

Paps was tempted.

Instinct compelled him to sniff, but intellect advised that his food was always placed in the round container at hunger time, and always satisfied without causing distress. The last time he wolfed down a bit of found human food he was rewarded with wetpoo for a full two cycles. There was nothing wrong with his memory; he walked away from the fallen morsel of pickled tofu.

“Paps.” He heard his name and scampered to the room with many chairs. Dianne—his female human—sat on the long, fabric-covered box, and mouth-curved as he approached. Mid-morning sunlight filtered through the window and made distracting patterns along her face and neck, but Paps ignored these and sat at attention near her feet. At ten inches tall and nine pounds, Paps was a prototypical Papillon.

“Good boy!” She rewarded him with a scratch of his left ear. Vaguely resembling a butterfly, the signature ear shape was the inspiration for his breed’s name.

Papillon means butterfly in French.

Paps had no idea how Dianne knew just where to touch him, but when her fingers caressed that spot he wanted to lie down, roll over, and offer his stomach for additional attention.

He did not.

His discipline was iron. As a Papillon this was matched only by his intelligence, and his energetic belief that he was much larger than his ten-inch height. Actually, he was a smidge over ten inches, and if he grew much taller he would no longer qualify for dog shows. To represent your breed in these conformation events you had to be within design parameters. Show dogs were not perfect, but they had to be close approximations. That was the game. Conform to the standard for your breed, more so than others did for theirs.

Conformation.

“We’re all going to the Dog Club later, Paps.” She picked him up and held him near her face, infusing him with a blend of coffee, toothpaste, and yesterday’s lunch. Humans contain trace elements of previous meals for up to three days. He closed his eyes and concentrated, but could discern no additional particulate matter.

She was pretty clean.

“You’ll get to see your friends.” She patted his head and placed him on the floor. He sat there until she rose and left the room a few minutes later, and then he padded back into the kitchen and wet his mouth with water. He almost always had clean, fresh water, but he thought it would be nice to pour the water into his mouth like the humans did. His chin hair often got wet when he drank from his bowl, plus the water was fresher when just out of the pipe.

Sometimes his bowl water was warm, or chunky.

After taking some refreshment he walked a short distance to look out the big window that moves sideways. From what Dianne had said it sounded like they were going out today. His eye twitched as a bird darted past and he tensed, but then the moment passed. He quickly relaxed and sat down, enjoying the view of the outside world.

Life was good, as far as it went, but as he stared out the window he couldn’t help but reflect that something was missing. He couldn’t quite wrap his mind around it, but for the past several seasons he had felt it when he watched the humans. Something about their *packish* behavior made him feel isolated. He wanted to belong, and while they certainly met all his needs, the humans didn’t seem to fully accept him as one of their own. It sometimes darkened him.

He lifted his leg and licked himself.

Not that he was morose, or even mildly depressed. Although he knew that certain canine breeds tend to be dark most of the time, he didn’t accept emotional breedism as a foregone conclusion. He acknowledged that there was a predisposition towards dark-thinking among certain breeds, but felt that personal idiosyncrasy and individual experience had greater impact. Otherwise, some breeds would be perpetually dark, and others constantly jubilant.

Life didn’t work that way.

He finished his housekeeping, and rather than dwelling on darkness he quick-walked around the house, checking that all was in order. He stopped at the front window, which was just a narrow opening on one side of the door. He could see the end of the driveway, and once in a while a car would go past, but the field of vision was limited.

He went now to his favorite spot near the back door, where two large, clear openings afforded a wide view of the back yard. There was also a small window nearby, often left ajar by the humans during certain seasons. When open, like now, the mesh outer covering let in scents from the outside world. From here he could see the woods beyond the yard, and part of the yard next door, where his friend Spangles was sometimes staked.

Poor Spangles. Nice pup, but a bit misguided. He seemed to always find trouble, but he was a good friend. At the moment he must be inside, and nothing else was stirring, so Paps decided to take a nap. It would be time to work-play soon, and he wanted to be well rested.

He liked work-play.

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On the other side of town a male Chihuahua perched on a square pee pad and painted a circle dead center. Just as he had been trained.

With a quick lift and shake of his right leg he danced away from the contaminated zone and waited for his human to notice and replace the pad with a fresh one.

Pickles, a purebred Chihuahua, was used to being pampered. The widow Agnes had no one else to lavish her attention on, so Pickles was it. This didn't mean that Agnes failed to enforce discipline; on the contrary, she had been training dogs for a very long time, and understood exactly what was required to attain the highest level of Dog Show achievement. However, Pickles also understood what was required to attain the highest level of canine satisfaction. Over the past several years they had come to an understanding, which is why the pee pad was already being replaced.

"Oh, Pickles, you are a very good dog. Very good, indeed. What would I ever do without you?" Pickles knew the tone, and sat perfectly still, striking what he knew to be an acceptable pose. He was rewarded with a lift and a kiss, which offered an opportunity to lick a bit of tuna from between the front teeth of a grinning Agnes.

"Pickles, stop that." Agnes made a grunting sound and placed Pickles on the floor with a pat on the head.

"Now you run along. Later we're going to have a bath." Pickles heard bath, and scowled. What sane dog wanted a bath?

"But first we're going to visit your friend, Paps. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

*Paps? Heck, yeah. I want to see Paps.* Pickles fidgeted excitedly, but was quickly admonished.

"Stay." Agnes turned her back and deliberately walked away. Pickles sat at attention, but did not quite know why.

It just seemed like the right thing to do.

Agnes walked to the other side of the room, stopped, and slowly turned around. Pickles remained seated, until Agnes said, "Come."

Something in his brain nudged him, so Pickles stood and walked majestically to Agnes' side. Pickles knew he would be rewarded with a mini-treat, but he didn't know why he knew.

The treat, as expected, was delicious. Pickles wanted to tell Agnes that she was quite gullible for always falling for the treat trick.

Why spoil a good thing...

"Heel." Agnes walked across the floor, making several turns with Pickles obediently at her side. Each time they executed a difficult turn or some other movement, Pickles was either given a treat, a pleasant scratch, or pleasant human tones.

Good Pickles, spoken like the sound of moist kibble.

When Pickles felt good, Pickles did anything Agnes wanted.

Agnes knew this, and since Pickles was in the zone, they spent a good twenty minutes reviewing all of the routines. Pickles didn't participate in any obstacle course competitions—he was strictly a conformation guy. This meant that he would need to be as close as possible to the ideal configuration for his breed, so they mostly practiced posing, walking a certain way, and generally following instructions that showed off his lines and behavior.

"Young man, I do believe you will earn some points at the Show."

Pickles saw her mouth move, and heard the sounds come out, but there was no actionable intelligence. Now and then when Agnes made sounds Pickles would discern a familiar word—like Pickles. For the most part, however, it was clear to Pickles that Agnes had a serious speech disorder.

Still, the treats were nice.

Agnes wandered off and Pickles went for a drink of water. After lapping up a quenching splash he looked around. It would be nice, he thought, to have another canine in the house, and that reminded him of Paps, his friend. If he was not mistaken he would see Paps today, but he wasn't certain if he was going to Paps' house, or Paps was coming here.

Either way.

He licked himself and lay down to wait, but soon Agnes approached with his leash.

"Come along, Pickles." She seldom used the leash at home, but always brought it in the car. Pickles didn't know why. She picked up Pickles with her free hand, and they headed into the garage.

They were going to Paps' house.

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Dong...

Paps looked into the distant fog and tried to see what had made the sound.

Dong...

The fog dissipated, and was replaced by an enveloping, cottony cloud that rubbed against his face. The roughness roused him, and he opened his eyes and lifted his head.

A third dong reverberated, and Paps was now fully awake. At first he had no idea why he was sitting up and looking towards the front of the house, but input soon coalesced into understanding.

The house, he knew, sounded a chime when a human stood outside the front door. It did not work for dogs or other animals, so he assumed it utilized species-specific calibration, and that the humans had set it to recognize only humans.

Of course, it was blatant discrimination, but Paps thought he understood. If the chime sounded whenever any animal stood in front of the door it would go off with the passing of every chipmunk or mouse.

That would not be optimal.

Whatever the reason, the chime sounded for no dog, which Paps found discomforting. If he could, he would change it to at least recognize dogs. After all, this was his house, too.

"You made it! Come on in."

Paps approached the front door in time to see Agnes enter, and as usual she carried a bundled blanket in her arms which contained the ever-ebullient Chihuahua.

"Pickles!"

"Paps. Good to see you again. May we come in?"

Paps found that amusing.

"Yes, but leave the human outside."

Pickles looked up at Agnes' hovering chin.

"Human—wait outside. Put me down first." At that moment Agnes lowered Pickles to the ground and released him. Pickles scampered away and looked back. As Agnes took off her jacket and gave it to the other human, Pickles turned to Paps.

"Bad human. Never listens."

"Well, she got it half right. She put you on the floor."

Pickles nodded. "Fine, we'll let her stay. By the by, where's that dreadful cat?"

"Adrienne? She's around here somewhere. Probably sleeping. Want some water?"

"Love some." They walked off together towards the kitchen.

"It's amazing how well they get along." Dianne hung Agnes' jacket in a nearby closet. She gestured with her hand for Agnes to have a seat on the couch.

"You know," said Agnes, "I've seen actual brother dogs get along as well. But these two...not even the same breed."

"Coffee?"

Agnes nodded, and made a signal with her hand towards Paps as the two dogs came back into the living room.

Paps happily approached her.

“Paps, it’s a trap. She’s going to enslave you as a cowchomper.”

It was a very old joke. Among dogs there survived a legend, probably from the days of the wolf, before the great awakening when canine and human came together. As the legend went, if a male wolf was injured and could not hunt or rip meat, a female would chew his food for him, to soften it for easier consumption. Modern dogs noticed that cows seemed to chew their food quite thoroughly, and jokingly likened them to the wolf-chewer of legend. One day an elderly Collie was gumming a mouthful of moistened kibble when she referred to herself as a *cowchomper*. It stuck, and became part of canine slang.

Of course, it wasn’t a word in the same way that humans use words. It was a concept, like most canine communication. Dogs don’t make words; they share concepts through sounds, gestures, movements, and even scents or fur shifts. Sometimes even they don’t know how a concept is being communicated, but the concept is shared. It just happens, and in many ways is no less complex or detailed than human language.

It’s just different.

“Might not be a bad gig,” said Paps.

“Depends on who you’re chomping for. What if your client was a senile Pit Bull who would only eat his own poop?”

“Not optimal.”

Agnes patted Paps on the head. “You are such a good boy. Have you been getting ready for the big show?” Agnes looked at Dianne. “Has he?”

“Oh, yeah. He really is coming along, although sometimes he’s not quite sure what I want him to do.”

“Have you been using a clicker? Sometimes it helps focus the dog.”

“I’ve tried that, but I think I need more training than Paps does.”

“It all comes with practice, and experience. In the end, the Show is a measuring stick for exactly how far you’ve come. It’s also a springboard for breeding, should you choose that path.”

“I don’t know that I would breed Paps. We’re really just doing it for the fun, and to do something together.”

“He’s young; not really ready to breed yet. Even Pickles won’t make Champion for quite some time. It wouldn’t be worth it until then.”

There was a brief silence and Paps wondered what the humans were on about. After a moment he gave up trying to understand, and led Pickles to the box with pictures, called tee vee. Dianne would often leave the box turned on, and Paps would watch it for periods of time. He and Pickles now sat and watched a program about volcanoes.

*Fascinating*, thought Paps, but Pickles soon dozed off, apparently uninterested. It seemed to Paps that they had no sooner sat down when Agnes called Pickles. They were leaving.

Magma. Who knew?

They said their goodbyes—human and canine—and then it was time to work-play.

“That was nice,” said Dianne. “Now let’s practice our moves.”

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Sometimes Dianne just wanted Paps to stand a certain way, and sometimes that was harder than actually moving around. Moving was hard, too, but in a different way. For some reason she wanted him to move in a very specific manner. It was complicated, but at the same time it felt somehow natural, as if that was how he was supposed to move. It confused and refreshed at the same time, but Paps was okay with that, because as long as he got it right, Dianne was happy.

Really happy.

She would actually celebrate by giving him bits of food—good food—of a sort that he didn’t often get otherwise. Sometimes it was dead bird, of a species he could not identify. Most important, it was meat, and even though the quantities were small, it made his mouth chomp.

There was equipment involved in the work-play. First, there was a special leash. His other leash was only used when they went out for a walk or ride, but this one was used just when they did work-play. It had a simple

loop that went easily over his head, but then firmly gripped around his neck. It felt odd at first, but then he got used to it and actually welcomed it as a guide for what Dianne wanted him to do. When he wore this leash, and Dianne held the other end, they moved as one.

The other unusual aspect of work-play was the peculiar noise. Every time Dianne wanted him to do a certain thing there was a sound, almost like two stones tapping together. Not rough stones, but smooth ones, quickly tapped together. It was subtle, and he had no idea where the sound came from. Every time he heard it he wanted to look in that direction, but felt compelled to do whatever Dianne was asking him to do. It felt like he was doing something right, but at the same time it was a mystery.

Click.

He stood at attention, just so. He even looked straight ahead, and knew that Dianne was about to position his legs before she touched him. It was a small adjustment this time, and she ran her hands over various parts of his body, as if checking for something.

Hopefully not fleas. The treatment was worse than the infestation.

Dianne finished what she was doing and was apparently satisfied, because she told Paps he was a good dog, and gave him a bite of meat food.

Good dog. Oh, yeah.

They had been work-playing on top of a small table, similar to those used at the Dog Show. He remembered from a long time ago, and thinking of it tickled a memory, a recollection of how he and Dianne had done a lot of work-play just before that Dog Show. Was there to be another one?

He didn't know, but either way he was pleased to just spend time with Dianne. She moved his head to the left.

Click.

His back right leg was shifted to a more solid stance.

Click.

“Good boy!”

Chomp.

“Okay, I think that's enough stacking for now.” Dianne lifted Paps off the small table and placed him on the floor.

Click.

He felt himself assume the position, standing tall, snout forward, ready to walk. Except, it wasn't really walking, the thing he was about to do. It was movement, and he used his legs, but he thought of it more as marching.

Among dogs there is a concept, roughly called stiff-walking, which comes close to describing it. Usually used in reference to an injured dog which cannot move its legs naturally, it is also used as slang to jokingly suggest one's parentage includes rodents, which scurry rather than walk.

Paps briefly thought of this as he started to move, reaching forward with each front leg, while allowing the rear legs to extend backward as he performed the gait for Dianne. When his mind wandered—trying to imagine how a rodent might pull it off—Dianne quickly got his attention with a firm but loving tug on the collar.

Click.

Paps was back in form in an instant.

Chomp.

They walked in a circle—stiff-walked in a circle—for a while. Paps enjoyed it, up to a point, because he was spending time with Dianne, but just when the work-play was about to feel more like work-work, they stopped. Dianne always seemed to know when enough of a good thing was enough. She took off the leash and gave him another morsel, and a ton of loving.

“Good boy, Paps. You are such a good boy.” She hugged and kissed him.

He loved work-play.

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Paps had the rest of the afternoon to himself. For a while he watched Dianne, who spent time in front of her small tee vee, which was located in her sleep room. It was a peculiar device, with no pictures to speak of, only

an unending stream of human symbols. Some he knew from his time as a pup, before he came to live in Dianne's house. In those days he had spent time at the side of a small human, and together they had watched tee vee for hours on end, often viewing human symbols along with instructions on how to sound them out.

Paps saw that the symbols could be combined in certain cases, and while he couldn't say the words like humans did, in his mind he could sometimes think them. Right now, though, the symbols on Dianne's tee vee flashed by too fast and too small to make any sense to him. He thought about asking Dianne to take him for a walk, but her ears were covered with what he assumed was a heating device.

She had no ear fur.

He left the room and walked around the house, sniffing here and there. He could tell from his stomach that dinner was not far off, and with nothing interesting afoot he decided to get in a quick nap. At that moment he heard the garage door open, and Jack came in. Paps greeted him with an excited woof.

"Okay, Paps. There's a good boy." The double ear scratch and fur ruffle set off a round of enthusiastic greeting, which stopped when Dianne entered the room and offered Jack a quick face press.

Paps watched as the humans communicated.

"You're home early. How was your day?"

"Not bad. The numbers added up."

"Again?"

"The exciting world of cost accounting. How about you?"

"Well. There have been some exciting medical procedures going down, let me tell you."

"All professionally transcribed, I presume?"

"If I do say so myself."

"I believe a reward is in order." They face joined again, longer this time. Paps was always confused by this. He had seen birds feed their young in a similar fashion, but as far as he could tell no food passed between Jack and Dianne. In fact, Dianne hadn't even chewed anything prior to the exchange. Paps speculated that perhaps food had passed between them the first time, and now Jack was trying to get more, or perhaps he had received too much and was giving some back. He walked over to Jack and Dianne, who both looked down at him. Dianne broke away from Jack and squatted down, patting Paps on the head.

"Don't be jealous, Paps. You'll always be my number one."

"Now I'm jealous."

Dianne stood up and gripped Jack. "Don't worry, Jack. You'll always be my number one human. She leaned away. "Are you hungry?"

"Sure, distract me with the promise of food."

"Is it working?"

"I'm a man, aren't I?"

"Help me with the veggies?"

Paps walked away. There was nothing here to see but unfathomable human behavior. He wanted to know more, to have a better understanding, and ultimately to become more a part of their pack, but it seemed so unattainable. If he couldn't even decipher the meaning of a simple face press, what hope did he have of higher understanding?

He had always felt that the key was the tee vee. It often displayed both humans and animals, sometimes even canine, and was festooned with human word sounds. Some of them he understood, and much of the science, but their behavior had him flummoxed.

Soon he smelled human food smells. They often cooked their food to the point of incineration, which was odd, but the smell was an indicator that his meal time drew nigh.

His growling stomach confirmed it.

"Na-ow. Food now?" The cat had mysteriously appeared.

"Yes, Adrienne. Can't you smell the charring?"

"Na-ow. Hoo-mans food much fire."

"Be patient. They always feed us at the same time they eat."

"Adrienne have food."

"Then why are you complaining?"

"Dog-thing hungry?"

“Yes, Adrienne. I am hungry.” He shifted his position. He was hungry.  
“Na-ow. Too bad.” She slowly walked away in her irritating feline way.  
“You know, Adrienne,” Paps woofed. “Sometimes you thrive on nasty.”  
Adrienne looked back. “Enjoy food. Whenever.”  
“Paps,” called Dianne. “Time to eat.”  
Paps lost his retort as he hurried to his food bowl.

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“This looks delicious.”

Jack and Dianne sat across from each other at the small kitchen table. Dianne had prepared several bowls of food, including round meat objects which Paps had glimpsed and whiffed earlier. There was also cooked green vegetable matter, unidentified, and some fluffy white stuff, which might have been snow, or cotton, heated to the point of steaming.

These humans and their scorched food...

Jack had already gathered the shiny, pointy sticks, which humans use to stab their food. It always amazed Paps that they felt this need to further incapacitate food which clearly could not have survived the flame. He understood and respected thoroughness, but human meal consumption bordered on the psychotic.

To each his own, thought Paps. He eagerly sauntered up to his own bowl and sniffed, stepped back, and sniffed again.

Exquisite!

Paps was unusual for a canine in that he did not rush right into dinner, even when he was hungry. He appreciated the effort that Dianne had put into his meal, and felt that it deserved a certain amount of respect.

After the third sniff respect had been satisfied.

Even as he chomped the food into morsels, he savored the complementary flavors and textures. There was meat, of course, but also vegetables and soy beans. There was rice, and watery gravy that brought it all together. And the smell!

Through the ecstasy of his meal he heard the drone of human conversation in the background.

“So what did you do today? Besides transcription?”

Dianne swallowed, and drank some water. “Agnes stopped by, with Pickles.”

“Ah, the Queen of all things Dog Show. How is the couple?”

Dianne looked over her water glass. “Jack...she’s a wonderful lady. If it wasn’t for her we wouldn’t have Paps, you know.”

“I know, I know. I’m teasing. Did you have a nice visit?”

“It was nice. Mostly we talked about the Dog Show, training, stuff like that.”

“I suppose Pickles is going to win it all?”

“Agnes isn’t like that. She wants to win, of course, but I think she just enjoys being part of the process, and of course, she loves her son.”

“Pickles?”

Dianne laughed. “Right. That little boy is well trained, and well spoiled. It’s a tightrope, but somehow Agnes pulls it off.”

Paps finished eating, and felt the telltale rumblings of the need for relief. He quick-walked to the kitchen table and communicated the need to Dianne.

“Honey, can you take Paps out? I’ll get these.” She pointed at the table.

“Sure thing. Come on, Paps. Let’s go fertilize the lawn.”

A minute later they were outside, in the same place where Paps always relieved himself. He took his time, sniffed around to verify that a dump had occurred in the recent past, and that it was his. Satisfied, he squatted, took half a step, leaned forward a bit, and pushed.

He felt a squeezing sensation, and took another step forward. The terminal expulsion was the perfect ending to a delicious meal, and he finished the process with the canine two-step.

So good!

“Okay, Paps. Looks like another victory.” Jack led Paps for a little celebratory stroll around the grounds, which gave Paps a chance to sample the scents of early evening. It was still light outside, and creatures of various sorts had recently been about, but something else grabbed his attention. There was a hint of something, a wild, musky trace that might have been animal, or might have been some manufactured human odor.

There were many such.

This one was new to Paps, so he wasn’t quite sure. He sniffed at the air for more input, but it was gone, led away by an errant breeze.

“Come on, Paps. Back inside. We’re going for a ride later.” Jack gently tugged at the leash, and they went back into the house.

Did he say *ride*?

If there was one thing Paps loved it was a ride in the car. The changing scenery provided a never-ending stream of input for his curious mind. The only downside was that often he wanted to stop and investigate something further, or turn down some road, but the car just kept going.

If he could control the car it would be more...fun.

Still, he loved rides.

Paps wondered where they might be going as Jack brought him back inside.

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An hour later Paps looked out the car window as scenery flashed past. He had been this way before, and always around the same time of day. He could tell because the fire disc in the sky had fallen to the point where shadows lengthened.

It meant they were going to the Dog Club.

Paps pondered the fact that shadows grow longer as the fire disc falls lower in the sky. Dogs had long debated the reason for this inverse relationship, without much consensus.

Some things just had to be accepted.

Chasing shadows was a different matter. He had once heard of a Greyhound that tried to prove he was the fastest dog alive by catching his own shadow. According to the story the determined canine was saved from self destruction by a passing cloud, though he claimed to have briefly touched the elusive specter just before it disappeared.

Well, maybe.

Paps couldn’t see his own shadow now, but he could see the shadows from other objects, and he guessed that they were getting close to the Dog Club. This meant he would get to see Pickles soon, as well as the other dogs in the club. Lately there had been more members than usual attending the meetings, and he wondered if it would be the same tonight.

“Just one more week before the Show.” Jack was driving, and spoke as he stopped at a light.

“I know. I’m a little nervous.”

“Paps will do fine.”

Dianne answered. “Not for Paps—for me. I have this nightmare of a daydream where I trip and fall in front of everyone.”

“I see. And how do you feel about that?”

“Just peachy, Dr. Freud.”

“Seriously, you’ll do fine. You’ve practiced endlessly, you know the routine, plus it’s your second Show.”

“But what if I fall down?”

“Then Paps and I will pick you up. No worries.”

“Thanks. I feel better.”

The light changed color and the car started to move again. As Paps was pushed back into the seat he had to marvel at the ingenuity of the humans. The ability to cause this car to move—at will—was nothing short of miraculous. He considered the question of how the humans did it, and concluded that they possessed a special intuition regarding movement.

He thought it not unlike the example of birds. They could fly, seemingly with little effort, and with no greater intelligence than a rodent. Yet he, a canine with much greater intelligence, could not fly. Neither could

humans, who were probably as smart as dogs. This eliminated intelligence as a factor in flight movement, which undoubtedly had the same basis in execution as ground movement.

Just...aloft.

Paps liked to solve riddles like this, and once he thought it through and had achieved an understanding, it calmed him. The car hummed along, and Paps stood up once and caught the reflection of Dianne in the mirror.

Now how did she accomplish that? She appeared to be in two places at once, and more, her head was facing in two different directions at the same time. Even a bird couldn't do that.

"Hello, Paps." The Dianne face in the mirror smiled at him, but the sound came from the Dianne head that sat two feet away. Paps looked from one to the other, woofed once in confusion, and finally sat down and licked himself.

Paps knew that he tended to over-think things, but how could such contradictions be ignored? He saw what he saw. Finally, thankfully, the car slowed and entered the Dog Club parking lot, which was crowded with other vehicles. After the car stopped, Dianne opened the door and let Paps jump down. She then put on his leash and led him towards the building, as he sniffed and picked up the scents of many other dogs.

It was exciting.

If this had been his home territory so many different scents might be cause for concern, but here at the Club it was just a sign of good times ahead. If the data he acquired was accurate, the scents were also quite fresh.

They approached the door, which Jack pulled open.

"Shall we?"

Dianne led Paps into the well-lit Dog Club, where a cacophony of canine communication filled the air. Paps excitedly pulled on his leash.

Click.

He came to rigid attention. All was well.