

Chapter 1

I'd smelled fear on the humans all morning, and the stink was really getting on my nerves. I mean, we all knew a windstorm was coming, and it was going to be rough; but the humans didn't have anything to worry about. They'd just go down into The Hole and wait till it was all over.

It was the chickens who should have been worried. Their house was so flimsy it was likely to take off and fly away in the next windstorm. But chickens are too stupid to think about these things, so they weren't worried yet. Meanwhile, Auntem gave off enough worry scent to cover every living thing in the entire state of Kansas, and as I said, the smell was pretty annoying.

So, yeah, I knew I wasn't supposed to chase the chickens, but I couldn't help myself. When those lame-brained layers started bragging about which one of them could fly fastest, I decided to let them prove it.

I took off after Eggy, baring my teeth like I was going to rip all the feathers out of her tail. It felt really good to run. It also felt good to get some revenge on the chickens. Ever since yesterday, when the nasty old neighbor tried to stab me with a pitchfork just for digging a little hole in her garden, everyone here had teased me for running home with my tail between my legs. They would have done the same thing—it was a big *sharp* pitchfork, and the neighbor is as mean as a wet cat.

The chickens, in particular, had acted like I was the only one who had ever shown fear in the history of forever. Now I decided I'd put a little fear in the chickens so *they* could demonstrate why their name means being a coward.

"*Squahhhhhh!*" Eggy yelled as she ran across the farmyard with me right on her tail. "That giant rodent is going to eat me!" Her big fat feathered body bounced ridiculously from side to side as she dashed around on long spindly legs.

"I thought you could fly," I barked. "And you know I'm not a rodent." I chased her into a corner between the water trough and the barn.

"I can't fly in this wind, you fool," she squawked.

"Excuses, excuses." I got ready to pounce on her, but she turned fast and hopped out of the way. Then she ran straight for the henhouse.

"Oh, no, you don't," I muttered as I shot after her. She would have to pay for that rodent remark.

The other animals always make rude comments about my size, but I think they're just jealous because I get to sleep in the house with the people. I'm small, yeah, but I'm a lot bigger than a rat. And I have a much nicer tail.

"He's coming this—*squaaah!*—way," one of the other chickens shrieked.

They had been pecking in the yard, trying to eat up all the loose bits of corn before they were blown away by the storm coming across the plains. Now, instead of eating, they scrambled frantically to get away from me, squawking and flapping and looking about as ruffled as they could possibly

get. I loved it. I ran in circles, snapping occasionally to keep them moving.

Then I saw one obnoxious old hen who had pecked at Dorothy's ankle last week. I really did want to bite her. So, I opened my mouth extra-wide and headed straight for her big fat chicken butt.

"Toto!"

I had to stop when I heard that voice. It was Dorothy, my pet girl.

"Stop something chickens, Toto," she said.

With her flat face and small mouth, she can't really talk properly, but I still love her. Auntem and Unclehenry, the other people, are always making her work when what she really wants to do is roam the fields with me, chasing grasshoppers and digging for shiny beetles. She needs me to protect her from work. If you do too much work, you end up dull and sad like Auntem, or pinched and mean like the mean neighbor with the pitchfork.

I want to protect my girl and keep her just the way she is. I love everything about my Dorothy, from the smell of her shoes to her sloppy habit of throwing things everywhere. She throws a stick or ball, and I have to go pick it up for her. Then, instead of putting it away, she just throws it someplace else, and I have to pick it up again. It makes no sense at all, and sometimes I get tired of cleaning up after her. Still, I love her, and I'll do anything she asks.

When I *know* what she's asking, that is. I have to pay attention really hard to understand human speech, and usually, I don't bother

Right now, though, even if she didn't use many real words, I could pretty much tell what she wanted me to do just from the tone of her voice and the way she looked at me, as if she wanted to tie me up like a shock of wheat and throw me into the barn loft. She was annoyed, and I could smell a little anger on her, too. But underneath it all, there seemed to be more fear than anything else.

Fear of the storm, probably.

With one last look at the fat old hen, I turned and trotted over to Dorothy. I wagged my tail and hoped she would pet me for a minute and that I could help her forget her fears about the increasing wind and the dark clouds growing like mountains in the sky. Maybe she would also forget I'd been trying to scare the chickens and that I'd chewed on one of her shoes this morning before breakfast. She would forget it all, and we'd just...

It didn't happen.

She looked at me for a bit, like maybe she was going to pet me, but when she bent down, it was just so she could tuck a loose flap of leather back into her shoe. That piece of leather is always coming loose and tripping her, so she really should let me chew it off for her, but whenever I try, someone always stops me.

"Dorothy!" Auntem barked as she stepped out of the back door of the house, "Something up something chickens."

She can't talk any better than Dorothy. They practice a lot—it seems like they're always barking about something—but their language is so different it's difficult to translate into real words.

Anyway, I guess Auntem had just told Dorothy to round up the hens, because that's what she did. She ran around waving her arms, herding them all into the henhouse. I could have helped, but somehow I didn't think she wanted me to run around after them again.

So, instead, I trotted over to the barn to watch Unclehenry bring the cows and the horses inside. He was having a hard time holding the door open because the wind blew it closed. He kept turning to look over his shoulder, as if there were a monster behind him. But it was just dark clouds and grass bent low under the weight of the coming storm. The wind moaned almost like a voice as it gusted along the eaves of the barn.

That sound made me shiver, and I had to admit I couldn't wait until it was time to go into The Hole.

The Hole is, well, a *hole*—dug out under the house—and since the house is very small, The Hole is even smaller. It's not much bigger than the ones I dig out in the yard to bury my pork chop bones. But it's deep and smells of worms and roots, a rich aroma that reminds me of underwear. It's a damp, comforting place much more interesting than the hard dry ground above. So, I never mind the wind and storms, because I know they mean a visit to The Hole.

With a loud thud, Unclehenry slammed the barn door shut and started toward the house with a lantern and pail of water. Maybe it was time already! I hurried to get Dorothy so we could go down into The Hole together.

I couldn't find her. The henhouse was closed up tight and sounded and smelled full of hens. I could tell Dorothy wasn't

Toto's Tale
by K. D. Hays

in there. She couldn't have gone into the barn, or I would have seen her. So, she must be in the people house. I pushed through the hole in the screen door, ran inside and headed straight for the door in the kitchen floor, expecting to see she was on her way down into The Hole.

She wasn't.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 2

Auntem was crouched down inside The Hole, crying.

"Toto!" Unclehenry yelled when he saw me. He reached out to grab my collar, but I twisted away from him. I had to find Dorothy, and I couldn't do that if they pulled me into The Hole.

Faintly, over the roar and moan of the wind, I could hear my name. Dorothy was calling me. *She* was out looking for *me*!

I ran toward the sound of her voice—out the kitchen door, down the steps and into the yard. At first, I thought she was in the front yard, so I headed that way. But the wind roared and swirled, carrying her voice in every direction, along with clouds of dust and straw. It was getting harder to see with each passing second.

I turned every which way, trying to find her scent or hear her call again. Then, just when I was afraid I'd never find her, I felt her arm around me. She scooped me up and carried me up onto the front porch. The wind pushed us back each step of the way. It seemed to take all Dorothy's strength just to get to the door, and then, no matter how hard she tugged, it wouldn't open. Wind whipped my hair into my eyes, and the roar made my head ache.

The full fury of the storm was almost on us now, and instead of being safe inside the wonderful Hole, we were out on the porch being attacked by flying bits of straw. I barked and wriggled out of Dorothy's arms to run to her bedroom

window, which was open almost enough for us to crawl through. Dorothy was smart enough to understand right away what I wanted her to do. She pushed the window sash all the way up, set me inside then crawled in after me.

For a moment, we just lay on the floor together panting. The wind still howled and moaned, but the walls protected us from the grass and straw that stung like bees. We weren't in The Hole, but we were safe.

Or so I thought.

As the roar of the wind grew even louder, the whole house started shaking like it was tired of being attached to the ground and wanted to get up and move. That made both of us start crawling toward the kitchen so we could get down inside The Hole. Wind shrieked all around us like a demon, and the house was pitching and swaying so much it was hard to move forward.

Just as we reached the kitchen, the house gave one huge lurch, and everything tipped sideways. The roar of the wind was almost drowned out by a horrible ripping sound, as if the ground were being torn into pieces. We tilted the other direction, and I slid into a cabinet full of crackers, soup cans and jars of pickled eggs. Food? The food cabinets were too high for me to reach. How could I be seeing crackers? It made no sense.

Smells swirled by so fast the odor of henhouse poop mingled with the scent of the neighbor's apple pie. I thought I was going crazy. How could I smell the neighbor's pie when her house was 5280 steps away?

Toto's Tale
by K. D. Hays

When I looked out the window, I saw why. The pie was sort-of hovering outside our window. And that wasn't the weird part. The weird part was that we were sort-of hovering above the ground. So was the henhouse.

The hens were not amused. Their feathers stuck out at all angles, and half of them were upside down. An egg hit the windowsill, leaving a stringy, gooey mess that stretched in a long line as the house spun around. Some got stuck in my ear. After that, the roar of the wind became less noticeable because I was too busy trying to rub the egg mess off my head. Every few seconds, I had to stop to watch for more flying eggs.

I watched for other flying things, too. After all, most of the smells of the farmyard don't come from eggs.

Dorothy wasn't watching as closely as I was, and she got hit in the forehead with a grade-A extra-large. She cried out in pain, and I ran over to her to make sure she was alright. I rubbed against her knee—I'm not tall, and when she's standing, that the highest part I can reach. She picked me up and held me against her cheek and whispered nonsense words. Together, we watched the chickens, hay, feathers and pie blow past the window over and over, like we were in the center of some weird merry-go-round.

The house had risen up to the top of a swirling cloud, which should have been very scary. And it was...for a while. Dorothy clutched me tightly, and my hairs all stood up and got itchy.

But things went on like this for so long, eventually it started to seem almost normal. Dorothy relaxed her grip on

me. I relaxed my hair. She yawned. I yawned. She set me down. I didn't pay much attention to the window after that because I spotted a pork chop on the floor.

Or was it the wall? The reason I wondered was that the pork chop was lying on a picture of a grumpy-looking family. I didn't remember seeing pictures on the floor, but people did put them on the wall. Or maybe they grew that way. Anyhow, it was a small pork chop, so I finished it in a few bites and looked for a place to bury the bone.

There was an opening in the floor where the cellar had been when the house sat on the ground instead of floating. If I put my bone in there, it might keep up with the rest of the house and bury itself when we landed.

But what if it didn't? I decided to bury the bone in Dorothy's bed.

I guess she thought I was scared. She followed me and climbed onto the bed and poked around under the covers until she found me. We snuggled together for another long time, listening to the wind howl and feeling the house pitch and turn with a rocking motion that grew steadier after a while. It was way past time for my early-mid-late-morning nap, so I closed my eyes. Dorothy snored, but I never fell asleep. I did rest my eyes a little, though.

Suddenly, the bed fell out of the sky with a loud *whump* that hurt my ears. The house fell, too, of course, since the bed was still in the house. The view out the windows was different from back on the farm. I could see trees, lots of beautiful, tall trees. We don't have many of those back home, so it's hard to find a good stick to chew or the right target for

Toto's Tale
by K. D. Hays

marking territory. But now they were everywhere. I had never seen so many trees in one place.

"Dorothy," I barked, "I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

But of course, she couldn't understand me.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 3

I ran to the door and barked to tell her to follow me, but she hung back, and I could smell that she was scared. I wondered if she was afraid of so many trees. Or maybe it was all the new smells. The wind brought the scent of rainwater, cherries, ground roses, clover, pie spices, apples and strange birds, plus lots of other things I couldn't even name. What could all of these new smells be? Where did they come from?

I was just about to start out the door without waiting for Dorothy when I realized some of those smells might come from large creatures that eat dogs. Enormous creatures with teeth the size of cattle horns.

I decided to go back to get my pork chop bone. Dorothy thought I was trying to hide in the bed, but I was just whimpering because I had a furball stuck in my throat, not because I was scared. Why should I be scared? After all, if there *were* enormous long-toothed beasts out there, they would eat Dorothy first because there was no way I was going out before her. She *is* my pet, after all, and is supposed to look out for me.

But she thought we were going out together, apparently. After pausing to tuck the loose piece of leather back into her shoe, she picked me up and carried me to the door, where the smells were even more powerful.

Sunlight filtered through the trees on a lush landscape of flowers and plants. I could hear birds that sounded like chickens, only less annoying. And there was a burbling sound

that reminded me of Auntem pumping water into a tub for a bath. I would have to stay away from that sound. Baths in Kansas were bad enough. I had no intention of getting one here in this strange place. Wherever it was.

The difference became really obvious when three people appeared. I decided to call them "people-who-can't-quite-reach-things" because they were shorter than Dorothy, even though they walked and frowned like grown-up people who worked too much. I hoped these shorter people might store their food lower than the people in Kansas did.

These shorter versions of people were also mostly bald, and covered up their lack of fur with silly-looking clothes. They smelled terrible, and they had blunt teeth that weren't a whole lot longer than mine. So, I told them exactly what I thought of them without worrying they would eat me or trample me into the ground.

Dorothy clamped her hand down over my nose and stopped me in mid-bark.

When the people-who-can't-quite-reach-things got close to our house, they bent forward and looked down as if they were searching for something on the ground. Unclehenry, Auntem and Dorothy do something like this every night before supper, and I have never figured out what they're looking for. I used to think it meant they'd dropped some food under the table, but every time I looked, I never found any.

When the short people straightened up again, one—a female—stepped forward as if she were the leader of the pack. This surprised me, because in addition to being a female, she also looked awfully young to be the leader. But

she was taller than the others, so maybe that made her important.

Then, when I looked at her more closely, I realized it was just her clothes that made her look young. She wore a light-colored dress, with a big frilly skirt and puffy sleeves, that reminded me of a lampshade. There was glittery stuff all over her, too, as if she'd sneezed into a pile of metal shavings. In the bright sunlight, she sparkled like pond water. When the sun ducked behind a cloud, though, I could see that under all the makeup she was wearing her face was wrinkled like a prune.

She was *old*, but she walked with pride, like she was important and she knew it and she knew that everyone else knew it, too.

"Are you a good something?" she asked Dorothy. "Or are you a bad something?"

This surprised me. Usually people just tell you whether you're good or bad. They don't ask your opinion.

Dorothy seemed surprised, too. She shook her head and barked some words that made it sound like she didn't understand what the old lady with the lampshade dress was talking about.

"You killed the something something," the Lampshade Lady explained.

"No!" Dorothy exclaimed in horror.

The accusation made no sense. Dorothy can't run fast enough to catch anything, and her teeth aren't sharp enough to kill anything if she did. And I'd been with her all day, and

she hadn't even been mean to any living creature, let alone tried to kill one.

Maybe the Lampshade Lady was really talking to me, but I swear all I do is *chase* the chickens. I've never killed one.

The Lampshade Lady only laughed.

"Your house killed the something something, and that's good because something."

I sniffed around for signs of blood or gore. Did the house fall on the chickens? I wouldn't consider them good. And anyway, it wasn't like we asked the house to fall on anything. It just sort of happened.

I saw no signs of crushed chickens, but when I ran around the side of the house, I finally understood what the Lampshade Lady was talking about. Sticking out from underneath were two bony legs that looked like they'd belonged to a person about Auntem's size. At first, I had this sick feeling we *had* dropped the house on Auntem. Then I realized it couldn't possibly be Auntem because (1) her legs are stout, like an ox's, and the dead creature had legs more like a chicken's and (2) Auntem would never wear such fancy, shiny shoes. In fact, no one in the state of Kansas had shoes like that. Or legs like that. Just where the heck were we, anyway?

The Lampshade Lady led Dorothy around the house, and Dorothy shrieked when she saw the legs.

"Oh, no!" She turned and clutched at the lady's puffy sleeves. "Help! Something help her!"

But the Lampshade Lady just laughed. That was kind of obnoxious, I thought. I mean, our house had killed this

person, so it wasn't all *that* funny. And the lady's laugh was real annoying, too. All high-pitched and squeaky.

"She was a bad something," the lady explained. She pointed to the east and then to the north and went on about being good. Then, with her face set in a grim frown, she pointed to the west, where the sun was already starting to sink toward the horizon. I couldn't understand what she said—except the word *bad* once or twice more—but just the tone of her voice made me shiver. There was probably a mean neighbor with a huge-normous pitchfork who lived somewhere in that direction.

Dorothy and the Lampshade Lady jabbered on for a while about good and bad things in various directions, but I figured I didn't need to pay attention anymore. Our house had killed the bad whatever in the east. So, if we just stayed away from the bad whatever in the west, we'd be fine.

I decided to go over to sniff the legs with the shiny shoes, but as the sun came out from behind a cloud and cast its rays over the side of the house, the legs started to dry up and shrink. By the time I got there, nothing was left but the shiny shoes.

I barked to get Dorothy's attention. She couldn't feel bad about killing something that wasn't even there anymore, could she? What *had* those legs belonged to? The smell in the shoes would give me a good idea.

But just as I turned back to get a whiff, the Lampshade Lady jumped over in front of me. She moved with amazing speed, almost like magic. Before I had a chance to get my

nose in place, she reached down, plucked the shoes up off the ground and handed them to Dorothy.

I groaned. What a waste! Dorothy couldn't tell anything about them from the smell. And she hardly ever took the time to chew shoes, either. The Lampshade Lady should have given them to me.

Dorothy tucked the shoes under her arm without even trying to sniff them. She nodded toward the house.

"I need to get home to Auntem and Unclehenry," she said with a frown of worry. "Can you tell me how to get to Kansas?"

The Lampshade Lady and the other short people just sort of looked at each other for a moment. Then they all started talking at once, and though I didn't hear the word *no*, they all seemed to be saying it in one way or another. There was a lot of head-shaking and sour looks and pointing in various directions and gloomy low-pitched voices.

Dorothy didn't seem to believe them at first, but the longer they talked, the more I smelled fear rising in her. Tears welled up in her eyes and spilled over onto her cheeks, and soon she was sobbing. The others kept talking; but now instead of pointing in various random directions, they all started pointing at a road made of bricks. As if that would solve anything. We didn't have a car.

I don't know how they could keep talking when what Dorothy needed was a hug. Even I knew that, and I'd never hugged anyone in my life. I nuzzled her ankle, but without arms, I'm not much good at hugging. Auntem does it really well. Dorothy needed Auntem to give her a hug.

She also needed a tissue. I realized that when she picked me up and gave me a hug. Her nose was running like crazy, and as much as I love my girl, I really don't like the feeling of wet snot in my hair.

Still, I tried to ignore the wetness as Dorothy held me close.

The Lampshade Lady raised her hand, and the others stopped jabbering like they knew she was going to say something important. I concentrated real hard so I could understand.

"You must swallow the Jell-O brick road," she said with finality.

Now, that was something I could do. I licked Dorothy's chin to cheer her up. Jell-O was a little weird but definitely eatable. It might take a while to eat a whole road, but I knew I could do it. If that was all it took...

Wait a minute.

I turned to look at the road. Those bricks weren't Jell-O. They were bricks of bricky stuff—hard, heavy and non-edible. How were we supposed to swallow them?

Maybe I misheard that part. She probably said to *follow* the road.

But how was that narrow track of bricks going to help us? We'd flown here through the air. We couldn't just walk back. And there weren't any brick roads in Kansas, so this was probably going to lead us someplace else weird. If she'd told us to follow a *dirt* road, I'd have felt a lot more comfortable.

"Can you come with us?" Dorothy asked the Lampshade Lady.

"No." Then she said something about shoes.

Coward! She was as bad as a chicken and just about as ugly. She knew this place, and we needed her help, and she wouldn't help us. I was starting to get mad, really mad. I wriggled down out of Dorothy's arms ready to bite the Lampshade Lady, but she disappeared before my very mouth.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 4

I mean, she *really* disappeared. One moment, she was standing next to the house pointing at the shiny shoes she wouldn't let me chew, and the next she had completely vanished. Even her strange smell disappeared into the wind. I aimed my teeth at her ankle and ended up with a mouthful of prickly grass.

Actually, the grass probably tasted a lot better than her ankle would have.

I was so surprised I didn't even think to try to bite one of the short people instead. But I was mad at them for making Dorothy so sad.

She stared at the brick road for a long time. It curved through fields and woods and stretched far into the distance, and it went on for so long that it made me tired to just to look at it.

That was all Dorothy or anyone else did for a great while. Then, finally, with a big sniff, Dorothy turned and walked back into the house, still clutching the shiny shoes in her arms. I followed her, waiting for her to set down the shoes so I could smell them. The creature that had worn them, the ugly thing we dropped the house on, had smelled bad, but in a really interesting way, like the corner of the barn where they shovel all the horse poop.

Dorothy packed a basket with some dry hard crackers that tasted almost as bad as dog food. And she found a box of dried-up dark things that looked like shriveled Junebugs but

without the crunchy coating. While she packed, I kept hopping up and down, barking "Pork chop, pork chop," but she misunderstood and picked up half a loaf of bread instead.

Humans are so slow! Did I have to spell it out for her? I decided I did. But just as I started to twist my tail into the shape of a P, she nudged me toward the door. My disappointment about the food was quickly forgotten when I realized she had set the shiny shoes down near the door. Now I could finally find out what they smelled like!

Scampering over, I stuck my nose down inside the nearest one and took a deep whiff. Everything got blurry for a moment as I inhaled the scent of frog water, snakeskin and dried roots I could not even begin to name. What could possibly smell like all of the those things at the same time? It was a powerful combination, and as soon as I felt normal again, I was ready for another sniff. The second time, the aroma was even more intense.

As I leaned in for a third sniff, Dorothy snatched the shoes away. I stared at her in disbelief as she kicked off her torn-up loafers. Was she going to put on the creepy frogwater shoes?

She was. Before I could utter a single bark of protest, she slid the shiny shoes onto her feet. Oh, no! Now Dorothy would turn into a dark, shriveled smelly thing like the one we'd crushed with our house. Desperate to show her her mistake, I rolled over onto my back and stuck my paws up in the air to demonstrate what could happen to her if she kept the shoes.

She thought I just wanted a tummy rub.

Fortunately, whatever magic was in those shoes did not seem to affect her because she still smelled like Dorothy.

After a minute, she shooed me outside, stepped out, locked the door and put the key in the pocket of her dress. Then she started for the brick road, and I followed.

The Lampshade Lady was gone, but the others were outside talking in low voices and watching us suspiciously, as if they expected us to steal the bricks out of the road rather than walk on them. I turned my backside toward them and farted in their general direction.

The road was only about fifty steps away. It was wide enough for two horses, if they were harnessed close together, and it was made of crumbly old brick that left dust on my paws. Dorothy's new shoes made a clicking sound on the bricks. Actually, one of her shoes made a clicking sound. The other was more of a clopping sound. Click, clop, click, clop—I thought I would go crazy from all the noise.

So, instead of staring at the shining shoes or the road ahead of me, I tried to distract myself by looking at the countryside. It was flat like Kansas but with beautiful trees all around. I hadn't had time to mark any since we'd arrived, so I was hoping Dorothy would take a break soon. She's a little taller than me—okay, a lot taller—and I could barely keep up. If I stopped to claim a tree, I might lose her.

After a while, we came out of the forest into a village of odd little round houses. The people-who-can't-quite-reach-things who lived there stopped working and stared at me as if they'd never seen a dog before. I started barking just to see if I could scare them.

They laughed.

I hurried back to Dorothy.

On the other side of the village were fields of corn just like in Kansas. Big black crows circled lazily through the air and landed in great cackling clusters, just like in Kansas. And up on a stick in the closest field was a figure stuffed with straw in the shape of a person, just like in Kansas. I think it was supposed to scare away the crows, but I never saw any reason why birds would be afraid of a pile of straw that didn't move.

Then I nearly jumped out of my fur. This stuffed pile of straw did move. It nodded, and winked at Dorothy. I'm not making this up. It even said something in that weird language people use.

The nod could have just been a trick of the wind, but the wink? And the talking? No, there was something really strange about that straw man. It was haunted, full of ghosts just waiting to snatch our souls and take us off to the land of endless bubble baths.

"Dorothy!" I barked. "We've got to get away from this thing!"

She stopped in her tracks. "Did you talk?"

"Yes!" I wagged my tail like mad. At last! She could understand me. After all these years of miscommunication. "We need to get away from—"

She waved for me to be quiet. "Toto, hush, I can't hear what he's saying."

What *he* was saying? What about what *I* was saying? Since he was a haunted pile of straw, whatever he was saying would be a lie designed to trap her so he could steal her soul. What I was saying was much more important.

"Run!" I barked.

Since the straw man was attached to a pole, I didn't think we'd have to work too hard to get out of its reach. But just in case, after we'd run about twenty steps or so, I turned around to make sure it hadn't followed.

It hadn't.

Neither had Dorothy.

While I was making a very sensible escape, she stood in front of the thing, talking to it as if it were Auntem's cousin who had come for a Sunday visit. And then, to my horror, she reached up behind the thing and unhooked it from the pole.

"No," I barked frantically as I ran back. "Don't let him loose!"

But it was too late. The haunted pile of straw was now free to chase us or trap us or whatever it planned to do. Though I have to admit, the straw guy didn't look too dangerous at first, because as soon as Dorothy let him off the hook, he crumpled to the ground in a heap and just lay there, all tangled and twitching.

I kind of felt sorry for him—for a moment.

Then Dorothy reached out to help him stand up.

"Come down the hello brick road with us," she said to him. "Something the lizard can give you legs."

We were following this road to get to a lizard with extra legs? I wasn't sure this was a good idea at all.

The tangled Strawman laughed. "I have legs," he said. "What I need is a train."

"I'm sure the lizard can give you a train," Dorothy assured him. "So, come with us."

She promised that without any hesitation. I wondered for a moment if the lizard somewhere down that brick road could give me a pork chop.

Wait, did she said the lizard could give the straw guy a train? Or had she said "plane?" Either way, if the lizard could give us some major transportation, maybe we really could get back to Kansas.

But no, that made no sense. Lizards might have extra legs, but they didn't have planes or trains or even pork chops. Obviously, those shiny shoes *were* having some effect on Dorothy.

And anyway, even if it had a plane, the trip to see the lizard wouldn't be worth it if it meant we had to bring this haunted pile of straw along with us. He could barely even walk—he wavered and wobbled all around as if he'd never used his legs before. And that made sense because stuffed guys made out of straw aren't supposed to walk and talk. I tell you, this was *not* normal.

But Dorothy didn't seem at all worried. She just led him out to the brick road as if she escorted talking bags of straw every day of the week.

I wasn't going to stand for it. I could rip this guy to shreds with my bare teeth, and I'd do it, too, rather than see Dorothy fall under the spell of his evil magic. With lightning speed, I ran forward, grabbed hold of his leg and pulled with all my might.

Instead of being grateful, Dorothy scolded me.

"Let go, Toto!" she said sharply. It was the mean voice she hardly ever used. The voice she'd used when I was chasing

the chickens. I probably deserved it then—I knew I wasn't supposed to chase those old featherbrains around. Yeah, Dorothy was right to scold me then.

But not now. Not when I was trying to save her from evil she had yet to understand. I couldn't believe she was being so foolish. Did she trust that walking itch-bag more than me?

Hurt and disappointed, I slunk back into the shadow of the tall cornstalks.

Dorothy turned away and started jabbering to the strawman. He laughed as he stuffed straw back into his pant leg. Then the two of them started down the brick road without even glancing back to see if I followed.

I did, of course. Not too closely, because I didn't want the unsteady strawbag to step on me, but I watched his every move. When he turned on Dorothy, I would catch him. And then she would realize she should have trusted me rather than him.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

Chapter 5

I couldn't tell if the scarecrow was completely stuffed with straw because I hadn't had the chance to give him a thorough sniff. But he definitely had straw where his brains were supposed to be because he acted like he had less sense than the corn he had been guarding. When we came to a place in the road where the bricks were missing, I jumped over the hole and Dorothy walked around it. Not Itchman. He stepped right into it, tripped and fell. I could understand his being a bit clumsy, but he did this over and over, getting back up with a laugh each time.

Finally, it was time to stop and eat. Dorothy stepped over to a tree stump, sat and put her basket on her lap. I knew she couldn't pull anything really good out of it, since she'd hadn't put anything much good in to begin with, but even not-good food is better than no food at all.

She handed the strawman a piece of bread.

"I don't eat," he said.

Well, that made sense. His mouth was painted on. And if he did eat anything, it would probably be straw rather than bread.

Which left more for us.

"Oh, okay." Dorothy nodded toward me. "Something feed it to Toto, then."

I hurried over to him eagerly and opened my mouth, but the strawman tried to put the food in my left ear! Even if he didn't eat anything himself, he should know from watching

the crows that a mouth has a purpose that's much more important than making noise.

I jumped up to grab the bread from his hand, thus demonstrating the proper use of a mouth. My lunch was gone in two gulps. Then, while Dorothy talked to the strawman about Kansas and Auntem and Unclehenry, I prowled around the clearing where they sat, sniffing for signs of danger.

Since we'd left the cornfields where the scary straw bag had joined us, the country had grown more wild. There were fewer farms, and I saw no people, not regular-sized or the ones-who-can't-quite-reach-things. Even the trees looked less inviting than the ones we'd seen earlier. They were gnarled and scraggly, and had branches like twisted arms waiting to snatch up unwary puppies who strayed too far from their mothers.

I used to wish we had more trees in Kansas, but now I would have traded just about anything to be back there, even if I never got to mark another tree again. I guess you don't realize how much you like your home until you go away. There's no place like it.

We walked all afternoon. The gnarled trees grew closer together, until they formed a dark, twisted canopy overhead. Dorothy began to stumble, and her steps were less certain, as if she couldn't see where she was going. I dashed out in front, barking to show I would guide her, since I can see better in the dark than she can. She leaned on the strawman instead.

Dorothy needed to rest.

I needed to rest.

Toto's Tale
by K. D. Hays

I can sleep anywhere, but Dorothy needed a house, so I started to search for one. By the time I finally found a tiny cabin, I was almost asleep on my paws. I smelled the cabin long before any of us saw it, of course. Wood cut into planks is dried out, not fresh like the wood in trees. I could smell ashes, too, the remains of an old cooking fire. And something else...was that frog water?

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)