

Toby's Story

**A Dog's Purpose
Puppy Tale**

W. Bruce Cameron

Illustrations by
Richard Cowdrey



**A Tom Doherty Associates Book
New York**

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

TOBY'S STORY

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The first smells were exactly what I expected, even if I didn't know *why* I expected them: Warm fur. Sweet milk. That was my mother, who smelled like safety and food and love. I could also sense my brothers and sisters, who smelled—well, a lot like me.

We all huddled close together. There was comfort in the closeness and in the heat of furry bodies. Even if a brother was sleeping on my head or a sister was sucking on my ear, I didn't mind. We were together. That was all that mattered.

But even then, there was another smell. Sometimes I would lift my head as far up as my weak little neck could get it, and twitch my nose, and there it would be.

It was a smell of fresh, moving air. It was a smell of green things that were full of life. It was a smell that made me want to know more about it.

But I had to get bigger and stronger before I was ready to find out what this other smell might be.

In a few days, my eyes blinked open for the first time. I saw a great big head with soft brown fur and a white blaze down the nose. Dark eyes looked at me fondly, and a wet tongue came out and licked me all over, from nose to tail, in a few swipes. That was my mother.

I loved her. She was wonderful!

When I looked away from my mother, I saw puppies all around me. Their fur was brown and black in splotches. My mother licked them, too, and we all wiggled forward to get a turn at her delicious milk.

Then we fell asleep. Being awake was hard work.

I liked it, though. Each time my eyes opened, I was able to stay awake longer. I was able to see more of what surrounded me. My family and I lived in a dark box with an open door. Through that door I could sometimes see glimpses of bright sky. And I could smell that exciting smell, the one that made my nose twitch each time it wafted my way.

Now and then a man came to the door. He would squat down and talk gently to my mother, and sometimes she got up and walked away from my brothers and sisters and me to greet him and wag her tail.

“Good girl, Sadie,” the man would say to my mother, rubbing her head. “You’re such a good mom.”

That was how I found out that my mother’s name was Sadie.

At first, all of us pups would peep and squeal forlornly for our mother to come back, but before long, we could get up on our feet and stagger over to greet the man as well.

I had thought that my mother was huge, but this man was gigantic! His hands were as big as my whole body, and they smelled amazing. I could not stop sniffing and licking them. I picked up smells of other animals, and something deep and rich and mysterious, and more of that fabulous fresh odor that I loved so much.

Where did all these smells come from? From outside the door, I was sure. I was determined to find out.

As soon as my legs were strong enough, I lurched out the door. Both of my brothers and all three of my sisters piled out after me. Two sisters bumped into my tail and tipped me forward onto my nose.

That’s when I found out that the mysterious smell on the man’s hands had been dirt—the stuff that was now all over my face. It was superb! I loved it! I sniffed hard, licked my mouth, and realized that dirt does not taste as good as it smells.

Oh well. I wobbled back up and looked around.

Later I learned that the place I was seeing for the

first time was called the Ranch. To me, at that moment, it was outside. Outside was big. And very interesting. I turned my head this way and that, taking in the sights and sounds and smells all around me.

We were in a space closed in on all sides by fences made of wire. Inside our space was dirt and grass and bowls with water. One of my sisters had already fallen into one of the bowls. Inside the space, also, was the little shed where my brothers and sisters and I had been born.

Outside of the wire, I could see more dirt and more grass. Far away was another pen with very big, long-legged dogs inside it. One of them actually had a person riding on its back. Astonishing!

Through the wire also came that scent that I had always longed to know more about. It was the scent of fresh air moving fast enough to ruffle my fur and make my ears sway. It carried other odors along with it—the green, living smell I had already noticed, along with the smells of other animals, fur, breath, sweat, dung, and urine. But there was something about the air, that sweet, warm air, that made me want to run.

So I did. I raced around the pen as fast as my short legs could take me. As soon as my brothers and sisters saw me running, they yipped with excitement and chased after me, dashing forward, stumbling, falling

down, getting back up. Our tongues hung out, and our tails wagged madly. Pretty soon, there was no way to tell if they were chasing me or if I was chasing them, but it was all so marvelous I didn't care.

Running! I loved running! It was wonderful!

In time, we were so exhausted that we all had to fall in a heap and take a nap. But after that, we all burst out of our house every chance we got and ran as much as we could.

The man came to see us often in the pen. I found out that his name was Walt, and after a while, I realized that he lived in a very large shed of his own—a house, people call it—nearby. He would come out of that building every morning and head right for us. He had a power that astounded me—he could cause a section of the fence to swing wide open, letting him walk right into our pen. No matter how hard I tried, I never could figure out a way to do that myself.

Walt would step through the fence, sit on the ground, and talk to my mother, Sadie. She'd lick his face and sniff his clothes before hurrying back to check on us.

Walt would stay sitting on the ground, and my brothers and sisters and I always raced over to him. We piled into his lap and gnawed on his shirt and licked his fingers while he laughed.

Once, his hands caught me and held me belly-up for

a few moments, while I wiggled indignantly. It was not comfortable, plus I couldn't snuggle into his shirt while he held me like that.

Walt chuckled and turned me back over. He held me up close to his face. I licked his nose and his chin and as much of his cheek as I could reach.

"Okay, boy," he said with a chuckle. "Toby. I think you're going to be Toby."

He set me down on the dirt again, but I clambered back up onto his lap while he picked up one of my sisters the same way he'd picked me up. I wasn't fooled, though. I knew I was his favorite.

"Tabitha," he said, putting my sister down. I seized hold of his shirt between my teeth and wrestled with it while he picked up more puppies. My other two sisters were named Tamara and Tess. My brothers became Titus and Timothy.

It didn't matter what we were called. What mattered was that we were together and that we could run every day, smelling the remarkable fresh fragrance that made my tail wag so madly it just about knocked me over into the dirt.

I loved that smell so much that after Walt left, I pressed my nose into a corner of our pen and stood there, sniffing as hard as I could. The fence sagged a little under my weight, and that's when I noticed a gap between a post and the wire attached to it.

I pushed my nose into that gap. It opened a little wider.

My whole head followed my nose. I shoved with my back legs and scabbled with my front claws. And then I was through! I was outside the fence! I was doing Walt's trick!

My brothers and sisters—Tabitha, Tamara, Tess, Titus, and Timothy—came racing over to see what had happened to me. It only took them a few moments to wiggle through the fence as well. Our mother came to the gap and put her nose through, but she was too big to fit. She barked impatiently, warning us to come back.

But we couldn't return to the pen. There was so much running to be done!

I dashed this way and that across thick grass that was tall enough to tickle my belly. Dandelions batted my head, and a long, skinny bug with powerful legs sprang up right in front of my nose. I stopped and sat down hard, and Tess crashed into me. I barked at the bug as it whirred away into the grass.

I chased it and Tess chased me. Chasing things was the best!

I couldn't find the bug again, but it didn't matter that much, because I was suddenly brought up against another pen with a wire fence like ours. There were no puppies inside this fence, however. Something different

was in there—feathery animals that each had two scratchy, scaly feet.

They were jerky, pecky birds that I would one day learn were called chickens.

I barked at them to tell them I was Toby. To tell them they could come out and play and run with us. But the chickens didn't seem to get the message. One of them shook out her wings and stretched out her neck and suddenly rushed at the fence—right at me!

I yelped. She was bigger than I was! And she had a very sharp beak that pecked at my toes through the wires.

I ran away. That chicken did not know how to play! But she was in a pen and I was out, so it didn't matter. Nothing mattered but tearing across the soft grass with my brothers and sisters.

That delicious smell poured into my nose as I ran. It was the smell of the whole world when I was running as fast as I could, the most wonderful thing in a place full of wonders.

I was so busy with this smell that I didn't even notice another scent creeping up on me as I ran. So I almost thumped right into a strange animal crouched in the grass. It was female; I could smell that. It had wide yellow eyes that stared at me, and it narrowed them as I got close.

It looked . . . interesting.



My brother Timothy was right behind me, and he liked this new animal, too. I think he noticed, just as I did, the way her back legs were bunched underneath her, and the way the muscles all along her back were tight. She was ready to jump. To spring away.

That meant we could chase her!

I slowed down. Step by step, I went closer to this new animal. Timothy was right beside me. Any moment now, she was going to run away. I just knew it. Another step closer . . . another . . .

The animal had triangular ears that stood up straight on her head. But when I took another step, she put those ears back flat against her skull and opened her mouth. I thought she was about to bark, but instead she let out a strange, threatening hiss. Her tiny teeth looked sharp!

It was such a confusing sound, I stopped, trying to figure out what she meant. Timothy didn't stop, though. He kept going. Another step . . . another . . .

The animal's fur fluffed up on her back, making her look suddenly bigger. I began to think that Timothy might not have the right idea here.

Suddenly, the animal let out a screech that hurt my ears. Then she did something truly surprising.

She didn't run away! She didn't let us chase her. Instead, she shot out a paw and batted Timothy hard on the nose.

He was so surprised, he fell over. I hurried to his

side and sat on him. It just seemed like the right thing to do. He wiggled out from under me and chewed on my leg, and when we both looked up, the animal was calmly licking the paw she had used to swat Timothy.

She clearly had no idea how to play. We decided to punish her by ignoring her. I chased Timothy back toward the chickens, and he turned around and chased me back toward the pen. Walt was waiting there, and he scooped me up in his big hands.

“Escape artist, huh?” he asked me, and he plopped me back inside the pen. Timothy trotted in a few seconds later. My other littermates were already there, curled up with our mother for some dinner. “And I guess you learned to leave the cat alone.”

I barreled over to join my family. I loved my mother’s milk as much as I loved running through the grass with that wind smell in my nose. I loved discovering the chickens and the other animals. I loved falling asleep in a warm pile with a brother on either side of me and a sister’s head in the middle of my back.

I loved everything.

Except the cat.