

## KATIE UP AND DOWN THE HALL

### CANINE COP



The third floor of our building was now a noisy one, with “the kid,” as I nicknamed Ryan, and “the child,” his canine companion, racing around from one apartment to another.

After five years of Katie being the center of attention, having Ryan on the floor was a complete and welcome novelty, “almost as much fun as raising a puppy,” I joked to Pearl.

“And he can talk too,” she laughed, as entranced by her new charge as I was.

Pearl loved taking on this new role, spoiling her “boy” by whipping up wickedly delicious dinners—tomato and Vidalia onion salads, paprika chicken cutlets, fried zucchini and

squash, mashed potatoes with garlic, all of it topped off with home-baked apricot-and-plum tarts or chocolate pies.

"Mmmmm!" Ryan grinned merrily, only some of the food getting into his mouth, while the rest of it was smudged all over his face or on the floor.

Voracious Katie, perched on a green dining chair right next to his, would crane her neck to the right, lick the crumbs and ice-cream off Ryan's face, scour his empty plate, and then clean up the floor as well. Ryan giggled with delight at her industry.

On nights when Pearl made spaghetti, Ryan played one of his favorite games, holding each long strand of pasta way above Katie's head, just to torture her with suspense, then dropping it into her mouth, one piece at a time.

"That's my girl," said Pearl, "a very good vacuum cleaner."

Unlike Pearl, who reveled in babysitting and fussing over Ryan, Arthur was somewhat less enthusiastic. He was increasingly ailing physically, more susceptible to colds and respiratory infections than ever. He suffered from severe pain related to arthritis and shortness of breath caused by a heart condition.

Both challenges left him enervated and often depressed. So he mostly stayed indoors in his blue pajamas and plaid bathrobe, reading and watching TV, and, of course, snuggling with Katie.

Some mornings, Ryan would park himself in Arthur's twin bed, eager to watch his favorite cartoons. That's when the trouble began.

"The purple dinosaur!" Ryan demanded, announcing his preference for *Barney*. He also loved *Power Rangers*. But "Artur," as Ryan mispronounced his name, liked neither.

As John later remembered, "Arthur would get so mad when 'the kid' would watch cartoons in his bed because he wanted to watch the races."

Horses or cartoons—that was the question.

Sometimes Arthur did tolerate the dreaded cartoons, and watched absently as he fed his “girl” small chunks of apple as they stretched out together. Other times, he’d had enough.

“Stop changing channels, now!” shouted Arthur, taking the remote control back from Ryan, determined to have his way. And so it went, with the three-year-old and the eighty-three-year-old arguing over channels until Ryan was dismissed from the bedroom, dejected, angry, sometimes crying.

“Ryan, come to me,” soothed Pearl, leading him over to the dining table where she began teaching him the basics of Go Fish and War, distracting him from cartoons. There they sat, playing cards while Katie watched, sometimes snapping up a card with her mouth and chewing on it. “Pa-Re-El!” Ryan shouted. “Tell her to stop!” And Katie would guiltily drop it.

Meanwhile, Arthur, feeling mild regret, would eventually come out of the bedroom holding up Katie’s rubber ball, a peace offering. At this, my dog would immediately run to the front door and scratch it, asking to be let out.

Ryan would be in a much better mood—and off they all would go, Katie leading the way for a down-the-hall race with Ryan (with Arthur as referee).

“Now watch the ball,” instructed Arthur, staring at his young charges. Both Katie and Ryan were on high alert, their eyes following his arm as he teased them with his warm-up. And then, he’d hurl the rubber ball to the far end of the hallway. Katie and Ryan took off in a flash, chasing after it.

With Ryan on her heels, and Pearl and Arthur cheering from their doorway, Katie galloped liked the wind, each and every time faster than Ryan. She nimbly scooped the ball up with her mouth, and then, without stopping at the hall’s end, looped back around for the return trip down to Arthur’s door,

where she dropped the ball at his feet, hoping he'd throw it again.

"Girlie, you're fast!" grinned Arthur, congratulating Katie with a biscuit.

"She got a head start," Ryan grumbled, racing to the door and demanding a rematch. So off they went again and again, until both boy and dog were completely winded.

Ryan was learning the art of being a good loser, while the "winner" promenaded in victory up and down the hall, having proved herself the alpha creature of the pack.



More than ever, our red-carpeted corridor was home base for Katie, her very own play space. To our seventeen neighbors along the hallway, who never socialized with one another, this public space meant little. But to Katie, it was her territory and frame of reference, the passageway connecting our three apartments.

I began to see that she instinctively used this hallway to glue us all together. She beckoned us up or down it with her head, in whatever direction suited her, and pulled us out of one apartment and into another. She was our canine traffic cop, a four-legged busybody telling us where she wanted us.

There she was at 6:00 p.m., racing down the hallway to pick up Ryan and herd him over to Pearl's for dinner. Then she'd make her way down to my apartment and scratch at my door, reminding me to come down as well.

After dinner, she'd race up and down the hall with Ryan again, with or without the ball, eventually herding him home to his apartment before returning to Pearl's to say good night—and then on home to me. She clocked more mileage than a car.

It was Katie—and only Katie—who could physically keep up with Ryan. "That's her job," joked John, "wearing Ryan out before bedtime."

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On nights when “Daddy John” came home late from the newspaper, he’d often find Ryan stretched out on Pearl’s living room couch, Katie on top of him, her paws protectively on his chest as the little boy slept.

And so, with her new friends down the hallway, Katie had expanded her role—not only a devoted companion to Arthur and Pearl, but also Ryan’s enthusiastic playmate and fierce protector.

This last role was vividly displayed one day at our elevator when an aggressive eighty-five-pound Labrador retriever came along and barked at Ryan in a threatening manner. Katie, all of twenty-eight pounds, sprang into action, moving in front of Ryan and growling ferociously at the large dog as she cut him off, unafraid, seemingly ready to rip out his throat. The Lab backed away.

No dog was going to harm Ryan while she was around.