove that this story is true, or false, but considering its possibility makes us truer to ourselves, and others.

As Brad raced on through the stoplights and honking horns towards the luxury loonie bin/hospital where Carolyn had most probably taken Jennifer, I thought about my own past lifetime, and people I knew, or could have known then. One of them was sitting next to me. "Dog is man's best friend" I saw on a billboard for a new kind of pet food, though dogs really would prefer their best friends to share their human food with them, no matter how greasy or chemical-infested it is. "And best friends are forever," the sign went on to read. Invisible tears flowed down my face when I looked at Brad. Maybe because at this time of his greatest need, and awakening, he had chosen me to be at his side. Maybe that was because, yes, I was at his side long before I was born, and when he was once very much alive.

It was a time before Carolyn. We were aspiring writers, working on scripts by night, putting in time as college students in 'safe' curriculums by day. His security 'day job' was business, working on an MBA as his 'citizen papers'. Me, I wanted to be a doctor, like Chekov, who could cure people's physical ills by day, and write books that would restore their spiritual health and vitality by night. Or, if I could get over my allergies to animal hair, a veterinarian. Money wasn't as much of a problem with us as it was with others. We had rich parents who paid for our education, as long as we got the education they wanted us to. During the course of our 'extra-curricular' activities as independent filmmakers trying to make the definite movie that would contain both edge and heart, we met a lot of chicks, some gals, a bunch of babes. But only one woman. Carolyn. We flipped a coin, deciding on who would get to marry her, when she wasn't looking of course. Brad won. Carolyn won too, sort of. Me...I had mixed feelings that turned into angry ones, then defective ones.

Brad got his inspiration from real life, and doing everything the hard way. Me, I...experimented with other ways to perceive reality, and metaphysical possibilities. So did Carolyn, though with her it was more about the pleasure of altered states rather than merging with the Ultimate State. We tried to forget ourselves, then lose ourselves, so we could find ourselves. Then one night, Carolyn found herself with her mind and body in two different locations. Her body was at a party where I was, and her mind...took the night off. I don't remember the specific pharmaceuticals (or if you wanted to be organic, 'herbs') that made such a state possible. But her state of lack of mind, and my lack of control of my mind, produced a night of passion. With a night of...well, mixed

emotions for me that preoccupied my mind on the way home, until I accidentally rammed into a tree. Or maybe looked for the biggest tree I could find to do a kamakazi last act drive into.

“What are you thinking there, Bud?” Brad asked me as I tried to remember the rest. How I wish I could explain it in words. All I had was my heart, body and dog mind. I stood up on my hindlegs like a man and dog, and nuzzled up to Brad, stroking his sweaty, beet red, shaking neck with my head. A gesture that Carolyn never allowed me to do to her because it would ruin her make up. A sign of affection and respect, and to the extend that I am able to understand it, love, which Jennifer always liked, no matter now much Carolyn said it was bad manners to teach me, referring to the Dog Whisperer and some animal hating East Indian dog trainer she knew as references to that ‘fact’.

“I know,” Brad said, as a smile came to his face. Feeling less alone in his quest to regain his own life, and his daughter’s, and the life of well...possibilities about to enter into her womb, IF she wanted to do so, or course. “Whatever Jennifer wants to do, she’s going to have a free choice. And our support, right Champ?”

I barked ‘yes’ as affirmatively as I could. It was as if I was reborn too. But with rebirth comes transitions which I sensed were coming...for all of us.

CHAPTER 9

I never saw Brad drive so fast, and well. I got scared at each turn he screeched around, reminding me of the night that I screeched my way into a dark ditch, then the bright light. But we made it. And we were both alive, big A. Even more so when we rushed to the door of the hospital which looked like a country club, and were stopped by the soul dead thugs at the door.

“I need to see your pass, Sir,” the fat, triple chinned security dude, or rather dud, barked out. “This is a private facility.”

“And I have private business, with my daughter, inside!” Brad shot back at them.

“And your daughter is who?” the whimpy goon with the Napoleonic complex asked.

“Jennifer...eh...Jennifer---” he replied.

Before Brad could say the surname which he gave to the child who was not of his own biologically, but was his in all other ways that mattered, goon number one flipped through his computerized roladex and replied, “No Jennifer here, Sir.”

Brad pulled out a picture of Jennifer, with himself, me and Carolyn. The one at the Beach in Monterey where I me, Jen, and Brad played in surf and Carlyn, as I remember, let her guard down and let her herself enjoy just being ‘common’ too. “You know her?” Brad asked goon number two, pointing to Jennifer.

“I know her,” goon number two said, smiling, his alluring eyes fixed on Carolyn’s face in the faded snapshot. “I saw every film she’s been in,” he confessed. “Even the chick flicks. But, always alone. So the woman I dated, and then married, wouldn’t see who I was always fantasizing about.”

“Neither of them are here, Sir.” goon number one interjected, doing the bad cop thing while his bud was caught in sensitive guy land.

“But their car is here,” Brad said, pointing to the Bentley parked in the VIP parking space in front of the flowery bushes that covered windows which housed humans wandering around in white hospital gowns who looked more lost than healed.

The two goons looked at each other. Brad looked at his watch. “Look, Jack. Look, Bill,” he said with a condescending tone, reading their nametags which bore only their first names and numbers underneath them. “I’m more powerful than any of your bosses. And will have you fired unless you let me in there, right now!”

It was a Mexican standoff alright. Brad with his very non-Herclean physique and his newly found courage to stand up for himself against the \$25,000 a year salaried guards who spent their entire lives building muscles on their arms and legs rather than between their now very offended blue collar ears. Meanwhile, the clock was ticking. Any moment now, something irreversible could happen to Jennifer and her potential child. So, I decided to take initiative. I sneaked around Brad, pulled his wallet out of his pocket, and nuzzled out a few of those pieces of paper that made everything possible. I sat in front of the goons, keeping those green pictures of those humans with the constipated expressions on their faces in my mouth. Growling, daring them to take the bankroll of crisp bills.

“He’ll open his jaw and drop that ‘bone’ in in his teeth if you open your mouth and tell me where my daughter is,” Brad said, stroking me on the neck.

“I guess I didn’t hear you say that she was her daughter, Sir,” goon number one said with an obedient grin.

“Can I see some ID, just for verification purposes, Sir?” goon number two added, bowing ever so subserviently.

Brad reached into his wallet for his ID. The goons nodded ‘yes’ with the most cursory glance, opening up the door. “Wing 2E,” one of them said with fabricated respect while the other pushed me back.

“He comes with me too,” Brad insisted with regard to me. “On orders of my daughter Jennifer’s therapist,” he smiled, lying his through his teeth, but never more sincere in the ways that mattered.

I opened my mouth, letting the money fall to the ground, then into the mud. Then as the goons went down to grab it, I pissed on the bills. It didn't stop them from collecting the presidential portraits, and fighting between themselves as to who got what.

Brad and me both walked in, treating ourselves to a look at those two pathetic creatures digging in the dirt for urine stained pieces of paper through a mirror. But we had no time to lose, and fast walked our way as quickly as we could to Wing 2E. Seeing more goons ahead of us, and seeing scary docs in clean white lab coats behind them (one of whom looked like the doctor who cut off my testicular tissue), Brad grabbed hold of his sunglasses, put them on, and snatched a long bamboo stick from one of the indoor artificial-flower gardens. He let me lead him down the hall to Wing 2E, pretending to be blind, making himself fit in even more so by bobbing his head around and singing "You Are The Sunshine of My Life". He sounded more white than black, and not even close to sounding "Stevie", but he sounded harmless enough to get by everyone else who could have stopped us. And nuts enough to be believed as a resident in what I now realized was more of a nuthouse than a hospital.

Finally, we got to Wing 2E. It was a darkly lit place, with all the doors locked. Except one, with the door wide open, bright light coming from inside, Jennifer screaming from inside it.

"No! No!" I heard echoing through the hallways, and every bone in my body.

"Yes, yes, Jennifer," someone with a condescending East Indian accent said. "It is for your own good."

"The good of our family too," Carolyn continued in calm voice that sounded demonic, but caring, in a way that served her view of things anyway.

"Stop that! Now!" Brad yelled out as he threw off his sunglasses, grabbing the bamboo stick like a warrior, slashing his way into the room. I ran in front of him, barking my heart out, not knowing what was in the room, but preparing to do whatever I had to to stop it. No matter how many guns or goons were in the room, they would not get away with what they were about to do to the girl I loved more than anyone or anything in the world.

Me and Brad froze when we saw the enemy, and the weapon he was about to use on us all. "It's a mild sedative," the small framed doctor with the large ego said, and two very large orderlies held down Jennifer on the abortion table, her legs tied into the stirrups, spread out and open. A nurse who looked more like a female Viking wrestler than an angel of mercy held a needle in her hand, ready to inject it into Jennifer's shaking arm, a defiant fist still at the end of it. "We know what we're doing, and would ask you to please let us do our job, Sir," the East Indian doctor in the clean white coat with the sterile eyes commanded Brad.

"For the sake of our family," Carolyn insisted.

“For the sake of your professional and social reputation, you mean,” Brad barked back at the woman he once loved, yet still called his wife. “And because you regret not doing what you’re making her do! Without asking her first!”

I added my approval to that by barking a ‘yes’ to Carolyn, then the doc.

“I must insist that you get that dog out of here, Sir,” the soul-dead doctor commanded, backing up from me like I was carrying some kind of contagious leprosy. “He is quite unsterile.”

“That’s because he’s alive!” Jennifer slurred out of a mouth about to be put into an even deeper stupor, and a sleep that would put the potential life in her womb into a very early grave.

Jennifer pushed aside Nurse Valkurie’s arm, somehow, and invited me to jump on her lap. I did so, but Gloomhilde and the orderlies had other ideas. All I remember was that there were lots of struggles involving human arms fighting with each other. Carolyn fighting with Brad. The Orderlies fighting with Jennifer. The Doctor fighting to get out of all of the fighting. And finally, me fighting to prevent that ‘mild sedative’ from getting into MY arm. Which it did.

I fell to the ground, and felt something...not so mild about it. I lost control of my legs, then eyes, then my breathing. My heart beat slower and slower, and louder and louder. Then started to beat fast, but faintly, till I couldn’t hear it beat at all. Then, I couldn’t feel my body, though I could see it. From somewhere on top of it, and the humans who rushed me down the hall.

“We gotta save him!” Jennifer pleaded.

“I will!” Brad insisted.

“We will!” Caroline added, tears that seemed genuine flowing down her cheeks. “No one in this family is going to die tonight! I promise you that!” she said to Jennifer, hugging her. Sending the doctors away, and then the orderlies, then finally, then Nurse Brunhilde.

CHAPTER 10

The rest of the night was about lights, for me anyway. Seeing an operating room light above my body and a bunch of other docs putting IV lines in my body, and jolting the chest with these electric prods, again and again. Then, I floated up, into another room above it, then above the building, then above the clouds.

“Yo!” I heard as another really bright, white light flashed into my eyes. “You finally made it here,” I heard someone say, in a language that was...my own. Dog talk. From a

German shepherd in a long white coat, with wise and caring eyes. “Welcome!” he continued with a smile, pushing a list of names my way on a slab of stone with this ancient looking writing that somehow I could read, and understand.

Suddenly the clouds became hard ground, then soft grass. With all sorts of animals walking around, talking with each other about real ideas, and ideals, each in their own animal tongues. Even the cats were talking about ideas rather than events, or, as lower form humans did, other people. Ya know, who did what to who and what they were wearing at the time. All around me, well fed scholars bearing hair, not ashamed of being animals but proud of it. Each embellishing and expressing their own special brand of beyond-human intelligence.

“Can I stay here?” I asked. “It seems, nice.”

“It is,” the Gatekeeper shepherd said, “But you’ve earned better than this, and besides, it’s work done down on the planets that makes heaven possible. Heaven watches, earth works, and makes heaven even more magnificent the harder it works.”

He led me across a field where everyone raised their paw to me in congratulations for something that I did. Something I didn’t know I did, or maybe wasn’t supposed to? Finally, beyond a creek, there was a temple, a big stone building covered with sort of a South American ivy. Inside, large ceilings and more contented scholars, some on two legs, some on four. Some with bodies and forms that I, still in my earthly dog body, didn’t recognise. In the middle of a great hall, there were ten open doors with dark sky and bright stars beyond them. The doors opened and closed with the rhythm of the flashing of stars behind them, that got bigger and closer each time they flashed. “Each one of those windows is about to open. The fifth month, or the species equivalent of such, about to come up any time now,” my guide explained.

I could see the lives awaiting me through each of those doors. They felt magnificent. Next lifetime opportunities where I would get respect, friendship, and love. Without complications. Without having to argue with or beg ANYONE for food, water, or the privilege of emptying my bladder or that most private and underestimated pleasure, having a good shit.

They were with really evolved species too. Dogs, horses, and on planets other than earth. Ya know, like the two planets where humanoid-like lifeforms are $\frac{3}{4}$ mind and $\frac{1}{4}$ heart, or more accurately $\frac{1}{4}$ lower emotions. I thought about what it would be like to be a humanoid life form on those planets. Yes, life as one of them would be...magnificent. But life awaiting me on the tenth door was...necessary.

“We thought you’d think that,” my Shepherd guide smiled at me.

“So, what do I do?” I asked.

“Close your eyes, click your paws three times and say, ‘there is no place like Om.’” He continued.

I laughed, then did the routine, as I had undoubtedly done it so many times before, then woke up...in what felt like 4 months earth time later.

“It’s a girl!” I heard Carolyn exclaim, with joy, as I felt myself being pulled out of a comfortable, warm, dark place into a bright, cold, and, for the moment, scary one.

“A healthy girl!” a doctor said.

“A new member of our family,” Brad said, hugging a grateful, and tired, Jennifer. I saw through my still unopened eyes someone taking a picture of us all. Jen, Brad, Carolyn and me, the new member of the family. Really a returned member of the extended family, coming back to get closer. To take care of old business, or maybe to make new opportunities. It seemed strange being back as a girl. I always pictured being a guy again, but being human, in a humane place, or potentially one anyway, was enough. Well, life goes on. Despite AND because of ourselves.

