

A Dog's Life

I like routine. It's 6 am and the kitchen light flicks on, shining a soft yellow light between the venetian blinds. The air-conditioning motor hums to life on the other side of the house. Arching my back and stretching my legs, I stick a paw out of the kennel and sample the temperature. Brass monkey weather. I snuggle deeper into the nest of blankets I've made in my Shetland pony-sized kennel. Then I hear the back door open and give Red a nudge.

I jump up and make a mad dash for the back door, stopping to select a toy from the cane basket on the way, at the same time that Max whistles. Red is hot on my tail.

"Good morning kids." Max steps aside, to let us in, running a hand across the top of our heads as we pass. We stand still while he removes our night blankets—wouldn't want to be seen dead in those on the streets—and then we cut loose. Red races through the kitchen and around and around the dining table with a ball in her mouth. I twist my body back and forth around Max's legs and he plays tug-o-war with the rope in my mouth.

"Want some bickies?" Max knows we can't answer, but he likes to talk to us anyway. My feet prance up and down like a Lipizzaner stallion. Must not to pee; must not to pee. Max gets real mad when I pee on the floor. I don't do it on purpose, it's just that sometimes I get so excited and . . .

Red and I are Hungarian Vizslas. She's a damn fine specimen, I might add. I watch her rust-coloured coat gleam in the artificial light, as she bounces up and down like the kangaroos we chase through the forest. The sound of biscuits falling into plastic bowls is music to my ears and I push between Red and Max's leg, so I can be the first one served.

I whimper as the bowls are carried across the kitchen, just above my head. Yes! Mine is the first one down and I have a mouthful of biscuits before Red's bowl even hits the floor. She rolls her eyes at me and delicately nibbles, making sure her long, silky ears are on the outside of her bowl. I snort around the rope toy I dropped on top of mine.

After breakfast, I lie at Max's feet while he finishes his coffee, letting the warm, dry air from the heater blow across my face. Red curls into a tight ball with her nose on my rump. She smells like the lavender bush she slept on yesterday. When Max puts his mug on the table and sighs, I lift my head and tilt it sideways, studying his body language for another sign.

Max smiles at me. "Come on then."

Red might've looked like she was asleep, but she's whining at the front door before Max has levered himself out of the chair. I grab the handle of my lead and flick it, so it falls from the hook on the wall. As I present it to Max he scratches under one ear. "You're my good boy, Marlo."

Red and I try real hard to coordinate when we're on the lead, because Max isn't as young as he used to be, but sometimes a *smell me right now* scent deviates me. Once we get to the park, Max unclips our leads and Red and I sprint along the dirt track, eager to see who has visited since yesterday.

When Red trots past me, I'm temporarily sidetracked. Her legs are long and slender and her gait graceful. I wish Bob the bulldog from 'round the corner was here. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than rubbing his nose in the fact that Red shares a kennel with *me*.

Hmm, there's a new smell in the air. I can't quite pick it, but it's mouth-watering. The grass is high by the creek, so I pick my way down the steep bank carefully, nose alternating between the ground and air as I close in on the smell. Oh, this is gonna be good. There are layers to this smell. "Hey, Red."

Around one more rock and the potency of the smell hits me in the face like a wet rag. The shapeless lump emanating this luscious odour has fur. It's eyes are missing and a gravy-like fluid is seeping from its torn cavity. I rub the side of my face on it tentatively. *Nice*.

"Marlo!" Looking over my shoulder, I see Max, standing at the top of the creek bank with hands on hips and his eyebrows pulled together. Red is sitting beside him, tongue lolling out. "Don't you dare roll in that."

Crap, I forgot I'm not supposed to roll on dead animals. Don't much fancy the bath I have to take afterwards, anyway. Oh, well, it was good while it lasted. I slink up the bank, head low, giving Max a wide berth. He taps his palm against his thigh until I come closer and then clips the lead back on.

* * *

At dinner time, my bowl scrapes along the floor in short bursts as I lick every last morsel of raw chicken mince, yoghurt, vegetables and left over sausage. Delicious. Red turns her back on me as she finishes her meal. I take the opportunity to admire her butt. I know better than to help her finish her dinner. Last time I did that she snapped at me. Bared fangs are not a nice look on a lady.

When she's finished we head into the lounge together and each rest our chin on one of Max's knees. Our eyes flicker between his lap and face, looking appropriately pathetic. He roughs up our necks.

"Come on then, kids." He pats the couch either side of him and Red and I take our places. She likes his left side and I like the right. The couch cushion has a circular dent just my size.

Max leans back and rests a stubby of bear on the shelf of his bell. I put my chin on his right thigh and my nose almost touches Reds. I give it a lick and close my eyes with a sigh. This is the life.