

# Stories of Compassion

## Writing Contest 2022





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# Sympathy

Claire Wu



One more week. That's what the vet said.

"We must end Zeke's suffering—next Tuesday, we'll have to put him down."

Rosa Flores steps across the hall of her home, her eyes flickering across the floating shelves that line the walls, filled with images of a muscular German shepherd. Below them lies the real Zeke, thinner than his pictures and dozing away. Blinking back tears, Rosa takes a step closer to the door. She knows death has been inevitable since the day Zeke got sick, but she still feels a surge of despair knowing how near it is. No, she tells herself, I can cry next Tuesday. I need to make Zeke's last week memorable.

Boysenberry Hill, the place Rosa met Zeke ten years ago. She remembers how small he was, with little bean toes and a tiny snout, wriggling around in the breeder's arms. She already had the name picked out, Zeke, and it was like the pup already knew it from the way he bounced around Rosa excitedly when she called him for the first time. It seems like yesterday to Rosa. Smiling fondly at the memory, she unwinds on the blue and white striped blanket laid out on the grass with Zeke at her side. The Thursday evening sun is starting to set, splashing the sky in scarlet. Rosa isn't sure how deeply Zeke feels, or if he notices the same beauty in life as she does, but the way he stares at every sunset from their kitchen window at home makes Rosa believe that he has an almost human appreciation of nature's beauty. As the two watch the setting sun from the hill where they first met, Rosa feels her small smile fade. Well, she thinks, at least he can properly see something he loves one more time.

Light tides pull in and out with the ocean breeze, lapping Zeke's soft brown underbelly and Rosa's legs as she tosses a frisbee straight up in the air, its plastic edge catching the early Saturday morning sunlight. Zeke's eyes follow the frisbee wistfully as it returns to Rosa's hand. Zeke has always loved the beach. In a way, he grew up on the shore, as a result of many days spent on the sand with Rosa, splashing through the shallows and chasing frisbees across the water. Now no longer able to chase frisbees, Zeke sits with Rosa near the water, snapping at the frisbee she tosses straight up for him. Occasionally, Rosa tosses a handful of seawater at him, the droplets catching in his fur. He shakes away a few beads of water gently, tongue lolling out, which extracts a giggle from Rosa. For a second, she forgets about how thin Zeke had gotten, how little he had eaten the night before, the one week warning. Instead, she loses her thoughts in the sun, sand, and sky. She wishes this moment could last forever.

They sit on the living room sofa on Monday evening, Rosa and Zeke, Rosa staring at a mountain of Zeke's toys on the coffee table that she had piled up an hour earlier. Zeke is sprawled across her lap, the warmth from his body almost balancing the chill Rosa gets by thinking of the next day. Rosa can list every story behind all the toys Zeke has: why she bought it, where, and when. They are all memories, snapshots of Zeke's life. In nineteen hours, the last memory of his life will be made. Will he be soothed into a peaceful, everlasting sleep? Or will he endure pain in his last moments? Rosa strokes his fur lovingly, torn between smiling and bawling. She checks the clock above the TV and starts counting down the hours before Zeke's last vet visit. Nineteen...eighteen...fifteen...ten...

Tuesday afternoon.

Over the past seven days, Rosa has tried to make the most of Zeke's last week. And it isn't enough.





As they enter the operation room of the vet clinic, Rosa feels Zeke squirm in her arms. He never liked the vet's. Heart protesting, Rosa lays Zeke down on the table and takes a seat in a nearby chair. Not bearing to look at Zeke, she glances around the room, taking in the bland walls, the posters, the cabinets and sink. All very ordinary, but Zeke is seeing these things for the last time. She wonders what he sees. *Come on Rosa*, Rosa tells herself. *Be strong*. With effort, she gazes into Zeke's caramel irises, as if trying to reassure him through eye connection. Searching through the many layers of golden brown, Rosa finds something unexpected. Not fear, nor distress, but rather sympathy. For her.

The room blurs as the tears she had worked so hard to avoid the entire week pour out at once. Even in his final moments, Zeke isn't terrified of death. Instead, he is concerned for Rosa's well-being after he passes. All this time, Rosa thought she was preparing Zeke for his death when really it was Zeke who was supporting Rosa in the face of losing her beloved pet and friend. Rosa reaches out and grasps Zeke's paw, feeling her tears wet his fur. As the vet readies the dose, Rosa can't help but wail. She has never been less ready for Zeke's death, not even after all the memories she has tried to enforce over the week. Despite the preparation she gave herself, she doesn't want it to end this way. The vet thrusts the needle into Zeke's fur.

Then the sympathy in Zeke's eyes disappears, replaced by a cold emptiness.

Zeke is gone.

As Rosa drives down the highway, her heart aches with every mile she travels. She keeps expecting to hear Zeke's bark ringing out from the backseat, but he's gone. Dead. Everywhere she looks, the sky, the city lights, the road ahead, she can find an image of Zeke. She can still see the warmth of Zeke's eyes, the last flicker of sympathy in them before the lights go out.



Hi, I'm Claire! I'm thirteen years old, and I've enjoyed creating stories since I was a toddler. For this competition, I wrote a story about a girl who knows that her beloved dog is about to die, because I believe that knowing that your loved one's time is almost up is one of the hardest things to bear. I'm honored to be this year's winner!





# Leto and Nebulara

Chiara Rojas



Leto was a young girl. Her age, we do not know. However, we do know of her never ending love of critters. Living alone in a vast forest covered with all sorts of mythical creatures, Leto had never seemed to find the one perfect for her.

Over lots of time, she had built a sanctuary for any animal to stay. Numerous types of life would find shelter with Leto, from crawling insects to cuddly bears and fierce wildcats. The sanctuary was magnificent; extravagant waterfalls that poured into long and flowy creeks and rivers, smooth and warm plains, tall trees covered with nests of birds and colorful lights, proper habitats for all kinds of wildlife, and more. Leto knew she had the perfect home and the perfect place for animals.

On a warm, sunny, spring morning, Leto awoke from the morning birds chirping their musical tune. She stretched her dark, tanned arms and climbed down from the resting area she had made for herself in a large tree. She felt the green, ticklish grass she had landed on under her feet and smiled, excited to pursue another day. After eating a bowl of mixed berries she had previously picked, she made her way around the entire sanctuary, which she did daily to ensure there were no issues and everything was going smoothly, which it was. Once she had completed all of her morning tasks, she made her way back to where she woke up to do her all-time favorite thing besides being with animals: sleep. We've learned that Leto's second favorite thing in the world is sleeping. She climbed back into her hammock and dozed off.

After an hour or two of light sleep, she felt something small and furry next to her. She opened her eyes, and there lay a small, purple and blue fuzzy animal. It had the body of a dog, the face of a large cat, the horns of a ram, and the tail of a squirrel. Leto was confused; she had never seen this creature before! Where did it come from? How did it get here? Questions raced through her mind. She tried not to move much, as the animal was sleeping, just like she was. The animal would continue to follow her throughout the entire day, not making a sound.

"Would you like to stay with me?" Leto asked the animal. The creature nodded its head and jumped into Leto's arms. While Leto was still confused, she was very happy that she now had an animal companion for herself. "I think I'll name you Nebulara. That seems fitting," Leto smiled at the animal, to which it somehow smiled back. It had been 3 months since Leto took Nebulara in. We've learned about Nebulara's ambitious and adventurous nature. Every day when Leto would do her trip around the sanctuary, Nebulara would join and play with all the other animals. While she is clumsy, Nebulara loves to get in all sorts of trouble. Another thing she loves is eating pinecones. While Leto is unsure if they're really safe for her to eat, it seems that she's been growing rapidly eating them. Nebulara seems to love sleeping just as much as Leto, which is quite convenient for both.

Nebulara seems to be a kind of company to Leto; Leto has always been alone, and now that she has something with her, she feels less lonely and happier. The forest seems to brighten up when Leto is happier, and right now, it is at its brightest. Not only was she more joyful, she was doing more. She had explored almost the entire forest with Nebulara at her side; Meeting new animals and finding new foods to eat. Leto didn't know about this more adventurous side of her until Nebulara came along. Everything had been perfect with Nebulara, until Leto remembered what she had forgotten; predators. After a long time with Nebulara, she had learned that she wasn't a predator, imposing risk for her in such a large forest with such different animals and predators.





However, Leto hadn't taken any precautions to keep her safe. One day when Nebulara was out walking on her own, she found herself lost in a strange part of the forest. She began slowly walking with her guard fully up.

Suddenly, she heard the smashing of leaves on the ground by what seemed to be a gigantic paw. The sounds of the leaves began getting louder and louder. Before Nebulara could see any animal, she heard the greatest roar she'd ever heard. In just a small amount of time,

Nebulara was face to face with a huge, brown bear standing on its back two feet. It let out a mighty roar once again. Nebulara was frozen with fear. She had never faced such a beast before. As the bear kept inching closer, Nebulara knew she had to take action. There, was when she released the only sound she could make; that of a velociraptor turning itself inside out. The sound was so loud, it even frightened the bear a bit. Leto heard it immediately and knew, in her heart, that Nebulara needed help. She sprinted in the direction of the noise until she was at the scene. She stood in front of Nebulara while the bear roared once again. Leto jumped with force on top of the bear, gripping onto its fur for dear life. The bear kicked and roared and try to get her off, but Leto wasn't going down that easily. She unsheathed her mighty spear made of wood and stone and with all her power, stabbed the bear it its nose. The bear immediately fell back and retreated.

Leto jumped down, completely out of breath. "Are you okay, Nebulara?" Still shaken with fear, Nebulara nodded. Leto crouched down to her level and scooped her up, squeezing her with a hug. "I love you." she whispered. Nebulara responded with a softer and quieter version of her previous roar.



My name is Chiara Rojas. I'm 13 years old and I'm an 8th grader at Holy Cross School in Santa Cruz. I have a passion for art and drawing and hope to study it further in college. I take interest in musicals, video games, and beauty. I love to sleep, and I also love my cat, Leonarda. I hope to continue writing as a hobby in the future!





# Deer Eyes

Tanish Gaglani



I miss the noise. The soothing thuds of the pouring rain on concrete, the blaring of taxi cabs like trumpets, the frenzied drumming of the street musicians; the sounds would embrace me as I laid on my bed. The city would speak to me like no one else. Now, there's nothing left except for an uneasy and hollow silence, as my thoughts press against my skull. Questions pound on my ears, worries and doubts multiply in my head without that vibrant noise to wash it away. Now, every night, as the faded once-golden grass sways, I lie wishing. Wishing that I could go back.

However, tonight, something amazing happens. The night wind from an open window seeps into my blankets and my skin. It feels so soft, and comforting, as I lift myself up from the bed and stare out into the night outside; except my stare is met with something back. The moon splashes into the black watery depths of its eyes. Moonlight traces long tan antlers. Reddish brown fur is accentuated by white spots along its sides. A deer stands outside my window. In its eyes, I see the same apprehension I hold in mine. However, there's a thrill to it. Seeing something organic, something with a heartbeat. Something that might understand me. Instead of feeling the methodical hum of air conditioners and garbage trucks, I can just barely stare into its eyes and just wonder what it's feeling. It's fleeting, though, as the deer runs back into the trees, and I'm left to wonder.

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The sun rises, and a gray sky now hangs above the almost endless rows of grass and vast stretches of gravel. I ride the empty stretches between the buildings, reveling in the fact that space can exist between buildings, and not a mesh of culture and ideas. However, there has to be that mess in the school, the same familiar chatter and laughter and beautiful, beautiful noise. I've stared at the image of the school on my phone, each time with questions and energy and excitement pulsating inside my bones. It's tall and imposing, grandiose in a quaint way unfamiliar to me. Filling my ears are frantic words as I navigate the labyrinthian school building. I open the door to my 8th grade classroom, and- I'm met with silence. Faces distort into confusion as the silence grates at my ears. Slowly, the classroom comes to life again, albeit hushed, and the blonde woman in heels next to the whiteboard introduces herself as a name I can't remember. She tells the class to treat me kindly, and she asks me to stand up and introduce myself to the class.

"Your name, where you moved from, and a favorite football team, please."

"I'm- my name is Noah. I uh... I moved from New York. And- I'm not really into football, but my dad says he hates the Colts." The silence is popped by surges of quiet whispering and muffled conversation. People look at me with eyes of contempt and agitation.

"Man, what are you even talking about? The Colts are the best!" I turn my head to see a young boy with black hair and blue eyes stare at me with a sense of self-pride and justice. After he says this, everything erupts, as if a barrier was shattered and everyone was let out of their cages.

"Probably a Patriots fan."

"It's like he's asking to be hated."

"Maybe he's special needs or something."



A curly haired kid comes up to me and says that it's just football and to ignore them. I push him away. The whispering condenses until the teacher shushes them and tells them to be kind to their new classmate. As the day goes on and people make up stories about me, I try to hide inside the blue plastic chair they gave me, just wanting to sink into it and never come out. As the bells ring and kids flood out of the room like a flash flood, I shove away the people trying to come up to me. It's like they're all peering into my head, intruding onto my own mindscape, trying to figure me out. The chilly bike ride home fills my mind with swimming thoughts of the Colts and the blue eyed kid and multiplying fractions and the patriots. They force their way into the little cracks in my brain, unyielding and immovable. I look behind me, and the school seems to tower above me. I was just small, weak and scared.

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Tonight, it happens again. I see those same black eyes staring at me. I hear my heartbeat again. It's closer this time. The patio door opens, letting out a creak as I silently approach the deer. It backs away from me with caution, stumbling on some dirt. One of its long, elegant legs is mangled and twisting in an odd direction. I quickly run inside the house to get the gauze; sprinting with an urgency and empathy I've never felt before. The deer waits curiously yet timidly outside, the grass wrapping 'round its hooves. I slowly wrap the gauze around the deer's leg, each circumference filling me with a sense of completion. In the side of my eye, I can see others beckoning to it. I can see the fear in it melt away. I nurse the deer, and as it runs free toward the forest, I can just barely see a glimpse of it looking back right at me. And its eyes say to me, wordlessly:

"Now it's your turn." And as the deer returns to its herd, and casts aside its fear, I promise to do the same.

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It's been 3 months, and I hear the noise again. The sounds of Ezekiel, the curly haired kid, biking away. The sounds of rustling gold grass in the sweet breeze. And sometimes, ever so faintly, the sounds of a running deer. My own fear muted the music, but those eyes helped me find it again.



My name is Tanish Gaglani, and I'm an 8th grader at Frank S. Greene Middle school in Palo Alto. I'm 13 years old. I like writing, journalism and playing piano. I have a crazy little sister and two awesome parents, and I wouldn't trade them for anything. My favorite things to do are to curl up in my bed and read, or go out biking with my friends. I'm really fascinated by animals, since they're so pure in their emotions and loyalty. An animal will never have another agenda, they'll love you for who you are. And that's really beautiful.





# Wink and Eyes of Rain

Trinity Smith



Amon: My chest is tight, and I feel like I can't breathe properly. Maybe it's the collar of this white shirt or the way my tie chokes my throat. Or maybe it's the fact that I am at my brother, Andres's, funeral.

"Eighteen." My mother, who's sitting next to me, mutters my brother's age over and over again like a chant. I want to scream at her that it won't make him come back; nothing will. But instead I close my eyes and pretend my brother is alive. And I feel like I can see him. His skin is the color of coffee mixed with cream, and his amber eyes are like wells of happiness. When he smiles, he pulls his lips back to the right, making it look more like a smirk. But then I open my eyes, and he is not here. Instead, I am here. With my skin like dark chocolate. With my eyes like gray clouds. I am nothing like my brother, but I learned a lot from him. He taught me to see things with vivid color when all I saw was gray days. He taught me to see beyond myself.

"Wh-what about Wink, my baby's dog?" Mommy stammers from sobbing after the funeral.

"We could give him away?" Dad suggests, taking off his glasses to rub his dark, misty eyes.

"NO!" I blurted. Andres loved that dog like his baby. Taking care of that dog was the last thing I could do for Andres. "I'll care for him!"

They both stare at me like I have gone bonkers. And maybe I have because I have never been good with animals. But I need to keep the dog my brother called family. They must see that I am determined to do this because they nod, obviously too exhausted to argue.

Wink: It's morning, and I am sitting at my boy's door waiting for him to come out and tickle my ears. I have the strangest sensation that he is not there. But I wait for him anyway. I hear a door behind me cracking open, and I strain my neck to see another boy. He smells like my boy, and they look sorta similar. But he is my boy's brother. Usually my boy's brother ignores me and just stumbles into the kitchen to get himself breakfast. But today he stares at me with his eyes like rain. My boy's eyes are like twin suns, smoldering and glorious. But my boy is nowhere. Instead the boy with eyes like rain calls to me. "Wink?" My name sounds gruff in his odd voice. I lift my nose in the air slightly to sniff for treats. But he has none, so I turn back to my boy's door. "Wink, come here!" His tone is demanding and irritation sparks in him. I walk over to him reluctantly. But when he looks grimly down at me, I realize everything has changed. For the next couple weeks, the boy with eyes like rain feeds and walks me. I miss the comforting hands of my boy when he cups my head or rubs my belly. Instead, I have rougher, colder hands that snap leashes on and tug me out the door. The boy with eyes like rain carries around a scent of despairing. Some days I wake up to muffled crying from his room. I want to tell him I know his pain. I want to tell him that I miss my boy too. But the boy with eyes of rain has his guard up. I can tell by the way he walks with his shoulders stiff and his face unfeeling.

But one day, while he was tugging me along he slipped and fell. I hurried to him and licked his face and the blood from his scraped knee.



Something in his face softened when I looked at him again. And he gently scratched my chin. I gave him my happy dog smile and he smiled back. "Thanks, Wink. You're a good dog." I feel like I can help this boy, and he can help me. I feel like we can be each other's island in the sea.

Amon: I hear a whimper and scratching at my door. Groaning, I rub my eyes and roll out of bed. I open the door to see Wink, my brother's chocolate labrador with big brown eyes, staring up at me. "Seriously?" I grumble to him, but he just smiles and slips past me. He leaps into my bed and lies down. "Get off!" I whisper growl, since my parents are still sleeping. But he just snuggles deeper into the blankets. "Fine," I sigh, crawling back into bed. "Just, please don't drool on the bed sheets!" He just smiles at me and licks me on the cheek. I feel a warm shot of affection in my chest, but I turn away from him and fall back into my dreams.

Over the weeks, I talked to Wink more and more. He caught me once sniffing softly, clutching my brother's picture. And he came over and licked away my tears and then curled up in my lap. I cried for over an hour more with him licking away my tears. When I finally stopped

and looked at him, he looked like he understood and missed my brother too. I chuckled sadly and whispered back to him, "Of course you miss him. Who wouldn't?"

"I never could have survived losing him without you. I miss him so much, but I know that he would want me to find happiness," I told Wink one day while we were walking. "You know he loved you, right?" Wink looked up at me.

"Well, he did love you." I crouched down so I was eye level with him. "And you want to know something strange? I can understand why. I love you too, Wink," I told him seriously. He licked my face as if to say, 'I love you, too,' back.



I'm Trinity and I'm 13. I have a yellow Labrador named Jake. I enjoy taking Jake on walks in our neighborhood, but I think he enjoys playing fetch more than walking. Jake is very good at intercepting the ball, because he is fast and can jump high. My favorite vacation places are Lake George, NY in the summer and Lake Tahoe in the winter. At Lake George, I spend time playing outside and visiting my family on the east coast. In winter, skiing with my cousins is what I prefer to do. I also take delight in writing and playing ice hockey.





# A Cry for Hope

Ananya Adya



The moment I entered the room, silence filled the air. I plopped down on my chair and could feel my sister staring at my foot as I got my food. Mom gave her a dirty look and I heard her mutter, "Don't stare." I wiggled in my chair and stared at my feet.

"I'm not really hungry," I said quietly. Pushing my food away, I got up and headed back to my room. Once in my room, I looked out the window and sighed. Why do I have to be the unlucky one? Why did God give me a clubfoot? What did I-A small blur of brown wooshed passed me, breaking my thoughts. Squinting my eyes, I tried to make out what it was. The tiny ball of fur hopped on a nearby tree branch and turned around. I gasped.

"It-it's an owl," I breathed, my eyes widening. Its soft, furry body with small pepper-black speckles carried its beautiful head which had a disk-shaped frame and a small, sharp beak. The thing that amazed me the most were its eyes. The color of a golden sun shining beneath its bold and black pupils. I could feel their glow as she looked back at me. After I admired her for a while, I yawned and rubbed my eyes. I looked at the baby owl and whispered, "Good night." Smiling, I dropped onto my bed and closed my eyes. The next morning, I went downstairs and heard my sister talking to Mom.

"How can I ignore it Mom? He has a clubfoot. I know you say to accept it, but I can't accept a permanent mistake." My mouth turned sour, and my heart dropped to the pit of my stomach. I went back up as fast as I could, choking back tears as I crumpled on my bed. I stifled a cry and swallowed the lump forming in my throat. I'm more than a kid with a disability, aren't I? I buried my face in my hands and cried. All the happiness that was left inside of me drained out. Who am I? A bee with no honey, a firefly with no light, a boy with no hope.

I stared out the window, hoping for the winged creature to come back. I knew it wouldn't come back until night, but I still looked outside in silence. As the sky darkened, the stars winked, and the moon smiled bright, I saw something flutter and grinned. When I saw the creature again I felt a chill go through my spine. But as I looked into the owl's eyes, I noticed something I hadn't noticed before. I had heard owls were known to be fierce and powerful. But as I stared at the animal, I realized it was... it was hurt. Her large eyes were glossy and sad, as if she was longing for something. I tilted my head. It tilted its head. I smiled and looked at it but then-I almost choked. The owl was injured.

The creature's foot was bent and covered in blood. The injury was weighing it down, causing her to limp. Tears filled my eyes and I sighed in sympathy. My shoulders sank and I started to think... I woke up early the next morning, and carefully packed a bandage for the owl. I attempted to tiptoe but tripped many times. I slipped out the door and into the forest. The cool breeze tickled against my skin, and the rocks beamed with sunlight. Small flowers blushed a soft pink, and the smell of fresh pinewood hung in the hair. I went to the spot I had seen the owl for the two nights before and waited. I heard a rustle and saw the owl fast asleep. Her small mouth opened as she yawned, and her beautiful wings extended. But as she saw me, she gave a yelp of fright.



"It's ok," I said gently, slowly putting my crutches down. The owl trembled with such fear, I felt hurt at how afraid she was. She tried to limp away, her tiny body shaking with terror. I tried to show her I was going to help her by showing her the bandages. She glimpsed at me and turned away. Pain filled my heart, "Please, I promise I won't hurt you," I whispered, my voice shaking. Small birds landed near the owl and started pecking at her. "Hey! Stop!" I shouted, shooing them away.

"I know how it feels like," I breathed. I sighed and sat down.

"I know how it feels like to not belong, to have others think you're a mistake, to feel hopeless and lost."

closed my eyes and felt defeated. How could a boy with a clubfoot ever think he was capable of helping someone else? Heart throbbing, I got up and slowly walked back. As I headed back, lost in my thoughts, I heard the smallest "chirp." Slowly, I turned my head. The owl moved towards me and headed down the branch. I stepped steadily, the air filling with my shaky, shallow breaths.

As I approached her with the bandage she stopped. "Don't worry, I'll just wrap it so it will heal," I said, hoping desperately for her to not go. The owl just blinked her eyes. I went closer and opened the bandage, trying my best to stay gentle. I wrapped it around the owl's foot, her soft feathers brushing against my skin. I backed away and smiled at her, "All done." She tilted her head and chirped, and I laughed. Maybe I wasn't so useless after all. Later that night I looked out the window and realized we were the same, the bird and I. Trapped, too afraid to fly. I looked everywhere for the owl and realized she was gone. I smiled sadly and my heart felt heavy. As I started to turn away, I heard the smallest "chirp." She was free and had flown away, and one day, so would I.



Hi, my name is Ananya and I'm an 8th grader at JLS! I love ice skating, spending time in nature, making art, and writing! Ever since I was little, I would come up with little stories and make them into mini booklets. It gave me relaxation and slowly made me realize my love for writing. I enjoy letting my imagination go wild and exploring the different types of writing. I also love animals and admire how much joy they can give to someone. I had a small parakeet named Mochi. She used to nibble from my hand, sit on my head, and sleep next to me while I did homework. I'm still amazed how something so small can give so much joy to us. Unfortunately, she died only a few months after we got her. Despite that, I still recall all the little happy memories I had with her and remember that she was the one who kept me positive, happy, and creative.





# A Day of Change

Ava Cowden



It was a cold, hazy morning like always here in the cage room, but this time of year there was snow to go with the fog. The cage room didn't have a roof, it was just three walls of cages. I had barely gotten any sleep because of the snow, but I tried curling up on the frosty metal floor of the cage. My cage was on the top row of cages, the coldest. I had always wished to get a cage on the floor but it seems I always got the same icy cage on the top.

As I was still trying to sleep I heard sounds, bad people sounds. That meant they were either going to give us food for the first time in a while or take a few of us to the arena to fight. I quickly ate all the food that was on the ground of my cage so I would get fed, but they weren't holding anything that looked like food, they were holding ropes. I was still calm, they took me yesterday, why would they take me again today? Then out of nowhere looked at me and walked over to my cage, and opened it. That's when I started to panic, I bit its hand and growled, but it did not seem to care. It put the rope around my neck and dragged me out of my cage, and I fell four cage levels to the floor. I realized that the rope had fallen off my neck. That meant I had a tiny chance that I might be able to make a run for somewhere safe, so I did.

I ran and ran and somehow they didn't catch me, I made it to the road of monsters. They zoomed past me then I ran to the middle of the road, now they were zooming past me on both sides, then made a run for the other side, and I made it once again. I looked back and then ran for the big buildings, I thought there might be a nice place to nap there. As I started walking I saw a squirrel, and I couldn't resist the urge to chase it and bark at it, it was a running plaything! I stared at it for a bit then I went all barking and chasing. Soon I lost it but there was a small human. I walked toward it because I smelt some type of meat, I was starving after such a lengthy day. It looked at me and started walking over, then all of a sudden she started to reach toward me. I couldn't comprehend what to do, so I just froze, and she patted me on the head. I looked up at her peculiar human face, with no snout.

All of a sudden it said, "Huh, you don't have a tag so you must not have a home."

I didn't understand a thing it said so I barked. All of a sudden it picked me up and said "You're now going to be called Alinta. By the way, I'm Calida." It took me into an arena, but there was no fighting area. Some bigger humans said "Calida what is that dog doing in our house." the small human responded, "It doesn't have an owner."

There was a pause and one of the bigger humans said "Wait, that's the dog who fled the dogfighting today. Calida, watch out, it's dangerous!" the small human dropped me and I flopped to the ground. I looked at all of them then the big humans grabbed me and threw me into the back of a monster. I could feel the monster moving and in nearly no time at all, it jerked to a stop. I hadn't noticed but the little human was there screaming at the big one. Then the big one got out and the little one followed. They opened the monster up and the big one yelled "Calida stop it!" I assumed its name was Calida, it said its name was that and its owner did too. As I was still thinking the big one picked me up and I yelped in surprise. Then I saw the bad human standing with a rope and started barking out of fear. Now they were going to the arena.

The bad human put the heavy rope on my neck and dragged me to the unlit arena and put me in. Across from me, there was a cage, and in the cage was Sheridan. Sheridan and I hate each other to death. As I was thinking about attacking him the lights illuminated up the room and a crowd started cheering. I heard his noisy cage open and the bad human yell something or was it the bad human. Then all of a sudden people picked up Sheridan and me, I let them put Sheridan nipped at all the humans' hands that went near him. Then I heard the little human, Calida, crying out from a distance.

Then Calida blurted out "Wait, that's my dog." I was baffled, I am not her dog. Then I realized that she merely wanted them to give me to her, and that's what they did. I wasn't angry, she was considerate to me and tried to protect me from coming back to this dreadful place. I thought maybe life with her won't be too bad. Then Calida came racing over and embraced me, and I believed maybe I can live the life I yearned for.



I love animals and have for a long time. I've had a dog my entire life. I don't have a favorite animal, but I do like canines a lot. I also love writing stories and drawing, especially things with animals in them.



# Sea Nettle Hearts

Lara Cardona



[Ma-knee-et] [Ku-val-eh]

"Would you like to dance with me?"

We are wrapped so close together that it is hard to tell my legs from hers and hers from mine. I have 26 arm-legs and she has 30, but that's ok, I am young and she is older. She is orange and I am white and we are happy this way -- drifting ever so softly in the deep, marred sea, so different yet symbiotic. She is Manet, and I am Quálle. We are always in the same sentences, and we are because our love is the same. I have no eyes to see but I can feel the harsh sand blowing through the water from the coast. In our way, we smile at each other with our hearts and swim with the current. It's funny how we share the same mind, one we don't have. I have no lungs but every breath of mine is taken by her.

Wait.

"Anything for you, Manet."

... Where is Manet? I have no eyes to see but I know that it is the (blue?) plastic jug that has struck her. It hits her like she is nothing but skin (she is) and carries her away without saying goodbye. No, I don't want this. The current pushes me back as I struggle forward toward her. Please don't leave me, I love you. Manet is gone. . . .

In and out like an exhale, we move like blossoms farther and farther away from a now distant shore. Still intertwined (like our souls if we had them), we are between continents now, perfectly below an empty sky. Manet lets go of me, only to twirl around me and to make me dazed and joyful and sweet. In my bliss, I embrace the strong current that sweeps around me and pushes my body to and fro.

"Kill me." It whispers.

Another day has passed. I must be going crazy, I cannot tell if I am going left or right, backward or forwards, closer to Manet or farther and farther away. I almost don't notice it brush past me, but somehow I can feel the smell of rotten flesh encircling me. Just like the turtle, something is pushing at its jaw. A fake anchovy, and the thing is a tuna that has been ripped open by a large bite. Chunks of the fish are falling to the ocean floor and its stomach is half open and bursting at the seams, but it still blinks with life.

There is no place for burials in the ocean. All I can do is softly numb it with my sting. Once I have left it petrified I leave again. No time for tears, just Manet. . . . I don't know if a day has passed. Minutes seem like hours but the sunset fades in seconds. Light is streaming through the surface in great curtains of warmth and illuminated in the light's gentle embrace, a soft orange skin is shining ahead of me and pointing at me with its arms.

Help me! I need to [cough cough] get out!" Turtles like to eat things like me. Sometimes I watch while the tips of their beaks crunch into legs just like mine. But there is something in my invisible heart that longs for Manet, and her kindness too. So I wrap my arms around the plastic and pull to let him free, just like she would. "Oh thank you," He says this through warm tears that dissolve in the cold ocean. "I owe you my eternal gratitude and my life!" It doesn't mean much. "No thank you, but have you seen a nettle nearby?" "No, I'm so sorry." "Don't be." I must be going then. . . .



If I had eyes, I think I would be crying. It is still shattering and through the open window of its stomach, I can see a leg inside of it, perfectly intact. Manet's tentacle is broken off as evidence that she escaped to someplace. Maybe there is hope left in me. I have been searching for a day, maybe. Closer to an island, I swim and survey for her. A turtle swims past me and kicks up the water around it while it thrashes and writhes. It is surrounded by a mesh, with stray beer cans caught on the edge of it, and its jaw is pulled backward by it.

Oh, Manet! I am here, my love! I am neither happy nor sad now. I am filled with the purest devotion and my limbs cannot take me to her any faster. Swimming, swimming, swimming to Manet. She is smeared in red and things are sticking out of her. All it takes is a swim closer to her and she is no more. Just a plastic bag, emblazoned with a red symbol on the front and full of orange streamers.

She is no more, and I am no more too. I let myself go and begin to drift with the current. Can a place exist without Manet?

...

I retreat into the eye of a gyre. A huge plastic storm in the middle of the sea is roaring for me. I see Manet, but I don't know if she's real this time.

"I can't come back to you, I'm stuck here!"

It's true, the image of Manet is stuck between two pieces of plastic. Soda tabs whirl around her because she is in the eye of the storm.

I know what I need to do. I am so tired that all I can do is spread my arms and hold the plastic arms while she rushes out. My invisible heart is slowing down now, and the shrapnel cuts me and pushes me like a hard wind.

"Anything for you Manet." That is my last whisper for her and anything else. Like the turtle and the tuna, this is my compassion. I love you, Manet, I do.



I like to draw, play electric guitar, and write stories and poetry in my free time (I have a glut of time). It's hard for me to focus on things sometimes, but my special interest (I like to say I'm blessed by the spectrum) is horror movies and tv shows/movies in general. I like writing horror too. I enjoy learning more about the history and culture of Puerto Rico and Switzerland, as my mother and father (respectively) are immigrants from those countries.



# Therapy

Amani Keller

If you were to ask this young girl about the true happiness in her life she would say animals. She was 13, well 13 ½ to be exact. She had 8 siblings that have all either moved out or only her little sister left and stayed with her. Growing up in Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, was especially hard since there's only a population of 4,660, and she never grew up around friend (considering she had none) or family. With her mom and dad not being present because of drugs and alcohol use, it was hard for her to grow in certain areas of life.

She never knew what it was like to be loved, cared for, or even just simply heard. But I guess that's what happens when you live in a toxic household. Growing up was different for her than many other kids. Her grades were always bad and she didn't have any friends, except for her best friend Bella.

Bella has been in her life since she was 1 year old which made her feel alive and able to live. But Bella doesn't last forever, she lasted for 12 years until... Forgetting. She will never forget the way her mom made her feel after finding out what happened, she lost her best friend, her life, her soul, and she lost her best friend. Bella. Yes, Bella may have been a dog, but she was special.

Bella wasn't just some dog, Bella was the only thing she had beside her sister. She felt anger and sadness, but she was mostly disappointed. "Why did this happen? Was it me? Did I kill Bella?" Who would have thought her own Best Friend would be alive one day and gone the next. She never quite realized that Bella passed of old age.

It's been a month since Bella passed, and as she progressed in life, No. Life got worse. It was hard for her to say that there was nothing but memories now, but that's how life works right? 4 months went by and her life took a chance.

When Marley came along there were no more dirty rooms, depression, anxiety, and hate. Marley turned her life upright, without Marley something bad could have happened. She was able to get her grades up and make more friends, but her family life was still toxic, that wasn't on the top of her mind though. She's walking on clouds now, now it's just Marley and her, and not just her. With Marley life was easy, yes she may have missed Bella, but either way, she got back up in life and conquered it. She never quite realized how bad her life was without dogs until now. Bella and Marley were her therapy and company she never had. 6 months have gone by and she now lives with her aunt in a healthy family and she has a good community and family life. It's been a year now since Bella died and since having Marley, and she never quite realized how much she needed them. Dogs are a huge part of our life, especially in our mental life.

If you have a pet, you are aware of how selfless love and support can be provided. She realized that people who spend time with domestic animals have been shown to experience less anxiety, depression, weariness, and pain. Most pet owners are well aware of the immediate benefits of sharing their lives with animals.

Many of us, however, are unaware of the physical and mental health benefits that come along with snuggling up to a furry buddy. Pets have evolved to be highly sensitive to human behavior and emotions. Dogs, for example, can understand a lot of the words we say, but they're even better at reading our tone of voice, body language, and gestures. A devoted dog will look into your eyes to measure your emotional condition and try to comprehend what you're thinking and feeling, just like any good human buddy (and to work out when the next walk or treat might be coming, of course).

Pets, particularly dogs and cats can help with stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as loneliness, exercise, playfulness, and even cardiovascular health. Taking care of an animal can help children become more secure and active as they grow up. Pets are also a great source of companionship for seniors. But, maybe most importantly, a pet can provide you with genuine delight and unconditional love. When she realized all this was true she began studying to become a veterinarian, and 6 months later opened her new shop. She now moved on in life and has a healthy and wealthy family of 5. At the end of the day, this story shows how affectionate dogs or any animal can be.



# The Amazing Trip to Hawaii

Amaya Guerra

I woke up one morning remembering that my family and I were going on a trip to Hawaii! I couldn't believe that we were finally leaving, I was so excited to see my cousin Rory. I ran down to breakfast noticing that my parents were already up and I told them how excited I was that we were finally going to Hawaii. I grabbed my bowl, poured milk and fruit loops into the bowl, and ate it as fast as I could. By the time I came back downstairs with my suitcase, my parents were already in the car. I pushed my suitcase in and jumped into the car.

As we were driving my parents and I was talking about all the animals we hoped to see. When we finally got to the airport I saw my cousin and her family waiting for us. When I saw Rory I ran up and hugged her and she hugged me too. As we were boarding I was able to sit in the same row as Rory after switching with a few people. We watched movies, talked about school, ate chips, and played a game of cards. When we got there I couldn't wait to get off the plane so we grabbed our things and headed to the exit.

After Rory and I waited for the rest of the family to come off the plane we headed to get our bags. As we were driving to the hotel Rory and I listened to music looking out the window at the beautiful view of the island, Maui. When we got into our hotel rooms they were so nice. They had a kitchen with 2 beds and connecting doors. The connecting doors allowed us to be able to go into each other's room. On the first day, we wandered around the hotel and went to the ocean to see if the water was warmer than in California. My whole family decided that we were going to go snorkeling the next day since the water was so warm. So I went to sleep thinking of all the animals I would see.

The next morning I ran into Rory's room and woke her up so we could get on the road early. I brushed my teeth, and hair, and put on my swimsuit. When we all got into the car and started to drive down the road all of a sudden my dad lost control and swerved and crashed into a tree after hitting an animal. I was so scared I could hear my heart pumping out of my chest. The whole car was quiet and nobody moved. I wasn't sure what we hit and I was just glad to be alive. But after a while, we all got out of the car.

We all went over to see what we had hit. Surprisingly it was a pig. I thought it was so weird that I looking forward to seeing a pig and we had pretty much killed it! We all examined the pig to see if it was ok. We had no idea what to do. The pig was black and white with a pink nose. It was a boy, his hair is very thin, and it wasn't soft at all. All of a sudden I remembered that we had a towel in the trunk since we were going to go snorkeling. I ran and grabbed it and told my dad we should pick it up, put it in the car, and go to the vet.

The poor pig was breathing hard and was very scared. We put the pig on the seat between Rory and me and left to go to the vet. The car was dented but what mattered was making sure the poor pig would live. When we got to the vet we rushed inside and told them everything that happened. All the animals that were in the waiting room started to bark and whine at the pig since it wasn't an everyday animal you would see in the vet. Fortunately, the vet was able to take the pig in and examine it. We waited for hours and hours just wondering if it would be ok.

My parents said that the pig didn't need our help anymore, but I didn't want to leave him so I told my parents that I was going to stay. Rory agreed with me and we ended up staying and missing the boat that would have taken us snorkeling. When the vet came out he told us that the pig was going to be ok and that they would send it to a wildlife facility where it would be looked after. I didn't want to let the pig go so I convinced the vet that we would take good care of it. The vet agreed and I decided to name him Wilbur. I was so excited to bring Wilbur back to the hotel.

Rory and I decided we were going to share Wilbur as a pet, bringing it back and forth between houses. The whole rest of the Hawaii trip was focused on Wilbur and making him feel better. We ended up having to stay because the pig couldn't leave if it was still hurt. But when Wilbur was finally healed he was very happy to be there with us. We took Wilbur to the beach and brought him everywhere until it was time to finally leave Hawaii. I felt so much comfort from Wilbur that the whole family allowed Rory and me to keep him! We brought Wilbur home with us in a cat carrier since he was just the right size. Wilbur brought has brought me so much comfort and happiness, I don't know what I would do without Wilbur the pig.





# Getting a New Dog

Amelie Galvan

When my mom told me I was going to my grandma's house I didn't really think much of it, I thought it was going to be a typical day. I was excited because I love going to my grandma's house. We got there and I hugged my grandma and sat down on her couch. My grandma had made us food because she knows I get hungry quickly. The food was delicious, that is a part of why I like to go to her house. She had my favorite show playing on the TV. My favorite TV show, at that time, was Mexican TV shows.

I was watching TV while eating my food, then I got bored and went outside to go on my bike and play outside. My brother was also outside. I spent a good amount of time at my grandma's house before my mom came. When my mom came she called me in from outside and told me and my brother that she had a surprise for us. She went outside to get the surprise, I was excited but also nervous because I didn't know what it was. Was I going to like it, is it alive or not, is it tiny or big, I had so many thoughts running through my head. She came in with a box that had tiny holes in it.

I tried looking inside but I couldn't see anything. She put the box down and told us to close our eyes. She opened the box and told us to look inside the box. I was so shocked and happy. I didn't believe what I was seeing. I burst out with joy. It was a puppy! It was so tiny and adorable. I started to pet it and then picked it up. I was so happy that we had gotten a dog. It was a tiny brown and black Yorkie, it was a girl, I knew because she had a pink bow in her hair.

We stayed at my grandma's house for some time with the dog so that she would get used to my grandma and us. Then we went home, the dog was riding on my lap the entire way home. I think I was her favorite at the time. When we got home we took her inside for her to get comfortable with her new home. She was probably scared and nervous because she was walking very slowly but the first thing she did was go to the couch and lay down. Where she laid down was soon to be her favorite spot in the house.

We named her Roxy because my brother wanted to name her Rex so my mom chose Roxy. Every single day she would go to the couch and sit there. She slept in my room a lot. She started getting used to us and started playing with us. We would take her to the park that we lived near all the time. My dad trained her to bite and bark and go to the bathroom outside. My mom taught her to roll over, jump, sit, lay down, and do other cool tricks.

We noticed that she got lonely when my mom would leave to drop us off at school and go to work and my dad was also going to work, so my dad decided to get another dog. He looked and looked for another dog, then he found the best dog for Roxy. He brought the dog home and the first thing the dog did was pee on my dad's favorite chair because he was scared. Then we named him Coby. Coby and Roxy became best friends, there were only 3 differences between them, Coby was a boy, Roxy was a girl, Coby was blonde, Roxy was black and brown, Coby was dumb, and Roxy was smart. We would take them on walks every day, Roxy liked walking, but Coby didn't so my dad tied their leashes together so every time Roxy would walk, Coby had no choice but to walk and Roxy always listened to us.

But one day we came home and Roxy got chubby, we didn't think much of it until she would gain more weight every day. We took her to the vet and the vet told us she was pregnant. Coby had gotten his best friend pregnant so they had puppies. They were so cute but only one came out surprisingly blonde. One day my mom had let the dogs out at our new house and then took me and my brother to my grandma's house, when my mom went back she only found Roxy, my mom, and my dad looked and looked for Coby, he was nowhere to be found. My mom called me and told me the news, I burst out crying, we had lost my dog. To this day we do not know where he went.



# Gerald

## Chax Gottlieb-Maier

John sat quietly in the back of a humvee with his dog, Gerald. Gerald was a big German Shepherd, although he looked scary he was extremely friendly. John was sitting on the left side while Gerald was in the middle next to John's friend Jack. John wasn't paying much attention to the dog because he was watching the road warily for any IEDs or enemy soldiers. It was the middle of the night and they were finally heading back to camp after a five-hour-long patrol. They finally got back to the base and immediately went to bed. Gerald

curled up at the foot of John's bed. They woke up at 6 and hopped out of their cot and put on their gear.

John slipped the dog vest on Gerald and then they both walked toward the mess hall. For breakfast, they had scrambled eggs that looked disgusting and some overcooked bacon. John and the other guys in his platoon ate the food while Gerald had dog food. At one point while John was eating Gerald looked up, tilted his head, and barked to get John's attention. John looked down and tossed Gerald a couple of pieces of bacon. Once John and the rest of his platoon were done they went out to a couple of Humvees and started loading them up. John was called into the tent for a briefing and he told Gerald to stay by the humvee. One of the guys in the fireteam with Gerald grabbed a Baseball. He turned to Gerald and said, "fetch." He chucked the ball and as soon as he did Gerald sprinted towards it. He was there in seconds and ran back to the guy who threw it, dropped the ball, and sat down. He was about to throw it again when John came out of the tent. He told them they were going to a small town just outside of the base and that it was just a routine patrol. They hopped in the humvees and started towards the town. When they get there they notice that it's eerily quiet.

John tells Gerald to follow him and a few other guys stay behind. Gerald and John slowly walk towards a tall big tan building. The building looked like it was several years old and the sides were crumbling. There were a few open spots for windows but there were no windows there and there was a huge gaping hole in the side of the building probably from a rocket-propelled grenade or an artillery round. As they went into the building John thought he saw something moving out of the corner of his eye. He turned and looked out the window and saw nothing. John felt a chill go down his spine and right after that he heard a low whistling type of sound. He immediately knew what that sound was and took cover. What he heard was a rocket coming straight towards the building. When the rocket hit the building everything went black for John. After the dust cleared John was lying unconscious on the floor of the partly destroyed building and Gerald was barking and trying to wake up John. When Gerald realized that he wasn't able to wake up John he bolted out the door and tried to run back and find the rest of John's team. Gerald began weaving back and forth between the rows and rows of buildings. He was going off his smell to try and find the humvee.

Finally, as Gerald was sniffing around a corner by a building he caught the scent. He immediately began flat out sprinting on his four legs. When he arrived at the humvee he started barking like crazy. The two soldiers still in the humvee had heard the explosion and were frantically trying to radio John. As one of them was radioing the other saw a dog running towards them and recognized it as John's dog. They hopped out of the humvee and ran towards the dog. One of them snatched John's baseball cap that he left in the humvee and brought it to the dog. They held up the hat to Gerald and Gerald sniffed it he then began walking back towards where he came from and the two soldiers followed him. The walk back to where John was seemed to be taking hours until finally Gerald stopped and veered off to the right into a house. They sprinted inside and saw John lying on the ground unconscious. They immediately knelt beside him trying to see what was wrong and after a careful examination, they didn't see anything external which was bad. One of them picked him up and put him in a fireman's carry and the other walked with Gerald out in front to keep guard. They exited the house and started back up on the long tedious walk back to the humvee. After another hour of walking, they finally reached the humvee. They realized that the drive back to the base would be probably too long so they called for a medical helicopter. They were waiting for probably only 2 minutes until they heard the helicopter and when it arrived a medic hopped out strapped John to a stretcher as they were bringing him up Gerald jumped into the stretcher with him and they were both lifted into the helicopter. When they got back John went to the hospital and Gerald was put back in the sleeping area. When John woke up Gerald was sitting on the bottom of his bed waiting for him to wake up. When John finally woke up Gerald started barking and jumped on his bed. John was extremely happy and gave Gerald a big hug.





# Two Plus One Equals Twelve

Emma Griffith

There are a lot of surprises in life. I received several surprises in 2020, one that hurt the whole world and two that were simply miraculous.

When Covid-19 struck, my family and I sheltered in place at my grandparents' home in Mexico with their two dogs, Luna and Lalo. The torment of not being allowed to go outside to parks and the beach was unbearable and I sank into depression.

It was May, and we were getting closer to my birthday. I had been wanting to adopt a dog for a while, and my mom began to look for one, much to my dad's chagrin. Every dog we have ever had was rescued from the shelters and streets of Mexico. My aunt had recently taken in a street dog that had come to her gate starving and thirsty. She named her Lola and we adopted her. Lola arrived the day after my birthday. It was love at first sight for me. Lola lived happily with us for two months developing a slightly romantic relationship with Lalo (I like to view it that way) and all-out-war with Luna. Luna didn't like having a female dog in the household, and Lola didn't like how Luna was trying to claim dominance so...they fought. A lot. Until I noticed that Lola was getting rounder. I knew it couldn't be the food. I fed all three dogs the same amount and Lalo and Luna weren't getting any heavier.

I was convinced Lola was pregnant and told everyone about it. To prove my point I began researching dog pregnancy symptoms. Sure enough, she showed all the signs such as nesting, growing larger in the stomach and nipple area, and mood changes. My parents would have to believe me now. And they did, but to be sure, my mom took Lola to the vet. When she returned she broke it to my dad first.

"Good news or bad news first?" She had asked.

"Good news," He responded.

"Well, Lola came to us pregnant."

"What?! What's the bad news?!"

"She's going to have around eight to ten puppies."

My mom treated Lola like a queen. She let her sleep inside instead of outside and mixed chicken and broth into her food.

It felt like an eternity waiting for the puppies to be born, but finally one morning it happened. I had come downstairs to ask dad for breakfast. I started to speak, when he shushed me. I listened as he pointed out the window. I heard a strange mewling sound.

"Do you think Lola gave birth?" Asked my dad.

The night before Lola had gone outside and wouldn't come back in again for bed. Instead she spent the night in one of the doghouses outside. I went out to check. I walked over to the front patio where Lola had been sleeping and what I saw made me scream. Puppies! There were lots of adorable newborns in the dog house with Lola and she was still giving birth! I ran back inside screaming and stormed through the house waking my mom up and we rushed outside to help Lola.

We picked up the doghouse, took the roof off and carried it inside with Lola and the puppies in it. Lola gave birth to nine puppies total—seven boys and two girls. From the start, each puppy had their own special personality and appearance. We didn't give them names at first since we knew we wouldn't keep all of them, so we called them by what they looked like. Two of the puppies had white feather shaped fur on their heads so we called them Little Feather and Big Feather.

The puppies were always SO hungry and were constantly following Lola around. My mom doted on Lola and the puppies and spoiled them rotten. Having babies in the house, canine or no, thrilled her. She would give Lola chicken and honey water and the puppies got powdered goat milk from the Himalayas. No matter what those pups did, like tearing up my grandparents garden, my mom never got mad. Time went on, and the puppies got bigger and bigger. Before they were a year old they were even larger than Lola (and Lola is a big dog). The puppies had grown up and no longer relied on Lola to feed them. This independence signified that it was time for them to be adopted. Since day one, my mom had been photographing the puppies.



Every bath they took, every pot they broke, every meal they ate, and so on. She posted these photos on Facebook so that everyone we knew knew the puppies and watched them grow throughout the months. My mom had friends and family begging her for a puppy left and right. The only puppies that stayed with us were Louie and Lyra. All the other puppies went to loving homes. I knew from almost the very beginning that Lyra was my dog. She was unique, intelligent, and her multicolored eyes were so captivating. Unfortunately she died this January from canine distemper. I have never cried so much. Then there is Louie. He is loving, crazy and really hard to handle, but I couldn't ask for anything more. He still lives with us, content and slightly unhinged.

Lola was adopted. I was devastated when Lola left, but it turned out to be the best decision we could make for her. She has a new family—a husband and wife—who live in San Diego. The puppies and Lola turned our lives during Coronavirus from a miserable melancholy

to a happy chaotic mayhem. I loved every escapade, every random thing they ate (and there were a lot of random things), and every new thing they discovered. I'm not anywhere close to being a mother—that will be many years in the future—but that responsibility that a mother has, that love is so special. Those pups changed my life forever, and I will never forget it.





# A Hopeless Christmas

Esperanza Diaz-Estrada

I'm Hope, well Hopeless Hope. I got that nickname from the other dogs in the pound after my second week being here and still not getting adopted. "Where's here" you may ask, well here's Haggus Pound located in Woodstock, Vermont a small townish, warm, and a very cold, cold place; since it's about two or one weeks away from Christmas—the best time of the year!

I've loved Christmas since I was a wee tiny gal and since I'm a polish lowland sheepdog. I blend in really well.

Anyways, let me tell you my story. It was a stormy day and chunks of snow were falling out of the sky like big marshmallows; families were walking in and out buying dogs as their Christmas presents. I was laying on the floor of my cage—yes, like prisoner—about to fall asleep, when I heard the bell chime and I saw a rather peppy energetic human walk into the pound. Her hair and eyes were the color of my kibble, she smelt like the peppermint candies and she had some fuzzy thing covering her ears. It was rather strange. She was talking to Mrs.Haggus the owner of this boring, cold place. I tried my best to ease the drop but all I could make out was

Mrs. Haggus saying "Alright missy you can start today".

The next day and every day after, the door's little bell would chime and the woman that was wearing the funny earthing entered. I soon learn that her name was Lorreta Kent and she was quiet helpful: cleaning out my cage, feeding me, and washing me. Lorreta had a little person who looked exactly like her and would always followed Lorreta. This little human was called, Annemarie Kent. I really enjoyed their presences, especially Annemarie's. Annmarie always told me about her day and Lorreta would pamper me by brushing or doing my hair. I noticed the other dogs didn't get as much attention as I did, which was so different, but I liked it!

Only two days away from Christmas and I can't wait to see my gals! I made sure to lick my paws clean for Annemarie to hold. My face pushed up against metal bars, I waited and waited for the little bell to chime but it never did. I waited to smell the scent of peppermint but I never did. I waited to see fuzzy ear things but I never did. The day quickly turned into night and there was no signs of Lorretta or Annemarie. Feeling hopeless, I curl up to the back of my cage and remind myself that I would always end up hopeless. The night before Christmas was wild. I saw countless people coming in and out of the pound with their loads of cash and loud outfits. But, not one of them were my Loretta and Annemarie. Suddenly an overly tall man, with hazel eyes, and this dirty yellow-colored hair approached my cage. He honestly looked like the people that didn't have a home—like me. But, he smelt like white chocolate. It was a delicious, sweet scent like Annemarie. The man was talking to Mrs. Haggus and kept looking at me. Then just like that, I was in a pet carrier and my anxiety was rising. I was in a pet carrier and taken away by this mystery homeless-looking chocolate man. "Enjoy the that one, Luke " screeched Mrs.Haggus. "Luke" what an odd name I thought. I heard the bell chime and instantly I knew we were outside the pound and I knew that my Christmas miracle had just taken a twist. But, I was no completely happy and all I could think about is Annemarie's stories.

"They're going to adore you" murmured Luke.

"They're?" And, why were they going to adore me?" I thought curiously. Normally, I could make an answer for everything, even if it was a wrong one at least I had an answer, right? The scent of white chocolate grew stronger except something was different. There was another familiar scent mixed with it, a familiar scent but yet I still couldn't think of anything. I ended up taking a nap since the drive was taking so long, at one point I honestly thought I had just gotten dognapped. Luke was starting to get on my nerves and he kept singing! So much singing, okay well it wasn't that annoying it reminded me of when Annemarie did karaoke at the pound. We arrived at a small house with oh so many Christmas decorations. As we got to the door the scent of white chocolate and the unknown grew stronger, even stronger than how it was in the car. When he opened the door it was like a Christmas wonderland: bright lights, a warm fireplace, and the smell of food! Luke started walking me to the living room and right there I saw them. I saw Lorreta and Annmarie cuddling on the couch in their full glory. The mystery scent had been peppermint. I jumped onto the couch and instantly started to lick their faces.

"Dad! You adopted Hope?! This is a Christmas miracle!" screamed Annmarie.

"Yes, this is a Christmas miracle" I responded as I licked her face. My new family and I were sitting on the couch and I had finally felt the nickname "Hopeless Hope" slip away from me as I cuddle deeper into the arms of my new family.



# Momo the Monkey

Eva Pohlmann

Ah, another day with my pet monkey. I got up and brushed my teeth like a regularly planned morning, but, this would not be a regularly planned morning. I continued on my day and woke up Momo, my pet monkey. I walked into the kitchen carrying Momo, I was going to feed him his favorite breakfast, bananas. I cut up a banana and set up the sink so I could bathe him. I grabbed the pet soap that I had bought and set him in the sink with warm water running. Momo ate his banana while I gave him his first gentle rinse. Today was a big day for Momo and me because we would have my friend Wren over and Wren was going to bring her tiny pitbull puppy. The puppy's name is Fern and Fern was a puny thing still. Wren said she was also going to bring over her sister, Wilder. I always found Wilder a little strange but she was still cool. Momo had never met Wilder before so I was a little bit nervous. I finished rinsing Momo monkey and washed him with a little soap that I spread everywhere, all over his little Capuchin body. Momo likes bathing. I rinse off Momo again so there is no more soap on him. After momos bath, I dry him and put on his diaper. It was the weekend so I and Momo got to chill on the couch and watch criminal minds.

Momo is still tired and lays on the couch resting. It is about 1 Pm when I noticed that Wren was still not here, I had gotten backtracked watching criminal minds and forgot that Wren was coming. I shoot Wren a text and she says that she got caught in traffic because an unknown crazy lady had crashed and there was lots of traffic. "Hmm, weird," I thought to myself. About 15 minutes later, wren knocks on my door with her tiny puppy fern, which alerts Momo to wake up and climb off the couch to come over and investigate what is going on. We sit down and Wren tells me that she doesn't know where her sister Wilder is and doesn't know if she'll be coming. I switch the television channel to the news, and to my surprise, there is a report about Wilder. "Crazy lady from car crash breaks out of police department and goes on a rampage to try and find he sisters friends monkey."

What? Is wilder trying to find Momo? I and Wren discuss the weird situation and then a few minutes later we hear loud knocking on the door. "Where Momo monkey! Let me in!" I immediately get scared and lock the doors while Wren dials the police. I wasn't going to let Wren's crazy sister inside. Wilder threatens us and is saying she will call animal control saying that we are holding a stolen monkey if we do not let her in. The police are already on their way but I let in Wilder anyway because I do not want her to get animal services. When Wilder walks in, a team of scary men in grey-blue jumpsuits. "We were told that you are holding a monkey in here." I'm confused but immediately after this, the animal services grab Momo as he tries to run away. There's something I thought I would never see, animal control with my Momo monkey.

I freak out and try to swing at the men carrying Momo monkey away, but then the Police show up and see me swinging at animal control. "Stop that right there lady!" an officer yells at me. Wren watches as I get restrained and my Momo monkey is being taken away. The Police arrest me and I'm on my way to the police department. I wonder where Momo monkey is being taken. Somehow my phone is still in my pocket and I'm texting Wren. Wren has followed animal control to where they are located to try and find Momo monkey. I show up at the police department and Wren is there with my monkey. She is holding a lightsaber and is ready to defend Momo. I look at Wren in awe and we fight off all the cops with momo and our lightsabers. After we're done fighting off the cops, we run out of the police station and stop at Del Taco to celebrate our victory. I wake up gasping from this crazy dream to see Momo's blank sleeping expression and I'm glad that everyone is ok. I text Wren to tell her about the crazy dream I had and we both agree that was arguably the strangest dream either of us have had in a while. Good thing I don't actually have a monkey and Wren's sister isn't actually crazy.





# Lost and Then Found

Freya Jolley

2013- My mom, dad, and sister came home from a road trip but little did I know what they would come back with. I was staying with a babysitter at the time with my little sister. It was about 7 or 8 p.m. and I knew that my family would be home soon. We were waiting to watch movies in the living room which was right next to the front door. But when the doorknob turned and the door opened all I saw was my dad holding a small crate and a smile on his face. At first, I was confused and didn't know what to think. When I looked inside the little holes of the carrier I saw a small fluffy back, white, and brown dog that was black on the body and had brown and white markings on the face and belly. I was so happy...

2020-Covid started in March of 2020 and everyone was beside themselves on what to do. We were stuck in our house for a whole year straight on lockdown in fear of getting a disease that could be the end of us. For the people who had pets and lived alone, you at least had company to be with. For me, I had Jetta, my dog, and my family. The only time that I could fully forget about my problems was when I would take Jetta for a walk. It was most calming when I was listening to music or when it would be cloudy or misty outside. But as soon as I got back to my house it would be a reminder of what was happening. For most of us, it was going to social media if you got stressed or were not in the mood to do work or school which was online. When you are on a video game or something you don't have to be continually reminded of what is happening in the world but when you go on social media that's all that you see. I would do that constantly but I knew if I just went outside to walk my dog I would forget it all...

So that's what I did. Sometimes I would spend hours in the park just drawing, reading, or playing with my dog. But the best part about being at the park was it was peaceful. Sometimes not always alone too I would go with my friends or talk to people that were regulars. But it was also nice to be alone sometimes. but most of the time it was just me and Jetta. One evening while I was on my walk I took my dog off the leash.. she was good at being off the leash and she would always stick by my side. But up ahead there was a cat on the fence post, Jetta minds nothing of this until the cat jumps down from the fence and Jetta goes after it... I chased both of them into a big bush but Jetta had crawled underneath and had already run about 2 blocks. I took my eyes off her to get the leash ready but when I looked down the street she was no longer there. I began to panic, sweat and heat filled my face as I ran around the neighborhood looking for her. Hours passed and she wasn't there...

At this point, I had hoped she had been found by someone. She, of course, was wearing a collar but I thought if someone found her they would at least be able to call me. But the phone never rang. I knew that this couldn't be the end. The first day looking for her felt like a whole week. We still didn't know where she was after 5 days and I couldn't live with myself. I felt like it was all my fault. My parents tried to reassure me that it wasn't but it was. I was the one who let her off the leash. I was the one that saw the cat but kept going. Sometimes I thought I didn't even deserve her back but I knew that I missed her and she missed me....

Two weeks later: we got a phone call ever since I lost her I would never miss a call because it could be someone trying to let me know that Jetta was ok and that they had her. So I ran to the phone like I usually do. The number didn't look familiar so I had some hope. When I found out who it was I was so happy. It was the shelter saying that they found Jetta under a stopped trunk on the side of the road. She was cold, wet, and looked malnourished. As soon as I found out who it was I asked when I could get her back. I wanted her back so bad I needed her back. They said that I could come and get her within this week or else they would start looking for new owners so I came as soon as I got off the phone. When I pulled up to the shelter I ran as fast as I could to the door. When I got to the front desk I said her name and said that they would take me to the back where she was. When we finally got to her she was as excited as always and she was so happy I was there. I couldn't describe how sorry I was to her and the people that worked there. They understood that it was an accident and let me take her home. On the car ride back I was the happiest I have probably ever been in my entire life. I knew if I let anything bad happen to Jetta I couldn't live with myself. It felt so good to be home. I knew from that day on I would always watch out for Jetta and I would always keep her safe.



# A Christmas Miracle for Suzie Q

Gianna Gonzales

I'm Suzie, well Suzie Q to be exact. This is the story about my Christmas Miracle. I live in Mackinac Island, Michigan. I have been in the pound for 1 week and I am starting to feel kind of down and like I am never going to get adopted. I am a mini Dachshund mix and I want to be adopted. I went to bed and a few hours later I woke up. I heard glass break and I saw two people dressed all in black opening the cages as an alarm was going off. I hid in my bed, my heart pounding. My anxiety was rising, just then I heard someone say "Thug, you got 'em all?" It was a faint whisper but I managed to hear it. I hid behind my dog bed in the corner of my cage, and they opened my cage. I curled into the smallest ball that I could and hid in the corner behind the dog bed. One man said, "Thug, is there anything in there?!" Thug said "uhhh..." The other man yelled at the top of his lungs "YES OR NO!" My anxiety was at the max limit. I couldn't think so I covered my eyes with my ears. I heard sirens and I knew that the red and blue lights meant they were caught. An hour later the police came inside and put all the dogs back in their cages but then they saw my cage open. They looked inside and saw me in a ball, ears over eyes. They made sure I was ok and they boarded up the window the criminals broke and left. The next day someone came into the pound and looked at all the dogs but then left. A nice-looking lady came in with her husband, looked at all of us, and left. That continued for 3 days and by the end of the third day, I was the only dog that had not been adopted. 2 days before Christmas 5 more people came in and did not adopt me. They said it's because they "did not want dog hair around their mansion" and "They had found other dogs somewhere else."

Christmas morning I woke up to snow outside and new toys for me to play with then someone came in. It was the police officer from the week before. He adopted me! It was the best Christmas ever! He put me in his hands and they felt rough and dry like sandpaper. We got in the car and when we got to his house it looked kinda weird... I did not know if I could trust him and his house or not. Once we got inside it looked like a very lovely house. The man took off his beanie and his face looked so nice. The man said, "your name will be Suzie Q." I licked his face and he said "My name is Jimmy!" It was getting pretty late and he said "I'll feed you some dinner and then we should go to bed."

Once we ate dinner he showed me my bed and it was stuffed with toys, Jimmy said "Merry Christmas Suzie!" I ran to the bed and jumped into the toys and rolled around in it. The next morning we were snowed in and that just gave Jimmy and I more time to get to know each other and bond.

Jimmy said, "having you in my life is making such a difference because I finally have someone who gets me!" We played around with all my new toys, took naps, ate delicious food, watched tv, and even went on walks. Now I know what you're thinking a walk when you're snowed in?! They were just walking around the house. Once it was spring time we painted his house and renovated the backyard. Now we have a pool and tons of grass to play fetch. 2 years later we went back to the pound but this time there was a dog that had been in the pound for 3 and a half weeks. We adopted him and surprisingly he was the same breed as me! Once we got home and Jimmy took the dog out of the crate my heart jumped out of my chest because I felt so happy. Once Jimmy put the dog down I ran to him and licked his face and he licked mine back. It was my brother! My heart was soaring in the sky and I could tell his was too. Jimmy said "we're going to name you Buddy!" Jimmy, Buddy, and I were the kind of family that went on trips like camping and going to cabins! One night when we were camping we were around the fire and I thought about how I had once thought about how I doubted that Jimmy would be a nice owner and just at that moment I erased the memory from my mind.

Jimmy said "I love you guys" and Buddy and could confidently bark "we love you too!" That Christmas was the best day of my life and it always will be.





# The Time My Dog Saved Our Game

Hudson Bell

On a cold and dark morning, I wake up to the sound of li. I looked out the window to see a sad Santa Cruz on a winter morning. I was so tired my eyes hurt to open. I tried to get up but my body pushed me back down. I need to get to school. Darby's big eyes greeted me. She filled me with compassion and I was given a reason to get going. I rushed out the door as I said goodbye to Darby and poured her some food on the go. I thought about Darby on the drive to school. I was in such a rush I didn't give her any water. When I got home Darby was jumping up and down with excitement. She gets so bored when I'm not around she feels like the presence of me is what makes her happy. That night I was watching tv alone when Darby jumped on my lap, she always likes comfort. Around 10:00 I decided to head to bed. I got in bed and after a minute Darby followed me in. The next day I'm having a big basketball tournament coming up that night against a good team and needed a good rest.

When I got to school I felt sick. I couldn't be sick when my team needed me for this big game. So I told someone and I went home. I took some medicine to feel better and then I went to sleep. I woke up and it was practically almost game time. I rushed to my backpack where my uniform was and I threw it on. The bumpy road made me feel worse. I started sweating and I wasn't even in the game yet. I couldn't lose this tournament, it was our last. I was playing with my friend Jake and Logan. We were a pretty good team so far and I didn't want to mess this up for our team. I knew I shouldn't have gone but I didn't want to disappoint my team.

I arrived. The seats were filled with tons of people yelling and screaming. So much pressure. The moment was surreal. I could not mess up in front of this many people. I tried to imagine myself scoring the last point and winning but it didn't quite give me the motivation to win. I close my eyes and looked deep into my heart, I thought of the one thing that supports me the most. Darby. I opened my eyes, ran onto the court and the crowd pierced the air with screams of cheer. At that very intense moment, I completely forgot that I was sick. The coach reminded us of our plays and we were ready to play. We ran warmups but my motivation soon began to deteriorate because I was already exhausted.

The buzzer went off and it was time to jump the ball. My friend Jake was the tallest so he went up. We got the ball, Logan shot a three, and made it. I stood at the wing feeling achy in my stomach but I tried to stay strong remembering that this is our last tournament and I should try my best. We were doing ok so far but not too good. I'm not at my best right now so I'm not doing too well. Thankfully, around halftime, I had to go to the bathroom badly. I asked the coach and ran straight there. It felt like five minutes for me when someone ran in saying "It's the end of the fourth quarter we need you!" I panicked, how was it already the end of the game. Then the bad scenarios started coming in. "What if we're losing badly?" "What if I get even sicker when I go on the court?" "What if I let my team down?" I rushed onto the court, grabbed a big sip of water, and subbed in for Logan.

I glanced over at the score and my mouth dropped. While I was gone, the score was 51 to 68. The thought of Darby always being there for me popped into my head as I got the ball. I ran down the court and just threw the ball, and it went in. Now we were at 54 to 68. Jake was a good defender and stole the ball as he rushed to the hoop and made a layup making us 56 to 68. After Jake had made that layup we weren't doing too well on defense so I ran in and threw the ball from one of the other teams' hands luckily Jake caught it and we both ran down the court. We had some time before the team came so he set up at the three-pointer line and made one. Which led us to a score of 59 to 68. With one minute left we were on a streak. Logan was subbed in and soon enough 67 to 68. We just needed one more shot and that was the game. But the unfortunate part was there was barely any time left. With 30 seconds left and we didn't have the ball things weren't in my favor. The other team shot and missed. I grabbed the rebound and rushed down the court the clock was ticking down. I shot it, and with five seconds left, it missed. I was in shock but the hope of Darby empowered me and before I could get it Logan grabbed the ball from the air and dunked it. We won. The crowd jumped from their seats unbelieving what just happened. I stood there shook by what Logan had just done. He had never been able to dunk and he finally did. I felt relieved, I was glad I didn't miss this. My team needed me for this and I couldn't have done it with the one closest to my heart, Darby. Thank you, Darby, for always being there for me.



# The Brilliant Dog

Hunter Cruz

OOM! He hears a loud crash on the ground as he looks up he sees the whole trailer on fire. I run out of the burning door, not in the fastest manner but somehow I still can run to safety. Hi, this is a key. I'm a small-legged kind-hearted dog but sadly for me, my home was just destroyed because of the leaking propane Tank in the stove.

He sits and watches my house well, basically a trailer but I call it a house. He can see Sarah running down the street to get here because once she heard that there was a house fire down near here she knew it might have been mine. "Hey, what happened". My house its, its on fire. I don't know how one second I was sleeping and the other I was rushing out and it was filled with fire." come back to my house for a little bit and stay the night, ok you look like you need rest". Ok, thank you. So right there that is where I basically lost everything in an

instant but thankfully the friend Sarah was there and helped me through it all and having a pet close to you helps when you are sad I know this is fiction but maybe you are in a hard time and animals can help by reliving streets and help people with loneliness let's get back to the story. Hey Sarah I appreciate you letting me stay here but I think I'll be fine\for a couple of days on my own. I'll talk to you later ok "oh o-ok bye I guess" see you later. Later that day.

HEY, nerd get out of my town stupid what hey guys get him, ah help as I run as fast as I can I quickly jump under a rail to get to a sketchy neighborhood then I stop and call Sarah "hello" SARAH SARAH YOU HAVE TO LISTEN TO ME IM BEING CASED CALL 911 AND PIG MY LOCATION OK "Uhh ok wait were" Beeeeeeeep "uhh he hung up uhh let me go call 911 and get him out of there. Meanwhile. "HAHA caught you nerd get over here" those were the last words that I heard before everything went black. I woke up to the sound of many people talking `` hey HEY get me out of heavy-"stop screaming if you do, we might hurt you. No please don't hurt me I'm an innocent dog so PLEASE don't hurt me. I don't know if we might or we might not so if you are quiet then ill hold back. So who did you meet? I mean like the mayor a couple of weeks ago but that's about it. well, what did he tell you did he say anything about the bank vault or like how to open it or something like that? Yeah, but why do you care? well since you know you're coming with us and you are going to tell us exactly where it is and how to open it and if you don't then we will lock you up in our brick house until you tell us!

Uh no, why would I ever do something like that plus I don't even think that you have a brick house not meaning that you don't have a house I was meaning you know Like to lock people up. Ok if you don't believe me then hop in the back of our van and we will show you. Alright. 10

Minutes Later. (Back doors to the van open very loudly) Ok, we're here. Wow, I thought that you guys were lying just to get me to do it. So are you going to help us get to that bank vault ok let me have a phone so I can call the Major and confirm what the password is ok? Uh, sure here you go. (Gives Phone) Bringggggg Bringgggg Hello is this you Jakey yes it is me but be quiet I was taken but I'm going to tell you exactly where I am heading ok after I tell you you have to call the cops and stop Jason and his gang ok? Uh sure but where are you headed? Did IM head to South Oak ST. ok tell the cops that I'm there ok? ok, but will you be ok? that's up to you if you get the

cops in time I should be safe ok? OK but don't BEEEEEEEEEP Ok, Guys let's hop in the van Ill show you the way OK let's put it into the GPS Ok it's South Oak st. ok let's go. 30 Minutes Later.

Ok, wee her it just down there. I see it lets go open it ok what is the code? It's 4232. Alright, Beep Beep Beep Beep It did not work I knew he lied lets hurt him! Hey not so fast! wait what the cops how did you find us? well, your Hostage called us and told us to meet here and now we caught you. All man well we did well guys but now we have to go to jail I'll get you Jakey I'll get you. Good job Jakey we will take you home ok you saved the day You are a Hero.





# Service Animal

Isabella Hoppe

In Santa Cruz California Sam, Bingo, and Sam's mother live in a nice home by the beach. Sam, however, has a disability and isn't able to attend his local school, and has done homeschooling ever since he was a little boy. Sam does have a support dog that gets him through hard times. Sam's mom had just gotten an email from an organization she was a part of. The email announced that schools in the county were allowing service animals to come to school with the student. Sam is ecstatic that his dream finally came true about going to school with Bingo.

His mom got this email on Wednesday and Sam would attend school the following Monday. The days that Sam had to wait to attend school were so dreadful and he just couldn't wait, Sam could tell Bingo was excited too. Sunday night was finally here and Sam got all of his supplies to go to school in the morning, he got Bingo all ready as well. That night he could barely keep himself from bouncing off the walls, Sam was so excited. But after a while, he and Bingo finally fell asleep.

It was finally morning, Sam jumped out of bed and Bingo followed after. It was still dark and quiet outside but his mom was already up making a delicious breakfast for his big day. Sam rushed to get ready but he started to feel his stomach flutter and got a weird feeling inside of him, this happened a lot and he just paused for a minute with Bingo and took a few breaths with his hand on Bingo's head. He came out to eat breakfast and it was all set on the table. There were pancakes, bacon, sausage, and delicious shiny syrup on the table waiting for him. He thanked his mom and began to eat. Bingo sat on the floor next to Sam eating out of his fancy bowl with a little extra food for the special occasion. After breakfast, it was time to get in the car and drive to school so he grabbed his backpack and his mom put the leash on Bingo and they headed out the door.

Soon they arrived at school, but suddenly Sam got that same anxious feeling "I don't know if I can do this mom."

He exclaimed, "Sure you can sweetheart, you will have Bingo right beside you the whole time."

His mother exclaimed. Sam leaned his hand out and gave Bingo a few strokes before they headed out the door. His mother hugged him and then he slowly walked over to the school, his stomach full of butterflies but of course some excitement as well.

There were so many kids he couldn't even count them all, he held on to Bingo's leash tightly walking to his first class. He could feel people's eyes staring at him but he tried to ignore them. Bingo walked close keeping Sam comforted and safe. He walked through the door to the classroom and sat down. He heard a few snickers from the back of the room. He looked back and saw a group of kids looking at him, Bingo growling at them. "All right class, let's get started on this lesson."

It startled Sam but Bingo was there and he knew it would be ok. The class was math and he had done all of the work the students had done at homeschool so he wasn't far behind. After that class was English and when he arrived there weren't any boys snickering in the back.

A kind girl introduced herself "Hi!" She said in an excited voice.

"hello" Sam said shyly.

"My name is Chloe, what about you?"

"I'm Sam and this is my dog Bingo."

"Aww he's so cute, and it is very nice to meet you," she said.

The class went by fast and by the end, Sam was very happy to have met a new friend. It was now lunchtime and Sam and Bingo went and found a table to eat his lunch, it was deafening in the cafeteria and Sam began to feel nervous but Bingo helped him. Suddenly the group of boys at the back of the classroom started heading toward Sam and Bingo and they were all snickering and whispering.



They finally reach Sam and Bingo's table, "Well look who it is, the boy who needs to bring his little doggy to school." a boy says, Sam looks down and says nothing "Hah, it doesn't look like he can talk on his own, maybe his dog can answer for him." Sam looks up and almost speaks, but then Bingo growls and suddenly lunges at the group of boys.

They drop their lunches and scream but Bingo does no harm, Bingo would never hurt someone. The cafeteria bursts into laughter and the boys run out in embarrassment.

The lunch monitor storms up to Sam and Bingo, "How could you cause such a racket?"

Sam's smile turned quickly into a frown, "Sorry sir, it's just..",

"I don't care, report to the principal's office!" the monitor yelled.

They walked shamefully to the principal's office. When Sam and Bingo arrived, the group of boys was there too. They looked disappointed, Sam took a seat.

"I heard about the issues," Said Mr. Brooks "and that these boys were bullying, I explained to them why you need Bingo at school and they feel sorry".

"We are sorry, we had no idea what your conditions were," said one boy.

Sam was mad but said "It's ok."

"I will have to suspend you and Bingo if he acts up, you may return to class."

There were two more classes left and Sam felt better with the group of boys. When he got home Sam told his mom about his eventful day. He was excited to attend his second day of school. His mother was also very proud of her boy getting through the day, and so was Bingo.





# Whales

Jarah Holmes

When I was younger, about 6 or 7, me and my mom were walking along the coast when we started hearing noises coming from the water. The water seems to be red and moving? Then we saw the first whale breach, a humpback whale that weighed nearly 20 tons and was able to throw itself through the water and into the air. All to catch these small little creatures called krill. The whole reason that the water was red for 2 miles is that it was a group of krill. And the whales were following.

The water started jumping out of the water as the krill tried desperately to escape. But they were helpless in the face of those massive animals. When I think back to what's the craziest thing about this story is that all of this was happening only 400-500 feet off-shore. So people could and were going in to have a closer look.

I and my mom only went down onto a beach to watch, while we saw surfs stop what they were surfing and they start to paddle toward the whales. And all this time I have been saying whales but only ever mention one whale. Well, now there were 15-20 whales all singing to one another and breaching out of that water. And there's no way to describe how it feels to be in the presence of huge creatures.

You feel out of place seeing them cause they are so different from us humans, yet so similar. Whales are some of the most highly intelligent creatures on this planet. They can form bonds with one another and develop a language and names. It's true whales use a specific set of clicks to identify an individual whale, such as a name, whales also use that same click to introduce themselves to other whales. They also developed a highly advanced language like whales with the same clicks for different situations, like for example, if a mother whale loses her calf the mother will call out to the rest of the pod and it will use the same click that the mother uses when she hurts.

But one thing that I think is the most impressive is the sense of family you have in a pod of whales. They are probably the most loving animals you will ever find. They play with each other, talk to each other, fight with each other, and cry with each other. They truly are unique animals. And all of these things were swirling in my mind when I saw them. But it was almost as if those thoughts slowly became quieter and quieter as all I felt was awe. Like I wasn't there I was just watching and it's a wonderful feeling like I felt truly in awe of these massive creatures.

Then one of the whales swam up to only about 70-100 away from me and just looked at me. The whale just stared and I stared back. I never thought that something like that would ever happen to me but life works in mysterious ways. The whale started at me for about 15-20 seconds, but it felt like a lifetime. And then the whale just swam back to the pod. I didn't know why it came over and I still don't to this day but I don't think I will ever forget that moment.

Those 10 minutes of seeing those whales were an experience I thought I would never have. Seeing those animals that don't seem that they could exist is crazy. They feel almost like aliens or something because they are massive creatures and your Brain doesn't like to fully register how big they are. It's crazy to think that because if you think about it those animals are just otherworldly, with their singing and their size they are truly magnificent creatures.

I still remember not being able to move or think like it was yesterday. I have never really thought about how the whales leave. I'm pretty sure they left no longer than 2 minutes after the whale looked at me. As I was walking up that beach feeling kind of in shock I don't think I was listening to anything or anyone. I was just there walking up those steps at the beach thinking that was an odd day. It was such an odd experience to think back on because there are so many things I still don't know about that experience. Like sometimes I think about why just that one area, why that one whale, and why me? Why was I the one the whale looked at? I don't know if it's just some of the things I think about sometimes. But I do know that I won't forget that day for the rest of my life.



# The Dog That Races

John Paul Gonzalez

There is a story of a dog that raced named Max and this is the story of how his 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix went down in history. In the Pitlane on December 10, Max is getting ready for F1 practice of 2021 for Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and the time is 1:30 PM local time. Max steps in his car and takes off for the first round of practice and it was challenging and Max trying hard and he got the fastest lap. Then the next day on December 11 for qualifying during Q1 Hamilton had got the fastest lap in his Mercedes formula one car. Q2 came around with Max claiming fastest lap on Q2 and Q3 giving him the first slot in the f1 grid start for the next day. Then on the next day December 12 the race is about to start and they got on the track and they are getting ready for the race to start. This race started at 17:00 local time or 5PM. The race lights go out and the race starts and Lewis Hamilton takes P1 or first position in the race as the engine rumbles he speeds through and cuts through Max Verstappen on turn 1. Max tried to overtake Hamilton forcing Hamilton off the track and Hamilton had rejoin on the track slightly ahead of Max Verstappen.

Max races and races going through turn 1 and 2 speeding at an almost unmatched pace. And these dogs are good at doing what they do because braking isn't easy they have to break with a ton of force of course though these racing dogs do more than bark they can race better than any living thing. These dogs are precise with their paw on the gas pedal because if you push the pedal a little too hard then the car can spin. But these dogs have been driving these cars for so long they have been driving for a while but it's still no easy task especially having to endure the heat of the car since it often reaches 122 degrees Fahrenheit now that is a lot. Also there are many points of the track that can be dangerous with the cars constantly exceeding 150 MPH and constantly being put under pressure by all the other drivers.

Another thing is that they are constantly enduring up to 6 g's or six times their body weight imagine you try going as fast as you can through each turn you are trying to drive the car one way but your body shifts to another I'm sure these dogs don't get enough credit I mean how much can a dog really do meanwhile Max was going really fast so was everyone else trying to be fast but Max was too good his speed could only be matched by a few at the race. And even then they probably couldn't hold onto that speed that Max could. But Max was determined to win but so was Lewis. Both of them could have been victorious at that track in matter of fact both of the racing dogs have the same racing line. A racing line is the fastest way around a track; the racing line that Max and Lewis take is also used by Sebastian Vettel; the racing line they use is called the ideal racing line. Something probably only these dogs can perfect especially considering the fact that they seem that they were built for this.

All of these dogs have been in this racing sport for many years but over time has shown that Red Bull is a great team guiding the young Max Verstappen through the way of racing for starting as a young dog and perfecting the way that the dog races with him the team would have had to find someone else to choose to have race. But it wouldn't be so easy after all a driver like this probably only comes every decade but there was a driver before which was the building stone of Red Bull's fame a driver by the name of Sebastian Vettel. This dog still races but is a bit older than Max Verstappen and some of the other drivers even though. This day of the Abu Dhabi Grand Prix Red Bull had no idea what was going to happen. Nicholas Latifi tries beating Mick Schumacher but crashes then a safety car comes out for two laps and Max decides to pit and change his tyres to the soft tyre compound which is a lot faster than the tyres Lewis was on.

Then the safety car went away causing Max to be faster than Lewis which resulted in Max going for the overtake for P1 on lap 58 turn 5 then coming in Max was the Red Bull 2021 Formula one FIA driver world champion, and this will forever go down in history as one of the best F1 races ever. And Max will forever be remembered as one of the youngest F1 drivers champion.





# The Life of Charlie

Karolina Espinosa

One day there was an 8-year-old girl named Allison but everyone calls her Allie, she had just got a dog named Charlie and she is a golden retriever who is about 2 months old. Allie lives with her mom, dad, older brother, and now dog! They live in a 2 story house in Santa Barbara, California right by the beach. The 2 story house is perfect because there is a lot of room and a decent size backyard. Her family got her while she was so little because golden retrievers usually last for about 10-12 years, so they planned on keeping him for a long time.

The next day when Allie goes to school she tells all of her friends about her new golden retriever named Charlie and that she is only 2 months old. All of her friends tell Allie that they all want to see the puppy but they would have to figure out when they would meet up to see her. But at the end of school, Allie's mom goes to pick her up and she surprises her with Charlie who was standing outside the school on a pink leash that stands out on her light skin.

Once Allie and her friends see the puppy they all rush out to pet and say hello to Charlie. A few years have passed now and Allie is now in her first year of middle school one day after school, Allie took Charlie to the park. Once they arrive at the park Allie tries to show new tricks to Charlie because later on, she wants to enter a dog competition. At first, they start by trying to do some frisbee tricks and start to get good at them. Almost every single day after Allie gets off of school they go to the park to keep practicing and spend more time together each day. Since they are spending so much of their time together they start to get a stronger bond.

It has been a few months now since they have been practicing together and now they have gotten really good. Now a few weeks go by and Allie's mom enters both of them into a dog competition because Allie just keeps asking and asking her mom to enter them but she kept on saying no. So as a surprise she did enter them and the event was in 2 weeks so they had to keep on practicing. In those 2 weeks they now have new tricks and freshened up on their old ones too so now they are very prepared to be entered in the competition.

The 2 weeks are up and it's the day of the competition and everyone is very nervous because Allie has spent a lot of her time trying to do a good job and train Charlie properly so she listens to her commands. At the dog competition, you have to step away from the dog and let him stay, walk away and call its name to run to you, and let the judges pet your dog. The only part Allie is nervous about is letting someone else pet Charlie because no one pets him besides there people he already knows and is comfortable being around. So once it is time for the judging Charlie does well even with the judge petting her but, the only part she struggled with was staying still and not following Allie. So even though they both did a good job with all of the other things they placed 6th out of 10 which is not that bad. Allie was expecting them to do a bit better but she knows what's important is that she and Charlie tried hard and gave it they are all.

What was most important is that they did it together and they will both have that memory of the two of them forever. 4 and a half years later, Allie is now a sophomore in high school and after school, she takes him on a walk to the park some people are trying to cut over a tree so the branches are falling and all of a sudden one of the heavier branches fell on Charlie's back leg and she started to cry of pain. So Allie called her parents to come to pick her and Charlie up to take her to the vet.

They said she was fine and just hurt her bone so they brought her back home but everyone was so worried that it was something more serious. 2 years later she passed away, right before Allie was going to move away and pack her things for college. Now that she is older she cherishes all of the memories they made and the time they spent together. She remembers the dog's competition, when she first got him, showing her to her friends, and just being so excited to be around her. Even though it was really sad and hard to recover from these were the best years of her whole life and she can't wait to see what is next to come up in the years ahead.



# There's a Story Everywhere

Katelyn Winslow

"It was a cold morning when you get woken up by the cars rushing by your house. You look outside and you see the first light come out from above the horizon. Your mother comes by and nudges you on the shoulder to get up. You stretch your front legs out followed by your back legs. You and your nine other siblings along with your mother walk outside onto the road all the sudden humans are screaming things like "Oh my gosh there's kittens in the road!" and "Oh my gosh they're so cute!" and "Oh no they're on a freeway, they're going to get hurt. It feels like not a single moment until they start getting out of their huge cars and they start running towards us. They get so much bigger when they run towards us, that you and your siblings run in opposite directions, everyone except you are running into the middle of the road.

You are now watching them as heartless humans pick them up one by one and throw them in their Cars. One of them ran in the wrong direction, and a car came flying by. Your sibling, a tabby cat with a black spot on its chest and nose, now can't move its back legs and is flailing, your mother rushes over to them but it was too late, your sibling is now lifeless. You run far into the tall grass next to the freeway, you don't come back.

It is weeks later and you haven't seen another human. You are now living off of ants, ladybugs and other insects every day when you woke up it was freezing out. It was like ice was creeping down your ears. You lapped the water next to the pile of weeds you've found, of which is now your bed. Although it isn't comfy, it works. As you were hunting for ladybugs one day you heard a high pitched noise, when you realized that it was a mouse, you try your best to stay low to the ground, and slowly creep closer, like your mom told you. Then, you saw it, its foot was bent like a pretzel you could barely tell if it was a mouse. You ran as fast as you could towards the mouse. When it started to turn, you leaped into the air, then fell to the ground, but kept running towards it. Finally, you grabbed its tail with the tip of your paw, the troubled mouse tried to run away, but you persisted. You twisted the mouse around, like you saw your mother doing, hunting that frog. You bit its neck, consequently, it squealed the loudest squeal you've ever heard. Your right ear then hurts really badly, but still, persisted. Finally, as the mouse was biting your tail, it released its jaws, you had finally caught your first mouse. Successfully.

You were dragging it back to the Dead grass, your home. Until you heard a meow. It was the same meow that your mother had done when the same frog hit her on the head with its back legs. When she fell to the ground, you ran over to her. When she finally got up only a few moments later, she couldn't walk in a straight line, she attempted to walk over to your siblings, she stumbled right, she stumbled left. Eventually she learned how to walk again, this time in a straight line. But once in a while, she walked in the completely wrong direction. You assured yourself that that's what happened on that morning.

Once you are snapped back to reality you meow, then it meows back. As the voice gets louder, you realize it could be an enemy, as you proceed you stay cautious, but even more curiosity builds up inside. Repeatedly, you meow and it meows back. You hear a leaf crunch behind you, you turn to see a kitten, the kitten is the same size as you, but all black instead of the cream color that you are. As it pounces on you it spins around and bites your tail, and your leg, that's when you realize that it wasn't fighting you, it was playing with you. After you get tired, you take a better look at them, you realize that it was your sibling. While you were running away that morning, you remember seeing him getting surrounded by many more people than you, somehow he escaped. Once you get a closer look at him, you realize that he was all black with really dark gray stripes on its side, that's also when you spot that he had a collar on, it was the same color as him, along with a tag that reads, Loki.

All of a sudden humans are surrounding us and had you in a net, you hissed, growled, and meowed to have them put you back down. A human with short, fluffy, curly, red hair along with a long black coat on, that looks like it is protecting her from the freezing air. Pinned on it, was a placard that said Annette. She then says in a hushed voice, "It looks like the one." She also says, "That should be the last of them." you thought you were doomed." Spoke Annette.

Annette was rubbing my belly on her soft, fluffy, bright red couch, with a notebook and pencil in her other hand. "Was that your story? ", "Was that your story Pietro?" As she was uncovering the scar on my right ear, previously covered by a Bandage. "Good thing you got that your surgery you probably couldn't hear at all out of that ear, couldn't you?" I knew she wasn't expecting an answer from me. Seconds later I was fast asleep with Loki cuddling next to me.





# Abe's Adventure

Laurent Roland

Abe dashed through the tall grass, frightening the crows away from their precarious perch. He was in hot pursuit of a ground squirrel whom he caught in the act of stealing berries, and his full intent was to punish his master's perpetrator. He leaped across a fallen tree, scattering the fallen leaves, then continued the hunt. Abe caught a glimpse of the thief, berries in their mouth, sprinting to the security of a pine. Abe ran ever faster. The wolfhound neared the squirrel, the squirrel neared the tree. Suddenly, quick as lightning, Abe was upon it, swiping with his ferocious paws. But the squirrel dodged the strikes and sped up the tree; ascending beyond retribution's reach.

Abe was bested, but it was an enjoyable chase nevertheless. He strolled home, exhausted and exhilarated, panting in the midday sun. His tail wagged steadily. A revitalizing wind ruffled his fur, giving him the sensation of being petted. He loved being petted. He was loved when he was being petted. His longing to be petted again rose to the center of his mind, and the love of his master and mistress drove him back to them. After a short walk, he got a view of the house. He bounded homeward with renewed vigor.

Abe's arrival was met with jubilation. His master and his mistress raced to meet him, as Abe would meet them himself. Jeremiah (his master) petted him and stroked his back, and Hannah (his mistress) presented him with a bowl of water. He suddenly became aware of his thirst and lapped up the water speedily. The dryness of his throat was relieved. "Now where have you been this whole time, be?" Jeremiah teased. The dog's tail whipped through the air, lightly slapping his master's leg. "Did you enjoy your little chase out there, Abraham?" Hannah always thought Abraham was a more elegant name than Abe and called him thusly. From out of her quarters stepped Marie, Jeremiah's daughter, and with the sight of Marie, Abe dashed to her and attempted to topple her over, licking her and whipping his tail. With Marie occupied, Jeremiah and Hannah snuck off to another room.

Jeremiah and his wife conversed in whispers, so if heard they would sound silent as the wind. "I don't know if we can let Abraham or Marie outside by themselves anymore", Hannah uttered solemnly. "The rumors are, rogues, criminals, thieves, dangerous folk of that sort were just spotted a few towns away. I've heard even Conner Bennet, The Badger, was seen just past Silverton. Without your protection, they may no longer be safe." Jeremiah seemed worried, but altogether disbelieving of the threat. He responded: "What would some villain want with a wolfhound and a 10-year-old girl? I think we should most certainly be concerned, but the danger is not present." Hannah conceded, her fear assuaged. The girl and dog outside heard not the murmurings of their superiors, and barely noticed the absence of Jeremiah and Hannah from the room.

Abe was happy having shown his affection to Marie, so he trotted off to a corner of the room and slept. In his sleep, Abe dreamt of running through a field, much as he had done with the squirrel. After awakening, he once again went out of the house, but this time his intent was merely to sunbathe on the porch. Abruptly, he both heard it and smelt it. A rattlesnake was near, a threat to both his master and himself. He searched around the brush, and nearly concluded when the rattlesnake hissed; prompting him to rear around and shift into a defensive stance. Abe soon lost sight of the serpent amongst the tall grass, but caught his scent eastwards (left facing the door). He sprinted to catch the rattlesnake, and lost it, but kept sniffing until he came to a forest.

The forest was partially lighted, partially obscured from the sun by trees. He ventured a few dozen yards into the forest. But he caught the scent of a grizzly bear and spied a river and a bee nest, so he dashed out of the forest. Since Abe did not possess imagination, like most dogs, he had no picture of home in his mind and left the forest without a destination. Upon walking some more, he came across the nearest town to the farm of his family, Silverton. It was quaint and distinctly western, with what looked like a hundred homes in sight. He explored the outskirts of the city. From a distance, Abe heard indeterminate yelling. Then, with no warning, a crack and a boom were audible to Abe's keen ears. But he continued his investigation of the city and came across a tiny metal cylinder with a point at the end. He was intrigued by it, and lapped it into his mouth to be carried, unaware of the danger he had just evaded.

Abe meandered to the house, metal object in his mouth, and finally arrived home. He barked at the door, and Jeremiah opened it, anxious but now relieved. "Abe! You can't just run away by yourself without us knowing, you've been gone for more than an hour!" Abe then presented his master with the object in his mouth. Jeremiah stared in disbelief at the bullet. "How in heaven's name did you get this? Where in heaven's name did you get this?" I'm glad you're not harmed, but we may be in more danger than I thought originally". "What, daddy?", inquired Marie, who had just entered the room. "It's nothing", Jeremiah dismissed. "I just may need to discuss something with Mother".

Abe left the house for the farm so that he may pace and rest in nature, and so he could guard against the crows. But from the opposite side of the house, Conner Bennett approached, silent as a panther. Conner Bennet was known also as The Badger, for his ferocity and skills as a gun duelist. He was, in fact, the rogue whose warning shot was found by Abraham. Abe had nearly been in the Badger's presence, as he committed a forced robbery. But now, Abe smelt an unfamiliar scent. He thought he might have encountered the smell before, but

he was unsure. Abe traced the scent, slowly, to its source, the house. He neared the house and heard shouting from the inside. "I won't give up my family's farm! Or my house, either. My family has owned them since my grandfather in the War of 1812, and I'm not ready to give them up now!" Then, an unfamiliar voice, Conner Bennet, spoke. "If you give me your land and your house, you keep your life. If you refuse, I take all three. You would be a fool to not submit." He spoke roughly but in a reasonable manner. He was quite convincing, as this time Jeremiah paused before denying him again. Abe heard not what was said next, as he snuck into the house.

Abe came through the back door, swiftly and silently. He ascended the stairwell, which was out of sight of both Conner Bennet and Jeremiah, as well as Hannah and Marie. He ascended onto the balcony overlooking the bottom floors. A heated conversation could still be heard. Then, Abe thought of something. He barked and stomped about, making a loud ruckus. In the other room, Conner Bennet wondered what all the noise was. He led Jeremiah at gunpoint to the source of the noise, the balcony. Abe had already hidden within a nearby closet. "What was that?", wondered Conner. He turned back to Jeremiah. "Well, never mind! Unless you give me the land and the house, I shall execute you!" Jeremiah responded, "No is my final answer!" "Very well then. One..." Abe slipped out of the closet. "Two..." Abe prepared to strike. "Three!" But before he could shoot, Abe dashed up and struck The Badger, knocking him down to the table below and causing him to faint.

"Abe! You did it!" Jeremiah was ecstatic. They called the police, and Conner was sent to the county jail to await trial, and the family land was safe. Abe, unknowingly, had saved his master's life, strengthening and proving the bond between animal and human.





# The Adventures of Cosmo and Steph

Marciano Moses

This story begins in a time of sadness and despair in a time of 4021 and a place called Death Valley. It was a wasteland and there is nothing but sand, garbage, and villains. There was a hero that protected the whole universe. This hero's name was Neo, but he hasn't been seen in years. Everybody has tried to locate him. They think his whereabouts are in Death Valley.

One day a young pug named Steph tripped over something that looked like Neo's helmet, but he wasn't sure? In wonder, he brought it to Neo's brother Cosmo. Steph went to Cosmo's home and knocked on the door, no answer, Steph waited hours for someone to answer. Then suddenly Steph heard a boom and screamed, the door slammed open, and a figure that looked like Cosmo was in the doorway. Steph was in shock at what he was seeing and he was speechless to see Cosmo. Steph rubbed his eyes thinking this was a dream. Steph then realized Cosmo looked off, or he didn't look himself. Steph asked Cosmo if this was his brother's helmet and He then replied slowly and said no. Steph in confusion said what, then cosmo replied: That was mine... Steph in shock said what do you mean it's yours? Cosmo looked at the little pug holding the helmet and said you think my brother did all that on his own, Steph replied nervously..... Sorta.

Cosmo laughed and said he wasn't the only one with powers, while Neo had super strength, he got to be a genius. He not only designed all the weapons and created and flew the fighter jets. He was the mastermind behind it all. Steph in shock asked why didn't you ever tell anyone you were the one doing most of the work, Cosmo replied: that's just not the person I am. He never wanted the spotlights and fancy cars; he just wanted to help the world all he could. Steph then said anyways could you maybe sorta help me find your brother so we can save the world. Cosmo was silent, he said my brother hasn't been seen in years, Steph then said "it doesn't matter we are going to find your brother" Cosmo looked at the energetic pug and said let's find my brother! So they set off on a journey to find Neo. They searched for weeks and weeks and nothing was to be found. While their journey to find Neo was happening villains were becoming stronger and stronger and there was no hero to stop them. They were worried all hope was lost. Then one day Cosmo heard his brother's voice but he wasn't sure, curious he ran to it and he found a cracked screen saying where his brother was taken. His brother still was in death valley, but he was in a tunnel around....

It stopped and the screen just shut off. Steph said: what, just happened. Cosmo distraught said we have to keep looking. So they did and 3 days later, they heard word that professor shadow was keeping neo captive under-mount rocky. Steph and Cosmo traveled there. Cosmo had been carrying this mysterious backpack for a while and Steph asked what is in it. Cosmo replied: the perfect time to ask, it's your very own jetpack and helmet, Steph in joy leaped into the air and said: thank you, thank you, thank you! Steph then said: and what did you bring for yourself. Cosmo replied: my original robotic arm. Steph then said but you never fought, Cosmo replied no I never did fight but I was always prepared.



Then Cosmo told Steph before anything happens, you will always be my partner. Then Cosmo and his new partner Steph ran into the rust yard looking for Neo. they then saw professor shadow and his henchmen, at first they were eager to save Neo ..... BUT THEN the henchmen of shadow pop out and start attacking, but then Steph flew into the fast-closing door to make it into the lair of professor shadow, once Steph makes it.... It's silent then a sudden slow clap happens..... Steph, nervous, but courageous, yells who's there, and none other than professor Shadow came from the shadows and said: cute very cute thinking this would beat me...with only one dog. Steph then said I'm not alone, Shadow and Cosmo burst into the room and shadow then called all henchmen into the room.

The Crew, already exhausted, are nervous about the biggest fight of their lives. Cosmo and Steph then looked at each other and said: for Neo, then they jumped into action, Cosmo used the robotic arm and flung away many henchmen then Steph came in and grabbed on to the robotic arm and Cosmo threw him into professor shadow... then professor shadow fell to the ground and Steph and Cosmo looked at professor shadow and said open the door, Professor shadow said fine, and there was nothing there.

Cosmo then walked over to professor shadow and pinned him against the wall, in anger Cosmo yelled: WHERE'S MY BROTHER. Shadow had an evil grin on his face and said: Let's just say he's not here in death valley anymore. Cosmo said: what do you mean not in Death Valley anymore. Shadow said he's been transported somewhere, Cosmo replied: that that was not what I asked. Shadow said fine, fine, you could do whatever you want you will never get the answer out of me. Steph said: Cosmo let's go, there's no point in wasting energy on him, we have to go find Neo. Cosmo eyesCosmo's eyes watering said: this won't be the last of our shadow, we will find my brother and we will bring all evil to an end. Cosmo and Steph then set off on a journey to find Neo and bring all evil to an end.





# Crazy Day at the Park

Matteo Caltabiano

One day, at Garfield Park at 12:06 pm, was a beautiful day. My dogs Kai and Lola were running on the grass near one end of the park, and I was sitting on a bench near the water fountain when I heard yelling and a kid with 4 dogs came up to me. "Hey, My name is Marcus, Marcus Galvan, and I have 4 dogs, Pepino, Moana, Spike, and Ariel." I was about to tell him my name but I heard, "Shut up." Marcus said. Then Marcus ran away with his dogs.

I felt disrespected by Marcus but tried to not care and started throwing a ball for my dogs to chase. I saw Marcus from afar and I wanted to tell him that he was mean but my friend, George came up to me and said " Hey, Matteo, do you know Marcus." I said, "Ya, I just met him a couple of minutes ago, and he was kinda mean." George said, "Ya he can come on a little strong but once you get to know him he is fine." Then he said, " Matteo, I got to go see you later." After George left I went up to Marcus and said " Do you want to hang out sometime and play baseball. Marcus responded, "No I don't want to!" Marcus stormed off behind the bathroom building and I didn't see him for the rest of the day.

The next day, around one o'clock, I went back to the park with Kai and Lola. Then I see George and Marcus hanging out playing basketball. I felt sad because he didn't want to hang out with me. I go over and say hi. Then I walk my dogs around the park, still upset about not getting invited to hang out with them. Then I walk my dogs back to my house and start to run to the basketball courts. I said "Could I play with you guys and they said sure. So we play 21 which is a basketball game you can play with three people. After the game Marcus said " Sorry I have been mean to you, when I meet new people I can get a little mean sometimes. Hope to see you around school next year." After I felt a little better, Marcus said sorry.

The Next Day, I saw Marcus at the park with his four dogs, and our dogs played with each other while we played basketball and watched them. Marcus can be cool once you get to know him. Then I see George and Marcus talking and looking at me. I didn't see Marcus for a week until I saw him at the park. I went over and said, "What's up." He said, "I know what you said." Then I answered, "About what, I didn't say anything." "George told me that you said I was a jerk and a dummy." Said Marcus. I said, " I told him that you were being mean but not that, George just lied. "Ok, I believe you. I see George from afar and talk to him. "Hey, why are you spreading lies about me?" George said, "Who cares, I want to be Marcus' best friend but you were hanging out with him so I had to say it."

Marcus walks behind and says " I wanted to be both of your friends, not just one of yours." So we all made up and went to go play at the hoops. I was mad at George that he did that to me but I forgive him because we have been friends since I was five years old. George was welcoming to me, and Marcus but if I was him I would have probably stopped and thought would Matteo like this. Marcus was getting guarded by me and George when I stole the ball and made a three. Now I was only down by two points. I had to shoot two free throws to win the game. That's what you do when you get a basket you get two free throws. If you miss one it lives and anyone can get the rebound. I got the ball shot and missed but was able to get the ball right back.

I got the ball and went through the legs and made a layup and scored. Marcus and George yelled, " We lost, but good game." Then I said, " Ya, maybe we can play at school tomorrow." Then they said, "Ohh Ya it is the first day of school." I was sad that summer was going to be over but it was fun to meet Marcus. The one exciting part is we get to hang out at school but going back to school sucks. I said, " This Summer was fun right?" They both nodded and look sad that Summer was coming to an end. Then I said, " We will still hang out a lot at school." Then they both got excited and we talked about how we could play at the park after school. Then I said, " I have to go, see you tomorrow."



# Nice

## Nathaniel Terrazas

### Louie's Part:

In 1846 Nice, France there was a dog named Louie and he was a French bulldog. He loved where he lived; it was warm, peaceful, cozy, and rustic. His two owners Fluere and Antwon were married and they adorned Louie. And it was July, 26, 3 pm and it was going to be a day that would not be forgotten. "Louie come here my sweet boy" Fluere called "it is time for Lunch". I was woken up by my owners I thought, but what time is and what is the date? I strolled down the hall of our 2 story apartment. It was so nice and cozy that there was no way I could leave. I was a French bulldog 3 years old but since I just woke up I look 10. I came into the kitchen so hungry when I saw my food I ate it like a hyena. Then there was a big BAM. There was a bigger Bam. I heard people screaming running and not knowing what to do. "Get out of here this is now our land" someone yelled. I was so scared then I ran so fast I was like the wind. I ran onto a big boat and the boat left like that. It was fast. I could not say goodbye and I was lost. In about a week I came upon a shore I did not know. It was so foggy and stuffy, nothing like France. I immediately started crying because I could not feel the compassion from Fluere or Antwon. And so I went into a place I did not know and started fresh. There were big stone buildings for us and wood for the workers. I was in a stone building. I would calm the kids if they were sad and all the kids loved me. And I thought there might be more love, empathy, or compassion than I thought.

### Fluere's Part:

"Ugh," I said "Why are we on this stupid boat" I screamed the captain stopped the boat and said, "off my boat, we are here". I walked on the shore and it was a ghost town but with no ghosts. Weeks went by and no sign of returning came into view. Then a whole year went by and we could not see the clouds and it was broken. But then there was a sign. People were coming on boats and people were screaming with compassion. "I'll get to see my husband," a woman cried. But then these boats were just fishing boats coming back into shore. People were so sad that they had to stay there for so long and nobody knew when they were going to go home. Everyone felt like they were going to rot like an apple. "Ugh," I said, "we need to get out of this stupid place". But soon people realized that this place was America. This was supposed to be a beautiful place but it was more like a junkyard. America was not a peaceful place, it was not cozy or anything, it was so disgusting. I felt like I needed a break or something. But then there was a sign.

### The Last Part:

It was a cold evening. I thought my fur was not good enough for the weather. I was sad. Then I heard something. "All aboard" a man yelled. "Get in the boat". Then I saw people getting in a boat and I ran in the boat not knowing where I was going to go but someplace new. I realized we were heading toward a beach. I thought, is this the beach that I have wanted to see forever but have not gotten to see? It was that very beach, the beach of Nice But it was more beautiful than before. With all the warm sand on the beach, people were yelling with joy. When the captain said "All ashore" we were all so happy that we could feel the warm sand at our feet (or paws). But then 2 hours later people were playing the trumpets and singing a beautiful song of wonder and joy. Then later in the night, there were fireworks and these fireworks were full of the compassion from France that was not given in America. Then in the morning of a new time, I was waking up from my dog bed to realize no one was there and remembered that I was still lost but then there were boats pulling in from the harbor and I saw Fluere with her furry coat running to the apartment and went outside and saw her standing right there and I gave her the biggest hug of my life and everything was full with empathy, kindness and compassion. But in the end, I got what I wanted.....love.





# Eat, Sleep, Walk

Preston Kwan

I never considered myself a dog person. In fact, I was always a bit scared of dogs. The ones I saw in the park often acted unpredictably and the ones inside their homes would bark loudly if I passed by. We didn't have any pets at home, and I was fine with that.

Now, imagine my dismay when in March of 2020, my mom informed me that she was interested in adopting a dog. She'd come across a 5 year old French Bulldog on an adoption website that was being fostered by a dog rescue organization, and wanted me to go with her and my dad to visit the dog at the foster mom's workplace. I went along, but with a small sense of dread.

The foster mom led us to the back of the shop to show us what she looked like, and she came bounding out to meet us. She looked up at us with her ears perked up, and I noticed that she was small, and had a mottled black and white pattern across her body, like a dairy cow. The foster mom told us about her, and gave us some cat treats to feed her, since that turned out to be her favorite kind of treat. She happily ate the kibble and looked around for more. She spent the rest of the time in the shop scanning the ground for presumably more food, ironically, again, like a dairy cow.

She stayed quiet pretty much the entire time, and after she greeted us and sniffed at our clothes, she lay down to rest from the activities. I was curious about her, but only pet her gingerly. My mom had to fill out an adoption application for her, and soon she moved into our house.

To sum up how I felt, I was generally annoyed with the fact this was actually happening. I broadcasted my annoyance and tried to rewind the decision.

"Do we have to keep her?" I whined.

"Can we return her?" I pleaded.

"No," my mom replied.

Turns out, you can't just return a dog like clothes that didn't fit. I swallowed my protests and silently lost that argument. My mom asked me to help name her. We called her Panda, because of her coloring and her shape.

Initially, she liked to chew a lot of stuff, so we had to confine her to the family room and kitchen with a low fence meant for guinea pigs. She was not comfortable with jumping, so she was easy to contain. I tried to stay mostly on the other side of the house, and was sort of wary of her. Then, while I was scrolling through some photos on my mom's phone, I saw a very cute photo of her.

Panda was carrying a leaf in her mouth while strolling in the backyard. A very full large leaf too, and she was carrying it by the stem, bringing it towards the camera. It was as if she just found something she was very proud of and wanted to take it towards the nearest person to show off her treasure. She looked pleased and happy. I felt a pang of regret, as if I missed out on a big moment. It was at this time I decided to "visit" Panda a little more often. I started petting her regularly and talking to her. Turns out she is a great listener.



Panda likes to watch us while we eat dinner, hoping for a dropped morsel of food on the floor. I had plenty of time to assess her face. She has a little squished nose and wide, expressive eyes and big, pointy ears. And on top of that, she has a little tongue that sticks halfway out, almost all the time. Her face grew on me, and became the cutest face I'd ever seen. Even though she had been through tough times, Panda never stopped being affectionate and joyful. I admired that about her and realized I loved her. She taught me to enjoy the moment and look for the good in everyone.

We adopted Panda right around the time COVID-19 and shelter-in-place started. The pandemic really put a damper on a lot of our normal routines. Online classes in school were a really tough thing to get through. It turns out that adding Panda to our family helped us get through it. She continues to make us laugh every day with her funny habits or her side-eye looks. So in the end, you could say our rescue dog ended up "rescuing" us. She is an integrated member of our family today. I may not call myself a dog person, but I am a "Panda" person.





# My Lost Sense

Sean Sirhan

I always had a dream of traveling the world. Visiting every continent, every country, and every wonder the world had to offer. I told myself that when I got old enough, I would travel the world. This all changed when I went blind. All my plans of seeing the world went darker than the night sky. But when I thought all was lost, I was given a chance. A light that could help me reach my dreams. That light was my service dog, Alfredo. Whenever I felt like giving up, Alfredo would come up to me, rest his face on my shoulder, and put his forelegs around me, hugging me. He reminded me that I could still travel the world even if I couldn't see. I want to tell the story of the two most memorable places Alfredo and I traveled to.

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We arrived at the airport. Alfredo jumped out of my lap and started barking at the door. The driver opened it and said, "Stay safe out there." We walked into the airport, and I remember wanting to pass out. There are too many people and too many sounds. I couldn't tell where I was, and I started to panic. Then, I felt a reassuring paw against my leg and a pull on the leash.

"Where are you taking me, boy?" I said while running across the seemingly endless airport. Suddenly, the leash stopped, and I heard a voice. "Are you Dante?" I realized that it was the assistant that I had hired to guide us. We climbed onto the cart, and the assistant started to drive us to our gate. As we arrived at the gate, the intercom said, "People with disabilities may board the flight to Japan."

When we landed in Japan, Alfredo immediately jumped from my feet and escorted me out of the plane, and somehow found my driver. What would I ever do without Alfredo, I thought. We then drove to the bus stop and entered the two-hour ride. We were on our way to the Yoshida Trail. On the ride, Alfredo took a nap on my lap. After some time, I felt him shiver in the air-conditioned bus. I took off my jacket and put it on him, and he stopped shivering five minutes later. After around two and a half hours, Alfredo and I woke up to screams of excitement. "Well Alfredo, here we are... welcome to Mt Fuji!" I said.

We paid the fees and found a group of hikers to go up with. I recall there being around seven or eight of us. I remember they first questioned how and why a blind was going to climb the mountain. My only response was, "I have my dog, I'll be fine." And that was true throughout the hike. Alfredo helped me the whole way, making sure I wouldn't bump into anyone or anything. Whenever there was a rock or something harder to get through, he would bark to get the others' attention, and they would help me up. During the hike, it always felt like Alfredo was uneasy. I could feel him shaking. When nightfall came, we reached a hut about an hour away from the summit. As we settled in for the night, Alfredo shockingly collapsed on me. I thought nothing of it and just thought he was tired. The next morning, we made it to the summit. There on top of Mt Fuji. The feeling is still fresh in my mind. The light breeze and the unique smell of the mountain. The audible excitement and cheers from the group. It was one of the first and best memories from the adventure.

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The second memory I want to tell was at Niagara Falls. However, unlike Mt Fuji, this isn't because of how beautiful it was. Niagara Falls was the last place we had to go to before we traveled the world. However, what was supposed to be a day of triumph ended up being one of the worst days of my life. In the beginning, everything was amazing. We arrived at the falls, and Alfredo began leading me to the vista point. He was going very slowly, and I assumed people were in the way. When we reached the falls, it wasn't like I expected. The air felt tense. Confused, I asked out loud, "Alfredo, are we at the right place?" Right as I finished, I heard a thud. All the shaking and collapsing became too much. I held Alfredo in my arms and started running. I didn't know where I was going, but I could hear the parking lot. I pushed people out of the way. "HEY!" Someone yelled. It didn't matter to me. People started to realize what had happened and moved out of the way. I rushed Alfredo to the nearest emergency room.

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I sat in the chair waiting. Listening to the clock. Tick tock tick tock. When I heard the door open, I immediately turned to what I assumed was the vet. The vet stated, "Alfredo had developed cancer and had to be put down."

That day still haunts me. It makes me think that maybe if we hadn't traveled the world, I would've noticed and been able to help him. How much pain was he in? How much did he suffer just to help me achieve my dream? If I could see Alfredo one more time, I would tell him, thank you for everything. Thank you for being my lost sense.





# Reno My Compassion

Taylor Klein

"Guess what..." I said to my friend, "What?" Was the return. "I can cry on demand!"

"Ok, do it." I was dared. I squinted, blinked, and it came to my mind- my dog dying. It seemed surreal because he had been with me so long, it was like the idea of cutting off my right arm. My dog's name was Reno. Reno had been with me for 10-11 years of my life. I loved him and he meant something to me I couldn't comprehend at the time. The time came to pass, leaves began to fall, a breeze came to settle, and an unsettling era had come out from behind the clouds. I would say around 7 to 10 days after his death, I came to terms with being compassionate. It was unsettling and foreign to see something I love so much decay before me. This sparked a period of growth in my life; because of Reno, I think I became more compassionate toward the people and animals around me. He taught me how to feel a conception of what will be healthier and overall better for someone or something else. And not to value my connections over someone or something else's robustness.

I've never felt compassion before, I took a lot of things for granted. Reno was one of those everyday items that I did overlook. He was always toughing it out; in fact, I rarely saw him at home, he was usually working with my dad. So it made it hard for me to imagine that he would pass away. I was in denial about a lot of things, specifically that he would always be there with my family and me. But his mussel had hinted at gray whiskers, his legs began to give out, and the look on his face warped into a depressed, lifeless dog.

I remember always taking it as a joke that we would, "put Reno down." I thought my parents were never serious about it. What I mean to say is for a while they would just watch his legs give out and think nothing of it. I saw it too, but we were set on, "that wasn't a reason for him to die and we should let him pass on his own time." And occasionally he would be better than he was on the last day, so it never came to mind that someone else would take his life for him. That spontaneous feeling, just a week before Spring break; we were going to take a trip and we hadn't done it in a while, so it made me negligent of almost everything. My parents were trying to find a place to take Reno while we were gone. There was a lot of side talk that excluded me. One night they were being the most exclusive they've been in a while. My dad came up to tell me what they were talking about. He said the next day they were going to put Reno down. I fell into this terrible feeling of grief. I was angry, sorrowful and mournful, depressed, and in denial. I didn't get why this was happening, it felt surreal that he was going to die.



The day we put him down I couldn't control myself, I was unhinged; I was snapping back, I started getting mad at everything and everybody, I couldn't express myself and would take that out in an unhealthy manner, and I was choking on tears. But a week passed and I felt something for him; I think it was compassion. I couldn't understand before why Reno had to die...But his death made me more compassionate about the situation as a whole. Would it be better to let him rot and decay and suffer more and more every day? I needed to be more compassionate about what he was feeling at the time and what would overall benefit him. I loved him and that was for the best of him. But, the emotions I was feeling weren't out of the ordinary. It's normal to feel that way, but if this were to happen to me again, I would try to seek compassion. In such a dire time, I think compassion for Reno would have been the best way to cope. My definition of compassion is being understanding/coming to terms with others for the sake of others. It's also a way of accepting that this was for the greater good; accepting that he was gone and that this would be better than his death being prolonged; his bones that soon tear through his flesh from too rough of a fall, his ears that will no longer hear his name being called, and the look on his despairing, desperate, glooming face would all be eradicated from this act.

If you went into a room of eighth and seventh graders and asked them if they thought, honestly, that they were compassionate, I think there would be a few resurfacing genres of answers. A group of people would answer truthfully, some would choose a more socially acceptable answer, and some wouldn't take it seriously. The way I started to feel compassion was through the emotional endurance of losing my dog, Reno. Reno helped me with understanding and using compassion by being an example in my life. He demonstrated taking things I love for granted without giving compassion for them. Now I take compassion into my everyday life and use it. It's not as if I didn't practice compassion before this incident, but now it's a more frequent item I'm using. But there are many other ways that people utilize a relationship between a pet and a person than finding a sense of compassion. Many great things come out of a relationship between a pet and a person, compassion is just a common thing you notice.



# Unknown Friend

Valerie Herrera

Roxy is at her house and sleeping on her bed at the bay window of Grace's apartment. Roxy's house is a very bright purple color and warm. Roxy is barely waking up and stretching her little French bulldog legs. Her view from her window is the tall and magnificent Eiffel Tower.

Roxy remembers that she will be going to the park later today with her friends Lavender and Sage. She remembers this because outside her window she sees a dog playing with its owner. Roxy starts to wag her stubby little tail and starts running in circles. Grace then says, "We will go in a moment, but first we will eat breakfast." Since Roxy is so excited she rolls down the stairs but feels nothing. Roxy hops onto her soft petite chair in the kitchen at the mini island with Grace right behind her. Grace goes to the counter and cuts up some fresh juicy fruit for some fruit salad and serves both of them. Grace turns on the TV and Roxy turns around and sees her favorite stuffed animal toy named "Boba" the panda bear. Grace is watching the news while Roxy is eating her fresh fruit salad bit-by-bit while watching the news as well. Roxy finishes her breakfast before Grace, so she heads to the closet to get her lilac leash. Roxy goes through the doggy door of the closet and jumps on a stool to yank the chain that turns on the light bulb. She snatches her leash in her slimy little mouth, turns off the light, and rushes back to Grace.

Grace is done with her fruit salad and sees Roxy being so antsy to go see her friends. Grace says, "Come on, let's go to the park to go meet sage and Lavender." Roxy responds with some very exciting light barks. Grace puts on Roxy's leash so they can go meet Sage and Lavender. Roxy loves seeing her friends. They go through their neighborhood and past the Eiffel Tower to go to the park. While they are walking through their neighborhood they see the colorful houses except one which belongs to Olive, or as Roxy and her friends call her; the "rich and annoying little brat". Her house is dark blue and olive green. Roxy tries to avoid Olive, but somehow Olive finds her only for trouble.

They are at the park Roxy sees Lavender and Sage so she runs to them then Roxy notices Grace is not following her so Roxy is like why is she going with Olive's owner she doesn't belong there so Roxy runs to Grace and starts barking at her and starts pulling Graces Jeans. Lavender and Sage are barking as well and are not quite sure what is happening. Grace says, "hold on Roxy I am talking to Hazel ... I have some great news for you, Roxy. Olive is going to stay with us over the weekend because Hazel has a business trip to go to. I hope you're excited! You're going to be busy with your new friend. Roxy is staring at Olive, wrinkling her little French bulldog forehead. Lavender and Sage heard what Grace said and they gasped. Then they saw a butterfly and got distracted and started chasing it. Roxy barks to them, "Hey! Over here! I have some news to tell you." Lavender and Sage ran over there and left the butterfly alone.



They were sad to leave the butterfly behind, frowning. In a disgusted voice, Roxy tells them, "Ugh. Olive is staying with me over the weekend because Hazel has a business trip to go to. I wish they would just hire a dog sitter!" Lavender says, "But my owner, Aria, is a dog sitter! I hope that Hazel doesn't find out. There's no way I want Olive to stay at my house!" Roxy says, "But, but, it's just... I don't like her that much, you know. No, I don't want her to come to my house." Roxy goes to Grace and nudges her to go, now, with her little French bulldog ears hanging down low. Sage says, "Well my owner Monroe is friends with Hazel's friend, but they never get together and I hope we never do!" Grace picks up Roxy and says, "Are you not excited that Olive is staying with us? I thought you were really good friends with her. You know, because we always bump into each other and you just talk a lot." But Roxy, in her mind, thinks, "We're not talking, we're arguing!"

Grace and Roxy walk back to their house after being at the park with her friends and learning the unfortunate news that is to come this weekend. Roxy plops onto the couch with her lip hanging. Grace sits next to her on the couch. When Grace sits down, Roxy sinks into the couch. Grace says, "Play nicely. In the meantime, you can sleep on my bed or the couch." Roxy hops off the couch and goes upstairs to the bay window and watches the sunset, because tomorrow, Olive will be there

The next morning, Roxy hears the doorbell and she knows who's there. It's Olive! So she runs under Grace's bed. After three ding dongs, Grace finally wakes up and says, "Roxy! Olive is here!" She sees Roxy's little stubby tail sticking out from under the bed, wagging in fear. Grace rushes to the door and says, "Hi come on in! Oh hi, Olive, you look so cute today." Hazel says, "Oh well here are her bags, in her bag, she has food, bowls, toys, clothes, and her blanket." Grace says, "Ok thanks!" Hazel says, "Oh my I have to go, by olive!" The front door closes behind Hazel and Grace picks up olive and takes her to the kitchen to get water. Roxy isn't very happy that Olive is at her house. But after a few hours have passed Olive isn't that bad and Roxy wants to be friends now.