

Between Turtle Rock and Apple Hill

"We are born believing. A man bears beliefs as a tree bears apples."

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Are we sure this is a good idea?" I glanced over at Annie as we drove Highway 50 through the rolling foothills east of Sacramento toward Lake Tahoe.

"We will find out," Annie said. "We all need to get out of Davis; besides, it's only one night of car camping—nothing super serious. There's s'mores for the kids and wine for the adults."

I tilted the rearview mirror down to look in the back seat. Charlie had his earbuds in and was lip-syncing as he gazed out the window. Magda too, had her earbuds in, but it was hard to tell because she had pulled her hoodie over her head and her hat brim down over her face. Her arms were folded into one another, protecting her abdomen. She was rejecting the changing world around her.

"I just don't know." I saw Daisy's head pop up from the back seat.

She panted and flapped her ears.

"This will be a great time for you and Charlie to take a hike together or find someplace to fish," Annie said. "I think he would appreciate a little alone time with you. I worry that since she is the focus of so much of our attention, he's a little neglected."

"Who picked Turtle Rock Park?" I asked.

"Feather, of course. She says it's beautiful. It was this or someplace called Lake Comanche."

"Where is that?"

"I have no idea," she said.

As we left Placerville, an incredible sound of tearing metal erupted from within the car, and my seat began to rock. I instinctively let off the accelerator and looked at the instrument cluster. As abruptly as it had started, the noise stopped. The oil pressure was fine, the battery was fully charged, and the motor was still running.

“Did we hit something?” I asked, turning to Annie. “All the instruments say the car is okay.”

“I didn’t see anything. Should we pull over?” Annie glanced at me with concern.

Daisy popped her head between the front seats and flapped her ears in distress.

The grating sound returned, and this time I knew it was the banshee behind me. I slowed and pulled off the highway into the parking lot of the Red Apple Cafe. Magda continued to shriek and kick. I lunged forward as both feet struck the driver’s seat with full force. When I spun around, I saw Charlie rip the white ear buds from Magda’s ears and rapidly replace them with his own, and with that, the turbulence in the car ceased. Blissful silence descended.

“What did you just do?” Annie asked.

“She twists and bites her ear buds,” Charlie said, “and it breaks them. Then she has a fit and thinks that her iPod is broken, when it’s not. It’s just the ear buds. I gave her mine.”

Annie and I stared at each other, not knowing how to respond. “Are we in Markleeville?” Charlie asked.

“No, not yet,” I said. “I think we are still in El Dorado County. This is Apple Hill.”

“Why?” asked Charlie.

“They grow a lot of apples here.”

“No, why El Dorado?” Charlie clarified.

“I think it means something like made of gold. They found a lot of gold here during the gold rush.”

“What do you guys want to talk about?” Charlie said, catching us off guard with this sudden change of subject.

“I don’t know. What do you want to talk about?” Annie asked quizzically.

“What do you guys talk about in the front seat?” Charlie said. “You are always talking about Magda.”

“Well, I was going to ask your mother how you knew to do what you just did with the ear buds,” I replied.

“I don’t know. It happens a lot.” Charlie shrugged.

* * * * *

At four-thirty in the morning, Magda had yet to fall asleep, and we had exhausted the strategies given to us by her therapists. She was kicking the sides of the tent and moaning. Every five to ten minutes she cycled back into sobbing and then screaming, “I want to go home! This is not my bed!”

The picture calendar and sequencing we had laid out for Magda prior to leaving on this camping trip had evaporated into the arid mountain air. Even with weeks of preparation, the right layering to her bedding, her quilted comforter, her fleece princess blanket, her weighted blanket, and her Daisy dog—Turtle Rock Park wasn’t her bedroom. Resistance to change seemed hell-bent on destroying any new experiences she might have, and by five-thirty in the morning, we were apologizing for waking the other families. By six, we were driving back down the hill toward home. Daisy and Magda were the only two who stayed awake with me the whole way back.

“I hope next year’s teacher gets it,” Annie mumbled as I pulled into our East Davis manor.

Sandy

*“If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear
to man as it is: Infinite.”*

~William Blake

Six years earlier...

Like a lot of our college classmates, Annie and I left Davis, California, in the late nineties with University of California degrees in hand, ready to explore the blank slate of possibility. We landed in Oakland, Annie’s hometown. Infinite possibility yielded to reality for me when I awakened to the fact that an undergraduate degree confers more debt than workplace preparedness. That reality also fed the blossoming notion that a solid friendship could mean much more, so Annie and I worked our way through graduate degrees in teaching and nursing respectively. Then, together as a unit, we sought what could be possible in a life together.

When we returned to Davis a little over five years later, we did so as a married couple with our two-year-old son Charlie toddling in tow. The move back was a milestone for us, one driven by the desire to no longer save quarters for the laundry, sleep without traffic’s constant rumble, and find local parks where children and junkies didn’t covet the same hiding spots. We felt compelled to find a place where Charlie could explore his own possibilities, and as part of that, go to a good public school. Our collegiate memories of Davis were rose-colored. The streets were safe, the sidewalks were smooth and wide, and the schools were renowned.

And then, as if by serendipity, it happened. I found a job in neighboring Sacramento, and shortly thereafter, the drafty white tract house with blue trim two houses down from the corner of Pear Street and Spellman Drive in Davis would become our first home. As our Realtor promised, it was only a stone’s throw from Putah Creek Elementary. (Putah Creek, which once ran through Davis, is the Green River that John Fogerty sang about in the eponymous Credence Clearwater Revival song.)

As the campus that a century ago used to be UC Berkeley's agriculture school grew, the town that was Davisville became an exceptional place to live and learn. Annie and I wanted the same thing that has drawn people to Davis for a century. We wanted to live in a town where forward thinking people had converted a campus farm into a top public university and then generations later converted traditional elementary schools into centers for language immersion and alternative choices in education. Davis seemed idyllic.

Our first home, the El Dorado model of the tract homes built in the Sixties, was well worn. The three tiny bedrooms, the one common bathroom, galley kitchen, and small dining area large enough for a card table had seen more renters than owners, and the volume of foot traffic showed. We set about patching its cracks as soon as we moved in.

One home improvement that Annie and I had always wanted was a dog. Annie had never had a dog. Charlie hadn't either. I wanted their first dog to be special. You never forget your first dog, just like you never forget your first house. I was biased, having grown up in a home with Golden Retrievers. They were all goofy smiles and wet noses when you wanted it and warm nuzzles when you needed it. On the other hand, they are a heartbreak breed; questionable breeding practices have made them prone to vascular and organ cancers. Annie, being her own person, often waffled on what kind of dog she wanted. Goldens were high on her list, but one day in May before we moved to Davis, without clear rationale, she decided on a Black Lab.

That was all I needed. On one of many trips back to Davis, I stopped, as I frequently did, at the Yolo County Sheriff's facility in Woodland, which also housed the county's animal services. It is a nondescript cluster of rapidly multiplying buildings mostly dedicated to tending California's only drought tolerant and sustainable crop: inmates. Regardless, I was drawn to it almost weekly.

When I pulled into the parking lot this time, the patchy and cracked asphalt was vacant as usual, except for the mid-80s Toyota Corolla I had seen there many times parked under a shade tree. Its flaking, faded, silver paint coordinated perfectly with the cracked back window that had been repaired with a multitude of quirky bumper stickers:

Dog is my copilot
Visualize whirled peas
Subvert the Dominant Paradigm
Who saved who?
Cure ignorance, not autism

Beyond the decals, I could see that the upholstery and armrests had been all but destroyed. The exposed and aged orange foam had been worn into a thin powder from the repeated passage of animal carriers. A haphazard arrangement of stringy towels lined the back dash. Sitting shotgun were three 55-lb. bags of Costco brand dog food. The floorboard was crammed with blue bottles of orange-capped laundry detergent.

I moved through the open chain-link gate that guarded the breezeway between the animal services office and the kennels. As always, I complied with the posted sign to check in at the main desk before looking at the animals. It was 11:12 a.m., July 12, 2005, and I checked the box “Just Browsing.” The uninterested officer behind the chest-high desk gave me a familiar smile. I left the office through another metal security door, held my breath through a “sanitizing” anteroom, and pressed onward to the kennels.

The main housing wing for the dogs was composed of two adjoining and identical rectangular rooms. The far room was locked and for strays only. The room in which I stood was only for adoptable dogs. The wall tiles looked like bits of mustard left outside of the cap to desiccate. The air was stale and the light from the florescent tubes in the ceiling was glaringly unnatural.

The concrete floor was sloped toward washes in the middle and edges of the room to facilitate a daily hosing, an ingenuity that was no doubt hard on the dogs. Chain-link gates offered me the prohibited chance to push a couple fingers through to give the dogs a head scratch, and the clear plastic information pouches wire-tied to the gates told me only the most basic information about each occupant’s true self.

Chihuahuas and Pit Bulls disproportionately dominated the cell block. The occasional indeterminate mix burst forth in exuberance as I approached. Whatever their breed, they all quieted when I turned my

attention from their paperwork to them. Most sat quiet and still, eyes trained on me, awaiting my next cue. Some were reluctant, others excited. All were ready to follow me out.

Past the first aisle of dogs and rounding the back wall toward the second, I spotted her, or rather her rump. She was facing the rear of her cage and seemed featureless under the artificial light. With her ears dangling forward, she was prying loose a tennis ball from under a section of chain-link. The ball was stuck, and she was a moving a blob of ink. Her haunches heaved left and right, her rear paws skidding sideways as her otter's tail yanked her body around. When she finally turned my way, she stared beyond me and barked continually.

It was a fearful, confused bark, unsure and remote, a bark I would come to know as her only bark. I kneeled down in front of her. The barking became staccato then falsetto. Her front paws danced off the floor, her rear almost touched the concrete, and she peed. She made no eye contact.

I whispered soothingly and pushed my palm against the galvanized metal. She immediately nosed and licked my hand, then dove back to pry her ball loose with no success.

I stood up and reached for her descriptive pouch: Female—Intact. Labrador. Owner night deposit/abandon. Age—approx. 10 months. Vaccines—Distemper, Rabies, Parvo, Bordetella. No Cats.

I turned to walk toward the office, and when I did, I nearly knocked someone over. It was her car in the lot, and she hadn't displaced personal hygiene in her rescue efforts, as I had prematurely judged. Her long wavy salt and pepper hair was freshly showered and tucked back in a low ponytail. Her thinly lined face was softened with her circular framed glasses. She wore a yellow SPCA polo shirt and faded blue jeans.

She smiled at me, a warm, welcoming smile. "Do you want to take her out?" she asked.

"Sure."

"Okay. My name is Anjou. I'll be right back." She turned on the toes of her red Converse and disappeared behind a steel door, emerging moments later with a frayed nylon leash and a key to the side yard.

As Anjou opened the cage, the black mass took notice again and

began to bark but relented as she was leashed. Her head low and darting back and forth, she pulled Anjou through the kennels to the meet-and-greet yard space outside.

“She’s all yours. I’ll come back for you in ten or fifteen.” Anjou handed me the leash.

She strode back inside and closed the gate behind her. As I stood holding the leash for the first time, I smiled. I was going to have a dog in my life again. It felt good. The possibility I held in my hand stopped just off the concrete walkway, unsure of what might come next. She crouched full bellied on the pea gravel that composed the small and fragmented outdoor enclosure. With a panting whimper, she glanced back at the door.

“Okay, let’s see who you are,” I said under my breath.

I bent over and ran my thumb over her head, from the depression between her eyes to the prominence on the back of her skull. Her mouth remained open, but her panting slowed as she closed her eyes. I reached back and rocked her loose scruff back and forth, and then I pushed the pin to release the leash clasp.

Rocks sprayed as she bolted. She fastidiously marked in all four corners of our enclosure. I took up position on a wooden picnic table and watched.

Her coat shimmered sunlight, and as I gazed at her, I noticed that her blocky head and parallel snout formed a perfect pear.

She tipped her head downward as she trotted around in search of a treasure of smells, stopping here and there to snort and root. Her ribs were obvious; she was about fifteen pounds shy of perfect. Her lack of girth accentuated a sturdy skull and low-set black velvet ears.

She didn’t pay too much attention to me, happy for this reprieve.

I called Annie and explained where I was. “Do you want to meet her?” I asked.

“No, I trust you, as long as she is good with kids.”

“Let me try some things with her,” I said. “Hold on a moment.” I laid my phone on the bench.

The dog trotted past me, and I pulled her tail. She was unfazed. I scuffled my feet in the gravel, and she returned to investigate. I grabbed

her webbed forepaw. No response. I got down on my hands and knees and pulled her ears. I shoved my hand in her mouth and I poked at her face. She was unperturbed.

I picked up my phone. "I think she'll be fine with Charlie."

As I ended the call with Annie, Anjou returned.

"Well, what do you think?"

"She's gorgeous," I said, and attempted to snap a couple of photos with my lousy flip phone camera, all pixelated black streaks.

"Is this the kind of dog you're looking for?"

I told Anjou about our house, Annie, and Charlie. I talked to her about our hour-long, after-dinner walks and expressed my own desires to have a companion for dog parks and fetch.

Anjou smiled. "She'll be perfect."

Anjou leashed the dog and started to walk her back into the shelter but stopped short. She turned to face me. "What would you see as a justifiable cause for bringing her back?" she asked.

Perplexed, I couldn't help but do the canine head tilt.

She persisted. "Is there anything this dog could do that would make you surrender her back to the shelter?" Her face straightened. "People return dogs all the time, and I don't think any dog should have to go through that twice."

"No...I don't think so..."

I had never considered this contingency; returning an animal wasn't in my repertoire.

"I suppose if she bit my wife or son," I finally said.

The smile returned. "Good. Perfect. Let's get to the paperwork."

We returned to the kennels, and the wriggling black mass immediately went back to her tennis ball problem. Anjou led me into her office where I was handed a short stack of requisite forms. Anjou also explained that cats and dogs could not be released until they had been spayed or neutered. The bureaucratic business of the adoption made me feel strangely uncomfortable, as if taking a dog into my home and family was a cold, perfunctory business deal, not an act of love, acceptance and welcome.

Written across the top of the adoption paperwork in the tight and

slanted cursive that is only still used by my parents' generation was the dog's name: Sandy. It didn't make sense to me. The sand was always blond in the beaches in my mind. That was all I could think of as I repeatedly wrote my name and address on half a dozen forms. Black sands conjured images of Humboldt County's Lost Coast, shale shattered from time and pressure into infinitesimal pieces. If this dog was broken or fragmented, I wanted that to be behind her. Besides, we had named her before she was even born.

After I had signed my paperwork and cut a check, Anjou handed me Yolo County's dog owner manual. "You will get a call from the vet in Davis tomorrow after Sandy's spay," she explained. "Do you have any questions?"

I thumbed through the generic information on housebreaking, crate training, and nuisance barking. "Why was she abandoned?" I asked.

"Lots of duck hunters around here get these dogs for Christmas. Too often the dogs are gun-shy, and they just dump them."

"The thought of dumping a dog would never occur to me," I said. "Me neither," Anjou said.

I stood up from my chair and reached to shake her hand. She ignored it and responded with an awkward grinning hug.

Driving home, I passed dozens of cars parked along the side of County Road 102, their occupants mingling about in the bright bursts of yellow sunflower fields, smiling with cameras in hand. I too was smiling. I felt like I was nine years old and turning ten tomorrow. Back in our El Dorado, I told Annie and Charlie all about my experience. I showed them the blurry photos and some of the black double-coated fur that still clung to my pant leg. To our most common Davis home, we were adding America's most common dog, and had given her the most common canine name: Daisy.

We all found sleep elusive that night.

Expectations

“My goal in life is to be as good a person as my dog thinks I am.”

~ Unknown

The next day we busied ourselves with activities in anticipation of the call from the vet. Anjou had estimated that Daisy’s spay would be done before the clinic opened to regular customers, and they would be calling me sometime before lunch to come pick her up. To me that meant she could be ready any time after they opened at eight, and we had nothing prepared for a new dog.

Petco was on the opposite side of town. Despite its distance from our house and congestion from the nearby students, we went there often because the SPCA held adoption events in the parking lot every Saturday. Charlie began to recognize the mini mall as the place where the three tile mosaic pigs in front of Peet’s Coffee went to celebrate with their Navajo Nachos after outwitting the big “wolf” sitting inside the window of the Dos Coyotes Border Cafe.

With Charlie’s enthusiastic assistance, we picked out a crate, food bowls, chew toys, training treats, a black leather leash, and a blue nylon collar. I also paid for a \$5 token to put in the machine by the front door where I typed in Sandy’s new name, Daisy, and our phone number. It whirred and hummed, and an etched aluminum dog bone clinked into a receptacle. Charlie danced. I did too, having pinched my fingers trying to get the tag onto the collar.

As an afterthought, I ducked into the Big 5 sporting goods store for two tubes of the cheapest tennis balls I could find. Later, when we returned home, I lined the back seat of my car with the new smells of our old blankets and the old smells of Daisy’s green dish towel that Anjou said would be comforting to Daisy and would help her transition into her new life with our family.

Charlie was napping, so I went to get Daisy alone. I was filled with anticipation.

The receptionist at the desk in the Davis Manor Center's veterinary office smiled as she stood and reached for Daisy's brand-new collar and leash as I handed them to her. Then, she disappeared behind a wooden solid-core door and promptly returned with a slow and sloppy dog.

I had packed and prepared for an infant, and I was getting a drugged-out teenager.

"Dr. Clementine says she doesn't need a neck cone. Just try to keep her from licking her belly. She didn't have breakfast, but I would wait until dinner to feed her." She attempted to brush Daisy's dark fur off of her white polyester pants. "Call if you see any signs of infection." She handed me Daisy's leash.

"Nothing to sign?"

"Nope, the county took care of it."

Daisy wobbled with me over the linoleum to the double glass exit doors. Davis' midsummer sun was baking the concrete sidewalk and liquefying the adjacent asphalt. Daisy stopped and refused to walk any further. Her head rocked side-to-side. I paused with her, unsure of what was happening. I watched her wanting to resume her stride, but her body refused. I picked her up under her chest and haunches like a forklift and carried her to the car. She lay still in the back seat, her head pushed sideways into her green towel displacing her lip upward against the back seat. Her eyes remained partially open as she battled the anesthesia on the short trip home.

When I got home and opened the car door, Daisy didn't move, so I carried her to the front door. I managed to free one hand to knock, and when Annie opened the door, she and Charlie squealed with delight. I set Daisy down and gently guided her into the entry, where she promptly vomited.

I watched her all afternoon waiting for her to move. She lay curled in a C shape with her jaw flat on the floor between her front paws. Occasionally, she lifted her head and licked the air in an attempt to cure her dry mouth. She slept for hours while I read my new *Idiot's Guide to Positive Dog Training*. It was an impulse buy at the checkout counter.

It wasn't long before I traded my book to play Thomas the Train with Charlie. I could tell it was taking extraordinary effort on his part not to drive Thomas and his friends over Daisy, but he knew the rules we had rehearsed. He kept his impulses in check with my promise that the dog would be a better playmate in the morning. Still, some of Charlie's trains decided to garage by Daisy's hindquarters that afternoon.

The moment we sat down to eat dinner, Daisy roused. Her nametag on her collar jingled as she shook off the effects of her drug-induced slumber. She stood still smacking her lips and looking thoroughly unsure of herself and her new surroundings. I opened the door between the kitchen and garage, sure that she would need to pee after an hours-long nap. She stretched a back leg and lumbered out, her nails click-clacking over the tile. I followed her and led her out the garage side door to our narrow side yard. Daisy squatted and peed on the hard soil. I congratulated her enthusiastically like a good idiot was supposed to. Then, she slumped down against the house, obstructing the musty breeze that emanated from the crawlspace vent.

Annie beckoned me inside through the window above our kitchen table. "Just leave her food and water outside for a while and come in and eat."

I obliged.

Daisy awoke after dinner and thundered around the yard. She found a branch that had fallen from the pecan tree in our backyard, and decided it was just the thing to play with. She grumbled under her breath as she trotted, head tilted with a backward glance as she dragged her first new toy around between the back and side yards in a continuous loop. I held Charlie up to the window to watch, and he was so delighted that his uncontrollable laughter ended in a bout of hiccups. Finally, Daisy disappeared from view followed by a loud bang as she slammed into the back of the kitchen door with her prize.

Charlie and I laughed.

"Time for a walk!" Annie announced.

Annie readied a fidgeting Charlie into his stroller as I went out to the backyard to get Daisy for our first family walk. As I would soon find, Annie had the easier job. I stepped outside and breathed in the

cool evening breeze from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, new leash in hand. Daisy seemed to barely sense my presence. She never darted, but she never looked my way, moving to each new area of interest while keeping at least ten feet of space between us. Only the repeated screeching of a squirrel high up on the power lines distracted her enough so that I managed to click the lead onto her new collar.

When I gently moved then tugged in the direction of the side gate, I was met with cogwheel rigidity. For reasons unclear to me, she finally relented. I made sure to lead Daisy through the redwood gate, not the other way around. I had heard that it was important for me to take the lead.

Daisy was a yo-yo on the leash. She moved independent of the direction that Annie, Charlie, and I were traveling. She had little regard for our presence as she caromed off my knee across Charlie's stroller and cut through Annie's legs. She kept her head down sucking in the scents of the sidewalks, lawns, and sewer drains. She frothed and drooled, and only paused long enough to urinate, then cough, gag, and dry heave. I stopped frequently, unsure if her upset stomach was from the continual tension on the lead or the inhalation of a noxious odor.

"Labs are easy-to-train, right?" Annie's question dangled in midair.

"I think so," I said, trying to remain positive. "Well, she is still technically a puppy and has a lot of energy. Let's walk farther and see if we can't drain her out a little so she will sleep tonight."

By the time we reached the end of a shaded path that would loop us back to our home on the other side of Pole Line, Daisy's panting was feverish, and all she could do to cope was spin in circles. Thankfully, her shadow headed east, away from her gaze, and no longer confused her.

On the way back, Annie walked with Charlie on the sidewalk. Daisy and I kept to the street where there were fewer lawns and hydrants. When we returned home, Annie and I were tired. Daisy was not. Rather than helping to calm her, the walk seemed to energize her. She was a like a wild Mustang. Her forepaws shadowboxed the air as I made her wait outside the fence before I returned to lead her through the gate. She broke ahead of me and immediately peed in the same spot she had that afternoon. I couldn't fathom how she had any urine left, but

I congratulated her, nonetheless. She then gracelessly pounced on her pecan branch completely unaware of my presence and praise.

I contemplated not letting her in the house and bedding her in the garage that night, but my mind flashed back to the floors of the shelter and the endless hours of solitary confinement she must have endured there. I questioned whether she was even conscious of my existence, the companionship I could provide, and if she would find comfort in our home. If she was in fact aware of us, she had no idea how to relate. I stood inside the kitchen with the door open and called for her to come. Either she didn't hear me, or she hadn't learned her new name yet, but finally she saw the open door and nearly tripped as she plowed past me into the house.

Daisy rooted through the house like a pig in search of truffles. I kept a distance but watched as she loped from room to room in a disorganized manner, her head down and her tail up, repeating her inspection several times.

She bounded into the bathroom where Annie was bathing Charlie and skidded on the tile floor in an attempt to stop, but her lack of mass prevented her from tipping over the edge of the tub and joining Charlie. She pulled her head away from the water and looked at Charlie then at the water then back at Charlie. She licked his face three times and retreated from the bathroom. Charlie was delighted.

In the summer, when the Pacific pushes cool humid air across the joining of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, the nighttime temperatures sometimes drop to the low sixties, even if it has been in the hundreds all afternoon. The delta breeze is the northern valley's natural air conditioner. In Davis, if you own an older home, you also own a whole-house fan, which is nothing more than a boxed fan bolted into the ceiling. When you turn it on at night, hinged flaps open, and the newly revealed oversized blades pull the chilled outside air through

your open windows into your house. But more significantly, it blows the super-heated air out of your attic. So, if you close your windows by nine in the morning, after running your whole-house fan all night, your house will stay relatively cool until about three or four in the afternoon, even if your walls have little in the way of R-value insulation.

The fan generated a white noise that Annie and I pretended was the ocean. As the louvers and belts realigned themselves with the influx of air, we imagined it was the sound of gulls and herons crying overhead.

To keep the motor singing peacefully, we had to open all six of our windows at night. Any fewer and screens became asthmatic as the house rattled.

I had gone to bed by ten that night, and by eleven, I awoke to the sound of unfamiliar sea birds slapping their wings and sneaker waves crashing.

My thoughts raced as my foggy brain came awake. Daisy must be licking her incision! I jumped out of bed to check on her.

The hardwood was cold and unforgiving on my bare feet. When I rushed into Daisy's room, I saw that her tongue wasn't lapping at her belly, as I had feared. She was grooming her front paws with a metronomic wet smack. Infinite cycles of inter-digital cleansing and violent head shakes to flap her ears clean were only briefly punctuated by the drive to circle in place and moan while readjusting her bedding. My presence briefly startled her from her ritual, as if I had hit her internal pause button, but as I stood confused at the threshold, she again hit play. Her pattern repeated ad infinitum.

"Ignore her," Annie said as I crawled back into bed, her face buried in her pillow.

"She has to stop at some point," I mumbled.

She didn't stop. She couldn't stop. It seemed as if an internal compulsion was forcing her to recollect and organize the day's scents. It was a self-soothing mechanism, but not for Annie and me. Any semblance to our peaceful beach sounds had mutated into a dripping faucet. Daisy was a slowly leaking toilet whose tank filled every thirty minutes.

I had to be at work by six, and I was up and grooming myself by a quarter to five. By then, Daisy had taken notice of the water running in

the bathroom sink as I prepared to shave. I heard her panting and rocking in her crate, so I opened her enclosure to let her out, thinking I could keep her from waking Annie and Charlie if I gave her some freedom. She sprinted out wildly crashing into walls, chairs, and cabinets. I managed to lead her out through the garage to the side yard. The moment she squatted to pee, I saw our next-door neighbor, Ms. Calamondin, return home from her graveyard-shift job stocking shelves at the Costco in Woodland. Daisy barked at her in high-pitched rapid succession, her hackles flared.

I confronted her with a loud “Ahht!” She stopped, continued to urinate, then rolled onto her back, her fur still raised. Belly up, she continued to bark, but muted.

When I came back inside, I apologized to Annie for waking her and Charlie, who stood clinging to her leg while she braced herself against the kitchen counter. She was filling a teapot with her free hand.

“It’s fine. I was awake getting kicked in the bladder anyway.” She moved her hand to her growing belly and rubbed. “This one hardly ever moves, so I should be happy she’s kicking.”

“Daisy is kind of a mess,” I said. “She needs to be walked, but I can’t do it until I get home tonight. She is really anxious and fearful—hyperactive, even.”

As if on cue, Daisy slammed into the back door.

I let her in to eat, and she coursed around the house from this to that, seemingly unaware of our presence. The marimbas played as I filled her stainless food dish with kibble. There was no response, no interest. Daisy was a pinball. As she bounced off the bumpers of chairs and deflected off the flippers of furniture, she came to rest, tilted, in the middle of the kitchen floor, her body tense and coiled. Annie and I stood waiting for the plunger to be drawn back and Daisy to be set in motion again. Sure enough, with her mouth drawn tightly, her ears pricked, and her eyes darting, she did just that, her toenails clattering against the grout lines as they searched for purchase on the kitchen tile. Before Annie and I could react, Charlie wrapped himself around Daisy’s barrel chest and squeezed. At that moment, Charlie gave Daisy what she had been searching for since she arrived in our home. Her ears dropped. Her eyebrows fell. Her

panting stopped. Her features softened.

I called Annie several times from work that day to see how everyone was faring.

“She seems very sweet, but anywhere she goes, she runs,” Annie said. “I’ve had to keep her outside most of the day, which I feel terrible about, but she keeps knocking Charlie over. And, her spinning and flapping hasn’t been too kind to the lamps.”

“I’m sorry.” It was all I could say. “I will walk her when I get home. Hopefully that will help.” I was unconsciously rubbing the tension in my shoulder.

“I think she is going to need more than walks,” Annie said. “She doesn’t sleep or nap at all. She is in perpetual motion.”

“I know, but we have to start somewhere. I’ve already called the vet’s office for a checkup. I read online that hyperactivity could be the result of a metabolic problem, and her ear flapping and constant licking could be an infection or parasites.”

I could hear Annie’s silence.

Thirteen Doors is available on Amazon

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