

The Whiskers Gang



Jenny Uzelac

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THE WHISKERS GANG

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Chapter 1

Tuesday morning started out just like every other morning, but it wouldn't remain that way for very long. Mermilo, a strikingly handsome purebred golden retriever, had an appointment with the dog groomer to get his coat trimmed and shampooed, and his nails clipped and manicured. He had a very important dinner date that night with the adorable poodle of his dreams who just so happened to live right across the street from his house.

As Mermilo started down the sidewalk to his favorite salon, Clausen's Clipper Clinic, his mood swelled with happiness and anticipation at how debonair he would look this evening as he would proudly trot alongside Miss Penny Purelove. His imagination began to wander. The crisp night air would ruffle his finely trimmed fur as he gazed at his beautiful companion. Her lashes would be blinking rapidly, while her eyes would be shimmering, reflecting the glow from the streetlights above. Her dainty, perfectly fashioned nails would make an elegant clicking rhythm as she pranced down the sidewalk upon her neatly groomed paws. They would both regard each other with admiring eyes. It would be the most glorious night of his dreams.

He had anxiously waited for months, trying to muster up the nerve to invite the curly-haired canine out for an evening on the town. There had been many times he started across the street only to retrace his steps because he lost every ounce of courage; his words would start to evaporate from his brain, his mouth would dry up like the sands of Death Valley, and he would start to tremble. Yes, it had been a strenuous several months until he finally decided to take the plunge and pop the question. So with all that in mind, can you blame him for wanting to look his "dog show best", as they say in the canine world?

For days and days he had anticipated how the evening would proceed, and the night was finally here. But he still had a serious problem to solve. Where would he take her? Perhaps they could get a reservation at Dagwood's Dog Biscuits Divine. No, their cuisine was too dry and overly crunchy. It would only create embarrassing crumbs upon both of their immaculately groomed coats.

Maybe they should try Baileys' Burger Bits. They had just recently been given a four star rating for catering to the canine cuisine in "Dog Diner's Directory", a weekly news guide for the trendiest canine bistros. Unfortunately, upon further thought, that also became a "no way", as their entrees were too juicy and runny and he surely didn't want to mess up his or her fresh grooming. He would really have to think this one through in order to make a huge impression on the little curly-haired poodle.

As he sauntered down Hazelnut Street towards Clausen's Clipper Clinic, his mind was heavily preoccupied in another world, totally oblivious to his surroundings.

All of a sudden, out of nowhere, everything went pitch black and his hearing became extremely muffled. His head was completely enveloped with some strange mesh-type dark colored material, pressing down heavily on his neck and restraining him so he couldn't move his head or body. He couldn't see a thing. What in the world was happening?

He struggled to breathe through his nose and mouth, his thoughts scrambling for answers as to what his next step should be. Was the world crumbling in on him or was he

just experiencing a nightmare? If this was a nightmare, it was one he was definitely fighting his hardest to escape.

While he struggled to become free from whatever monster was holding him down, he realized he was being dragged across the sidewalk, his surrounding world still black as night. He could barely make out stifled voices. One? No, two deep voices; definitely, two men. They were discussing how to lift him. But lift him to where? Soon, his question was answered. A large coarse-feeling piece of “something” was abruptly slid between the sidewalk and his backside. With a jolt, he was violently hoisted into the air and dumped into an abyss. A loud slam echoed through his ears and the voices became even more distant.

Fear started coursing through his veins. What was happening? Who did these voices belong to? What did they want with him? Didn't they know he had a very important evening ahead of him with the pooch of his dreams? All of this nonsense was putting him far behind schedule.

The floor of whatever he was laying upon started to rumble and vibrate uncomfortably below his body. He must be in a trunk of a car, he thought frantically. He knew the sound of a car from the many times he had accompanied his master for a jaunt in the country. Oh, how he loved riding in automobiles! His master would roll down the windows and Mermilo would stick his big furry head out the passenger side, feeling the rush of cool wind whipping through his cheeks. His big jowls would rustle against the force of the air, allowing the drool to fly out of his mouth, hopefully not hitting the car behind them, and Mermilo would feel free and fresh.

A good car ride was one of his favorite pastimes. Unfortunately, it certainly wasn't a favorite when he was trapped in the trunk. This space was dark, cramped and very uncomfortable. Oh, how he wished he was in the front seat right now with his master.

The car started moving, but poor Mermilo could not tell which direction he was heading. How could this be happening? The poor retriever was just minding his own business, making his way to get groomed and gussied up for his exciting evening with the poodle of his dreams. Why me? Why?

As he lay in the trunk feeling panicked and forlorn, the car continued to speed further and further away from Mermilo's original destination, towards an unknown location.

Chapter 2

Clausen's Clipper Clinic was bustling that morning and full of excited customers. Terriers, hounds, wiener dogs, Pekingese...pooches of all shapes, sizes and colors were patiently waiting their turn to be made into the beautiful canines of their innermost dreams. Many were regular customers at their regularly scheduled times.

Mermilo had been a devoted client for more than three years, never missing an appointment. In fact, Mermilo was always early.

"Fifteen minutes early is being on time", was his motto. So, when it was ten minutes past his scheduled appointment time, Cheryl, his stylist, became alarmed. That wasn't at all characteristic of the retriever.

"I wonder what could have happened or where he is?" she thought.

From somewhere deep inside her sub-conscience, a tiny voice kept urging her to call his house and find out why he had been delayed. He never missed an appointment. She knew how much he prided himself on his personal hygiene and appearance. She walked over to the counter where the phone was sitting, picked it up, and dialed Mermilo's number. A gentleman answered the phone.

"Hello? This is Stan. Can I help you?"

"Hello Mr. Dudley. This is Cheryl at Clausen's Clipper Clinic. Mermilo had a scheduled grooming appointment today, and he is ten minutes late. I am calling to find out if he is on his way. He is usually early, but he has not shown up yet. That is very unlike him."

"My. That is very unlike him." Mr. Dudley answered, showing concern in his voice. "He is always such a prompt individual. I had better get in the car and search for him. I will let you know what I find out. Thanks so much for calling."

Mr. Dudley carefully hung up the phone. He stood quietly, scratching the back of his head, deep in thought. Mermilo would never make an appointment and not show up without any notice.

Could he have gotten sidetracked? Was it possible he had stopped to talk to a friend? Maybe he had encountered someone who had asked for a hand with a task. Even so, Mermilo would not be late for an appointment.

Still scratching his head, Mr. Dudley quickly grabbed his car keys and his hat off the front hall table, and headed out the door. He had a strange feeling in his stomach that something was not quite right, and he had to get to the bottom of it immediately. Time was of the essence.

Chapter 3

The trunk rattled and shook, tossing Mermilo from side to side. Every muscle in his body ached and the odor of dirt, sweat and gasoline filled his nostrils, making his head throb even more than it already did. Why would someone want to do this to him? He was known in the town as “the gentle giant”. Mermilo always went out of his way to help anyone or anything in need.

As a matter of fact, one sunny afternoon a few weeks earlier, the tomcat that lived next door had cornered a small terrified mouse that had been trespassing underneath a rosebush in the dark depths of the cat’s backyard. Mermilo, who had been casually waltzing down the street, suddenly heard

desperate cries and pleas for mercy. Naturally, “the gentle giant” gallantly rushed to the scene to administer help to the one in need.

Of course, the cat had not been overly excited to see Mermilo emerge through the back gate. On the other hand, the mouse was thrilled to death (no pun intended). After many minutes of debate and diplomatic discussion as to why mice were full of cholesterol and not a very healthy diet choice for felines, the cat grudgingly agreed to grant the mouse his freedom. The mouse was forever grateful to “the gentle giant”. Mermilo, on the other hand, had to pay heavily for his heroic behavior by promising to hand over his juicy beefy-burger bits dinner to the tomcat for the next week, seeing as how he had helped the cat’s gourmet meal escape. Oh well. It was definitely worth it, to save the life of a fellow animal friend.

The car turned one direction then another, confusing Mermilo even more as to what direction they were headed the vehicle drove on for what seemed like hours. Well, it seemed like hours when your four legs were bound together, your eyes were covered and you could hardly breathe, let alone being cramped into an uncomfortable, small, smelly, dirty area. Yes, he was pretty sure it had been hours.

All he could think about was that at this very moment some other dog was taking his appointment time. That was unacceptable. He would be a longhaired, smelly, dirty retriever at dinner this evening. The beautiful curly-haired brown-eyed poodle would glare at him in disgust, trying to determine why she had ever agreed to go out with a disgusting mangy mutt like him in the first place. That was not how he wanted the first evening, of possibly the rest of his life, to go. *I have to get out of this predicament, but how? I need a plan and I need one fast.*

Chapter 4

Stan Dudley jumped into his car as fast as lightning, quickly started the car, jammed the gears into reverse, and backed down the driveway. Something was not right and he had to put the pieces of the puzzle together. He shifted the car into drive, and went speeding down the street; his eyes darted right to left, searching for a large golden-colored mass wandering along the sidewalk. Nothing fitting that description could be spotted on his street, so he veered left onto Hazelnut Street, the route that Mermilo most likely would have taken to get to Clausen's Clipper Clinic. So far, Mermilo was nowhere in sight. Panic started to grip Mr. Dudley's stomach. Mermilo was his pride and joy, his companion, his sidekick, his best friend.

They had met four years earlier. Mr. Dudley had decided that a dog would brighten up his life, so he had headed down to the local animal shelter in hopes of finding a true friend and loyal companion.

He had looked at just about every kind of dog imaginable. He had petted miniature schnauzers, large collies, and average sized mutts. He'd snuggled dachshunds and teeny tiny yorkies, but it wasn't until he had come to the last cage in the room that his heart stood still.

Sitting inside, on a bare concrete floor shivering, was a cute cuddly golden retriever puppy. His eyes were drooped with sadness and you could tell by the look on his face his heart ached from loneliness. He had been abandoned by a family that had moved away. The shelter employees weren't quite sure if he had accidentally been left behind, or if he had been forgotten on purpose. Either way, it didn't matter. Mr. Dudley knew as soon as they locked eyes with each other and the pup's tail started to wag that this dog was the one for him.

Mr. Dudley continued driving through town searching for his dear friend, but to no avail. He even stopped and asked some townspeople if they had seen Mermilo earlier this morning. No one could recall spotting the big dog trotting down the street. Mr. Dudley was heartbroken. What direction should he go now? No one had seen him, so he could be anywhere. Sadly, Stan Dudley drove down the street, looking and searching not only with his eyes and ears, but with his heart.

Chapter 5

Mr. Dudley had just driven by when out from behind an old maple tree, a bushy, longhaired, sandy colored feline lazily sauntered out and plopped his fuzzy behind down on the concrete sidewalk.

“Hhmmmmm,” he thought to himself. “Interesting. I wonder why everyone is looking for Mermilo? He’s not really that fantastic or special. For some reason everyone always seems to think he is. Oh well. Too bad they didn’t ask me. I spotted him earlier. He didn’t look like he was enjoying himself too much. I wonder what those two burly brutes wanted with him? I guess it’s none of my business. If they aren’t going to take the time to ask me, I’m not going to waste my breath telling them what I observed. It’s too bad for poor old Mermilo.”

The cat began meandering slowly down the sidewalk back to his storm sewer. You see, Fats Furball, as he was known on the streets and in the sewer, was a homeless one, with no food nor shelter...nor love from anyone. He relied on himself for everything he needed in life. He had never had a human of his own. He was born wild. His mother had been a cat on the prowl, and this was now his lifestyle, too.

Oh sure, sometimes he wished that some human would take him in, give him shelter and food, and most of all love. Yes, he had several garages in the neighborhood that left their doors up a tad bit so he could squeeze under them to get out of the rain or snow, or escape the heat in the summer. Yet he didn’t really have a home to call his very own, with a human to pet his neck, or to curl up on their lap, or to purr to like a jet engine, or to snuggle up with at night at the foot of their bed. No, he was all alone, wandering aimlessly throughout the town’s storm pipes and cold barren streets.

Still the last thing he wanted from anyone was pity. In fact, he was a rough, old tomcat who could take care of himself. Come to think of it, he didn’t need some mushy, sensitive, emotional human to tie him down. He was free to come and go as he pleased. He had the greatest life! Or, at least that’s what he kept telling himself deep down inside.

With that in mind, he surely wasn’t going to go out of his way to help some spoiled dog that didn’t know the true meaning of survival. No sir. Mermilo was on his own.

“Hmmp.”

And with that the old cat was out of sight.

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