

I wagged, and she almost smiled. Then she noticed the missing burger bag. I stopped wagging. Her eyes asked me a question, and my eyes answered. Sometimes that was all Cassie and I needed: eyes. She knew I hadn't eaten the bait, but Taylor was suspicious.

“Dodge, you devil,” he scolded playfully.

I let out a bark to tell him I was innocent, but he was already getting on his bike. He waved good-bye and headed out, pulling a little trailer with Daisy's kennel behind. The pit bull was still shaking in her crate, but was going to Pet Rescue, the shelter where Taylor worked and Cassie volunteered. She'd get a bath, a real dinner, and a warm place to sleep. She didn't know it yet, but she was on the road to home. Maybe even a forever-home.

Cassie pushed her bike into a roll before swinging her leg over the seat. I was right with her, ready to go. She pedaled fast and I broke into a run, feeling the wind in my ears and fur and nose. I let my tongue loll out of my mouth, just a little. I tasted the air. It felt good to run, to be on the move. To be running away from the warehouses. This neighborhood was no friend to dogs.

I had a great pace going when Cassie squeezed her brakes. I slowed, smelling warm rubber and something else. We were still near the water. I sniffed. Seaweed. Gasoline. Vegetables?

I followed Cassie's gaze to see why we'd stopped. She was staring at two men outside a vegetable-scented warehouse. They were shouting and posing like circling dogs.

One of the men had on a white apron. He puffed his chest and stuck out his chin as he howled out angry words. The other man wore a coat and the kind of special collar men wear around their necks to look fancy. Only the cloth seemed to be choking him — his face was all swollen. The shiny car behind him matched his shoes. It had to be his. And next to the car was an even larger man who was hiding his face under a hat.

I stifled the growl in my throat. I smelled lies. Or maybe horseradish.

The man in the collar put his hand on the apron man's shoulder. It might have seemed easygoing, like a pat. But it wasn't. It was more like a nip at the back of the neck. A signal to let the other guy know that he was in charge. He