

“Doggie Day Out”

There I was, bounding through the neighbor’s little garden and onto the hard pavement, my heart thundering in my flapping ears as the wind roared past and my paws hit the ground faster than any pup had moved before; the giant metal moving machines screeched by, weaving passed, and parting for me on my quest. I could hear my family calling out from far behind, unable to catch up with my impossible speed.

“I’ll be back in time for dinner!” I barked back to them, hoping they might understand me this time. I continued on the familiar path that would eventually lead me to destiny; the D-O-G park, as my family calls it. I knew I must get there, and fast. I could still hear my brother and sister frantically chasing after me, desperately calling out for me to come back. I stopped, for a moment, wondering if maybe I should go back and wait for them to take me to the park another day, but then I heard it. A rustling in the bushes lining the edge of the woods next to me. I raised my nose to the air and caught the scent of a squirrel. Immediately I took off into the trees, my quest long forgotten as I made my way deeper into the foliage.

I rushed through the bushes and trees, sticks smacking against me and mud splashing up as I pursued the squirrel. Finally, I had it in my sights; it quickly scurried into a small hole at the base of an old tree. I crept over, sniffing around, and brought my eyes level with the opening. Surrounded by various nuts and seeds was my adversary.

“Oi, get your snout out of my hole,” said the now very angry squirrel, “go on then, shoo.”

“Oh, oh, please come out,” I barked, drawing out the e in please, “I just want to play! You see, I was on my way to the park whe—” oh. The park. That's where I was supposed to be going, I thought to myself. I looked up to find myself in an unfamiliar place, a maze of towering trash and trinkets surrounding the old tree that the squirrel called home. All around yellow and green eyes began to blink back at me from all over this mysterious treasure trove. I backed up until my rear paws hit the bark of the squirrel's hideout and tucked my tail between my legs.

“Oh ho ho, you're in for it now, kid,” said the squirrel flicking me from behind, “you should've left when I told you to, the girls don't like dogs coming in here.”

“We most certainly do not.” purred a silky voice from above. A fluffy gray cat leapt down before us and sauntered over, the large plume of fur around her neck swayed lightly with each movement like an extravagant scarf. “So, Pippen,” she said with a fake smile, “care to explain why you've brought it here?”

“Petunia! Baby, come on! The guy was chasin me, I didn't know where else to go, and I didn't think he'd follow this far, really!” said Pippen grasping the fur along my back desperately as he pleaded with the feisty feline. She moved around us like water, forcing us to step further into a growing crowd of anxious cats, flicking their tails about as they crept closer.

“Hm, I don’t know. Girls, it seems to me our little rodent has overstayed his welcome,” said Petunia. Many of the cats seemed to agree; the small circle that formed around us was rapidly closing in.

“No! Please, Petunia, darling, honey,” said Pippen, wide-eyed with zero sign of the earlier confidence, “it was an accident, really! It won’t happen again, I promise! Please don’t kick me out.” Before he could finish his plea, she swiped at him mockingly, barely missing his fluffy tail. In his terror, Pippen gripped my back even harder, yanking on my short fur.

“Ow!” I said as I jumped, “That wasn’t very nice, Pippen!” the crowd of felines drew back, hissing furiously.

“Now what on earth is all this racket about, girls, hm?” called a smooth, motherly voice. The sea of cats began to part for a large, stout, tabby. “Awe now Pippen, what’s this about you bringing a dog in here?” she said with a grin and hearty laugh. Pippen hopped up to explain himself, but before he could, Cecilia turned her gaze on me. “What’s your name, child?” she asked kindly.

“My name’s Russell, and I’m not a child! I’m almost one and a half!”

“Oh my! Aren’t you precious. Girls, you got yourselves this worked up over a puppy? Come on Russell, why don’t you tell me about your home while I get you something to eat?” she turned, gliding in the same direction she came from before, whisking myself and Pippen along with her.

“Now wait just a minute, Cecilia! You can’t be serious about helping a dog,” said Petunia, all former grace and pomp thrown out the window as she puffed up as if she had licked an outlet and frantically scurried up to Miss Cecilia.

“A puppy,” Miss Cecilia corrected, “and I ain’t, Pippen is.”

“What!” said Pippen, finally relinquishing my fuzz and stepping out in front of me.

“You brought the poor lost thing here, you best get him home, don’t you think?” Miss Cecilia told him. Pippen’s shoulders slumped.

“Yes ma’am,” he said while Petunia giggled to herself. This option seemed to satisfy her, however, it didn’t stop her from casting glares my way and swiping her ridiculous tail against my face. “Alright kid, work with me here, what’s your place look like?” he asked while Miss Cecilia disappeared into her little hut to grab us a snack.

“Well, I live in the little houses all bunched up together right across the street from the big houses with the huge yards. Oh man, I wish I had one of those big yards too-”

“Woah, slow down there, kid. Forget the yards. Anything that might help us identify which house is yours, something in the yard or the color of the door maybe?”

“Oh! Got it! Right now, there's a whole big bunch of boxes outside my house. You see, Pip, can I call you Pip? I’m gonna call you Pip,” I said before he could tell me no. “My family packs up and goes on trips sometimes, but this time I get to go with them! Something about moving houses, they're taking everything. I don’t know how

they're going to move the whole house by dinner but Mama said that when it's happening," I said. But then I came to a realization as the sun slowly began to dip lower in the sky. "Wait, if the move is happening tonight, and I'm not there, that means they'll leave without me, doesn't it?" I asked with tears forming in my eyes. "I never should have gone to the park without them! Now I've lost them forever!" I said hysterically.

"Woah, it's alright don't cry, um, it'll be okay?" said Phippen patting my back, "Cecilia? Cecilia!" he called out desperately.

"Ugh, come here," said Petunia, pulling me into her big fluffy chest, "Don't cry, Russell, we'll get you home in time. I know where your house is, there's a tom cat next door I used to go out with." Phippen gasped. "Oh, hush!" she said to him.

"Alright, I've got the fire started for dinner, it should be ready in an hour. You all just hang tight till then," said Cecilia emerging from her home. "Oh dear, is everything alright?"

"Yes, Cecilia, but we don't have time to stay for dinner. I'm going to help Phippen get Russell home now before his family moves." said Petunia releasing me, "we'll head out the back way and cut through that neighborhood with the big yards. How does that sound, Russell?" I nodded slowly to her, standing up straight and shaking off the tears from before.

We said quick goodbyes and I thanked Miss Cecilia for not dooming me to the ultimate catfight before we set off through the woods. I frantically crashed through bushes to keep up with Petunia who made no attempt to make it easy to follow. Phippen

rode along on my back, claiming I had tired him out from the earlier chase so I owed it to him.

“Oi, steady on the road, kid. You’re tossing me around back here!” said Pippen after I jumped a fallen tree in pursuit of Petunia. It was starting to really get dark now, making it even harder to keep up with her.

“We’re almost there, Princess,” said Petunia casting a smirk over her shoulders to Pippen, “Just through these trees and we’re out of the woods.” She was right. We exited the forest to a massive yard with a small swing set and shed off to our left. A few boxes sat in the open shed and on the house’s back porch.

As we slowly crept into the yard, a light flipped on against the house while a man stepped out onto the porch to set the table. Petunia quickly scurried back behind the trees and Pippen begged me to do the same before hopping down to hide himself.

“Hold on, I think that might be,” I started to say, but it was too late. The man had finished placing things and looked up at his yard just barely spotting me. He stepped out onto the grass staring intensely.

“Russell?” he called out. My tail thumped against the grass wildly, it was my dad. But what is he doing here, I thought to myself as I raced through the grass to see him. “No way, hey buddy!” he said scooping me up into his arms, barely keeping hold of me as I wiggled and kissed him, “Oh, just wait till Mama and the kids get here, we were so worried we lost you! What do you think of your new yard, little man?” he set me down into the grass and I took off like lightning.

“My yard! This whole thing is my yard!” I barked rushing about. I slide to a stop at the forest’s edge where Petunia and Pippen stood smiling. “Did you hear that guys? This is my yard! I have a big huge yard! And I’m not far from you guys! Oh please visit, please!” As Pippen promised he’d stop by and Petunia agreed, if only to make sure I didn’t cause more trouble by trying to come to them, I heard my siblings call out from behind. I bid my temporary farewells to my newfound friends and followed my family inside our new home for dinner and a bath. I hated baths, but I couldn’t bring myself to resist this time, I was happy to be home.