

MARK RANDLE

# Smudge Dreams Big

*The Search for Somewhere*

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*For those who sometimes get lost on the way to somewhere  
important.*



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1

## The Dream



Smudge was on a mission. That's right. Smudge was really going places, and the world was his oyster. And Biscuit's—*obviously*. Biscuit was Smudge's dog, and Biscuit insisted on being mentioned in all important announcements. Absolutely nothing could stop them now. The adventure had begun. The winds of destiny were calling. The path was unfolding.

*Sort of.*

Well... actually, *no*. Not quite.

Smudge and Biscuit were still sitting on the doorstep of their house. They hadn't gone anywhere at all. Not even one teeny, tiny step. In fact, they'd probably gone backwards slightly, as Smudge was now leaning with his back against the door. Biscuit hadn't even finished his breakfast biscuit—although Smudge had definitely finished his.

But as soon as they knew where they were going—oh boy—were they going places. Great big wondrous places. Magical places. Places that made Smudge burst with excitement. The only problem was that they didn't know exactly where. Not precisely. Not “on a map” exactly.

“How,” you may be wondering, “can they know where they're going and also... *not?*” Well, let me explain.

Smudge had seen something. He had seen it in a dream. Not just any dream—the *Dream*.

It was a place, a vision... a home-but-not-a-home. A temple made with perfect balance and glowing shapes. Tall arches and steady pillars stood in perfect harmony. Round windows caught the light like moons. Across the walls, patterns curled and unfolded—circles within circles, spirals that seemed to turn without end, and glowing shapes Smudge didn't yet know the names for. The whole place seemed to breathe and shimmer, as if it were alive—just waiting for him. It was the Sanctuary of

Symmetry.

Smudge had never seen anything like it in his whole life. Not in books, not in the forest, not even in cloud shapes (and Smudge was an expert cloud-watcher). In the dream, the Sanctuary seemed to breathe and shimmer, as if it was alive—just waiting for him.

Smudge knew Biscuit had seen it too. *Dogs know these things.*

However, the *Dream* hadn't exactly come with directions. No map. No guide. No signpost pointing: *THIS WAY TO MYSTICAL TEMPLE*. All Smudge had was a feeling inside—a feeling so big and bright it filled his chest like warm sunshine.

All Smudge knew was that he had to get there, and he knew for sure that he would. He could *see* it. He could see himself and Biscuit at the Sanctuary. He could see it all plain as day right in front of him—not with his eyes, but with his heart and mind.

And for Smudge, that was enough. More than enough.

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## Decisions



Biscuit looked up at Smudge. Smudge looked down at Biscuit. It had quietly turned into a competition of who knew what they were doing the least. It was close—very close—but Smudge won. (He had years of practice.)

“Right,” Smudge said, brushing crumbs from his mouth. “One thing’s for sure... the Sanctuary of Symmetry isn’t *here*.”

“Woof!” Biscuit barked in full agreement.

“I guess we should just set off then,” Smudge continued.

“Woof!” Biscuit barked in full agreement once more.

“Every journey begins with a single step,” Smudge declared as he placed one foot very dramatically in front of him and marched down the garden path. Biscuit trotted behind, tail and hopes high.

*This is easy*, Smudge thought—until...

They reached the garden gate and stepped out.

Now came the tricky bit.

Left... or right?

Smudge stood very still, tapping his chin. Left looked sensible. Left looked tidy. Left looked like the sort of direction someone would choose if they wanted to make a proper decision—an adult decision.

*That’s me*, Smudge thought proudly. *Smudge the adult*.

“Left seems right,” he said confidently—though he did pause for a moment to wonder how left could possibly be right, but decided not to worry about it.

And so, with great seriousness, he turned left.

Biscuit, however, did *not*.

Smudge walked a few steps and glanced over his shoulder. “Come on, Biscuit! We are going left! Left is right!”

Biscuit looked at Smudge, quite rightly, as if Smudge was actually wrong. Then he planted himself like a tiny, furry statue

and stared down the right-hand path with deep dog seriousness.

Smudge took a few more steps. “Biscuit,” Smudge tried again, “this is the way...”

Biscuit moved not one inch. He was an excellent example of the opposite of moving.

This was all very strange. Biscuit usually followed Smudge everywhere—into cupboards, under tables, even once into a recycling bin (they nearly got recycled). But now? Now Biscuit just wasn’t interested.

Smudge squinted—first at Biscuit, then at the right-hand path. It didn’t look especially special. Just a path. A very ordinary path. No glowing signs of destiny. No magical butterflies. Nothing.

Smudge sighed. “Fine. I’ll come your way. But only because you’re cute and I love you.”

And just like that, Smudge about-turned, marched towards (and past) Biscuit, and headed down the right-hand path.

As he did, a quiet feeling fluttered inside him. *Hmm... I guess right does feel kind of right*, Smudge thought to himself. While he’d been busy trying to work everything out in his head, he hadn’t noticed how beautiful the right-hand path actually was. The trees seemed a little greener, the flowers a little brighter, and the sky above opened into a friendly blue.

When he glanced back toward the left-hand path, it already looked like it might rain.

Smudge straightened up at once and pretended this had been his plan all along. “Yes, well,” he said grandly, “I always knew right was right. How couldn’t it be?”

He looked back at Biscuit, already trotting confidently behind him. Not for the first time, Smudge had the feeling Biscuit had some secret sense that couldn’t be explained in woofs. Or

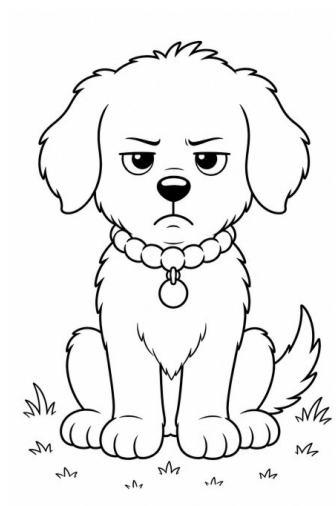
## DECISIONS

perhaps he was actually just keeping it to himself anyway. It was hard to tell.

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## The Journal



Smudge and Biscuit had been walking for what felt like at least seven hours. Possibly eight. Maybe nine.

Smudge wiped his brow dramatically. “This,” he declared, “is the longest journey anyone has ever taken. In the history of journeys.”

Biscuit gave him a look: *Stop being dramatic.*

Their house was still perfectly visible behind them.

Mum stood in the window, holding a cup of tea, watching them. She looked wonderfully proud of her brave little adventurer... who was currently nineteen steps from home. Smudge waved. Biscuit wagged. Mum waved back.

Smudge cleared his throat. “Perhaps we should... um... take a short break. We don’t want to overdo it, do we?”

Biscuit rolled his eyes but indicated his agreement by sitting down with a plop.

Smudge dropped onto the grass and swung his backpack round. “Let’s see what Mum packed.” Out came the sandwiches: two beautifully wrapped creations, triangular, symmetrical, crusts neatly cut off—Mum knew Smudge appreciated good geometry.

“Oh!” Smudge gasped. “What’s this?”

Hidden beneath the snacks was a small wrapped parcel. Smudge inspected it from every angle, then tore it open.

Inside was a blank journal with a neatly folded note tucked into the front:

*“For your adventure. Record everything you discover along the way for me.*

*—Mum”*

Smudge appreciated the thought but was not overly impressed—mainly because it required writing. Long, wordy writing. His absolute nemesis.

He closed the journal with a soft *whump*.

“Well, I suppose it doesn’t have to be perfect, does it? Let me see what I can do.”

Setting it aside, Smudge dug into the sandwiches. They were delicious. Too delicious. Smudge knew he shouldn’t eat them all at once. He absolutely knew. Mum had definitely intended them to last longer than five minutes.

But the sandwiches were so symmetrical. So perfect. So there.

“I’ll save half,” Smudge declared bravely.

He took a careful bite.

Then another.

Then a not-so-careful bite.

And suddenly both sandwiches—and half the snacks—were gone.

Biscuit stared at him in disbelief. His tail paused mid-wag.

Smudge shrugged.

Biscuit huffed through his nose, the universal dog sign for:  
*And where is mine?*

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## Chilly

### ***Journal Entry***

*You only find what you're looking for.*



The day had started wonderfully. In fact, it had started perfectly. Smudge and Biscuit were finally on their way—paws pattering, boots stomping, heads high. The sky was bright, the breeze was warm, and the path ahead stretched out like it had been rolled out especially for them.

“Nothing can stop us now,” Smudge said proudly.

Everything felt right. Everything felt easy. Everything felt... well... beautiful.

But journeys have a funny way of changing.

First, the warm breeze turned cool.

Then the cool turned cold.

Then the cold turned *very* cold.

Little clouds began to sneak across the sky, followed by their big, grey daddies. The colours slowly drained from the world. Even Smudge’s excitement dimmed slightly, which was quite impressive because Smudge was very committed to being excited.

Biscuit began to shiver. Smudge did too. Their tummies rumbled. Their toes tingled. Their backpacks—previously helpful—were now worryingly empty.

They stood together in the cold, the dark, the nothingness. It occurred to Smudge, somewhat belatedly, that they had not planned this very well.

“It could be worse,” Smudge told himself, in an attempt to feel better about the situation.

He was right. It started to rain.

“Don’t panic,” Smudge said, instantly panicking. “ARGH—don’t panic! Biscuit, whatever you do, do *NOT* panic.”

Smudge ran around in a tiny frantic circle with his hands in the air, screaming, “THIS IS FINE! TOTALLY FINE!”

Biscuit remained perfectly unpanicked, which was admirable.

And then, just when everything felt hopeless, Smudge turned to look back where they had come from... and froze.

A house.

A proper house.

Warm golden light poured from its windows. A small chimney puffed a perfect curl of smoke into the air—not a new fire, the steady smoke of something that had been burning a while. The whole thing stood there calmly, as if it had been waiting all along. As if it had always been there.

“Biscuit... was that there before?”

Biscuit tilted his head. He wasn't so sure.

Smudge wasn't sure either. How had they walked right past an entire house and not noticed?

Well, because they weren't looking for one then.

And now? *Now*, they definitely were.

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## Naughty

### ***Journal Entry***

*Things feel wrong for a reason.*



“Come on!” said Smudge, suddenly full of energy as he hurried toward the house. Biscuit trotted beside him, nose twitching with interest. Every few steps Biscuit glanced back at the cold and darkness behind them. A lovely warm house was better than THAT. What could possibly go wrong?

Up close, the house looked even nicer. The windows glowed in two perfect squares, and the roof sloped at such a satisfyingly precise angle that Smudge couldn’t help noticing it. Everything looked cosy, welcoming... and oddly arranged, like a picture someone had drawn very carefully.

Nothing seemed unusual at first glance, except for the curious strings and little ropes hung around the place—neat loops, tidy knots, braids that looked professional. Smudge didn’t know why, but they made the house feel... neat.

“Here goes nothing.” Smudge knocked on the door.

No answer.

He knocked again, louder this time.

Still nothing. No one was home.

As they stood there, the wind howled through the trees. Biscuit whimpered softly, shifting from paw to paw. Smudge’s stomach made an unhelpful grumbling noise.

Biscuit looked up at Smudge with an expression that said, *It looks warm, seems magical, and that is enough information for now.*

With a deep, hopeful breath, Smudge tried the handle.

*Crrrrreeeak...*

The door eased open all by itself, slowly and smoothly, as if it had been expecting them.

Smudge and Biscuit exchanged a look. It was a very specific look. A look that said: *This might be a terrible idea.*

But also: *We’re freezing, hungry, and out of biscuits, so...*

Smudge felt a tiny flutter of doubt in his chest, but the warm

air drifting out of the doorway wrapped around him like a soft blanket. And it smelled—just faintly—like something sweet.

They knew they shouldn't. They knew they really shouldn't... but they did.

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## Cookies

### ***Journal Entry***

*When things feel wrong, listen.*



The house was oddly perfect inside. It smelt amazing, and a lovely fire crackled in the hearth. Interestingly, a table stood in the centre of the room, set for two: two chairs, two cups, two plates. And in the middle sat a stack of fresh, warm, golden cookies.

Not three. Not one. *Two*.

“Someone must live here,” Smudge concluded.

Unsurprisingly, the room did not answer.

Biscuit was already sitting neatly in one of the chairs, tail wagging politely, as if waiting to be served. As you may imagine, he had a particular weakness for cookies.

“Biscuit,” Smudge warned, “we shouldn’t. Really. We don’t know—”

Then the smell hit him too.

Warm. Sweet. A little bit magical.

“Oh...” Smudge murmured. “Oh no. That smells delicious.”

His stomach rumbled loudly, as if to say, *I’ll take over the decisions from here, thank you.*

“Fine,” Smudge sighed as he climbed into the other chair.

“Just one. One tiny taste. One crumb.”

He reached out. Biscuit reached out. Their fingers and paws touched the warm cookies at the same time.

They lifted the cookies.

They looked each other in the eyes.

They slowly took a bite.

And—

**WHOOSH.**

The floor dropped.

The chairs vanished.

The table folded like paper.

Smudge tried to shout, caught in a chaotic whirlwind of ropes

and knots, “THIS WAS A TERRIBLE DECISION!”

But all that came out was:

“AaaaaaAAAHHH!”

Up they went.

Down they fell.

And then—

*SNAP.*

Everything stopped.

Smudge dangled upside down, swinging gently from his ankles. Biscuit dangled beside him, his little paws tied together in neat knots, swinging gently like a puzzled furry pendulum.

Confused, Smudge swallowed his mouthful of cookie and blinked. “Biscuit...?”

Biscuit gave a soft, embarrassed whimper.

They didn’t struggle. Instead they dangled in the calm resignation of the mildly naughty, who knew this was at least partly—all right, entirely—their own fault.

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## Truth

***Journal Entry***  
*Don't hide things.*



Smudge dangled. Biscuit dangled. They swung together in slow, tragic unison like two ornaments on a very confused Christmas tree.

“Well,” Smudge said at last, “this is new.”

They stared at each other, upside down and certainly perplexed. “Hmm, how do we—”

“Enjoy the truth cookies, did we?” interrupted a voice.

A figure stepped calmly into the centre of the room.

She wore a patchwork coat with frayed edges and a belt with all kinds of gadgets—neatly coiled ropes, mysterious tools, you name it. Her expression was unreadable—but faintly amused.

“Name’s Tether,” she said, resting her hands in her pockets. “It looks like you could use someone who knows their knots.”

Smudge gasped. “You set *the* cookie trap!”

“I didn’t set anything,” she said. “I just left a bit of rope lying around.”

She flicked her chin toward them. “You trapped yourselves.”

Smudge opened his mouth to protest... then shut it again. She had a point. In fact, she was *100% correct*.

“Hmmm,” Smudge muttered eventually as he swayed gently back and forth.

Tether raised an eyebrow. “Honestly. Leave a plate of truth cookies out and you’ll get all sorts in here.”

*Truth cookies*, Smudge thought. *Why does she keep saying that?*

Then Smudge felt something odd.

A tickle.

A bubbling in his chest.

A fizzing in his throat.

Oh no.

Not this.

Anything but *THIS*.

“I... I have a confession,” Smudge blurted uncontrollably.

He clapped his hands over his mouth.

Tether smiled wider. “Yes?”

Smudge shook his head frantically. He tried to stop himself. He tried to think of something else—clouds, triangles, broccoli, absolutely anything.

But the words burst out of him like fireworks:

“I ONCE ATE THE LAST CHEESE SANDWICH AND BLAMED BISCUIT!”

Biscuit barked in outraged betrayal.

“I’M SORRY!” Smudge wailed. “IT WAS TOO DELICIOUS, AND I PANICKED WHEN MUM GOT ANGRY!”

Biscuit swung upside down in sheer horror.

“And-and-and—” he gasped, trying and failing to stop. “I DON’T REALLY KNOW WHAT I’M DOING MOST OF THE TIME!”

“Oh yes,” Tether purred, “anything else?”

“I WAS SCARED OF THE DARK UNTIL LAST YEAR!”

“I SOMETIMES PRETEND I KNOW WHAT ‘POLYGON’ MEANS!”

“I ONCE TOLD BISCUIT I HAD A PLAN WHEN I DIDN’T!”

Another truth tumbled out.

And another.

And another.

All the little things Smudge kept tucked away.

It took slightly longer for Biscuit’s truth cookie to kick in, but kick in it did.

“WOOF!”

(Translation: “I didn’t sense anything magical earlier—I just wanted the cookies!”)

Smudge gasped. “I KNEW IT!”

Tether stepped closer, amused. “That’s it. Let it out. Let it all

out...”

And they did.

For what felt like several hours, the truth poured out of both of them like an unstoppable waterfall of confessions. And together—with all the dignity they could manage while dangling upside down—they spoke every truth they’d never said aloud, not knowing that each confession was slowly, quietly... setting them free.

Smudge confessed every tiny thing he’d ever done: the time he said he didn’t know who ate the last slice of cake (it was him), the time he blamed Biscuit for the muddy footprints (also him), the time he pretended not to know where Mum’s favourite pen went (it was still in his pocket), and the time he told Biscuit he didn’t mind him snoring (he did).

Biscuit, under truth-cookie influence, yapped, whined, and barked out his own confessions: the shoes he chewed, the suspicious hole in the garden he absolutely did dig, and the fact that he always knew where Smudge hid his sweets—he just let Smudge think he was being clever.

By the end of it, they hung there like two soggy tea towels, emotionally wrung out but strangely lighter.

Tether nodded once, satisfied there were no more secrets to be kept.

“Now then,” she said. “Why don’t you tell me what you’re doing here?”

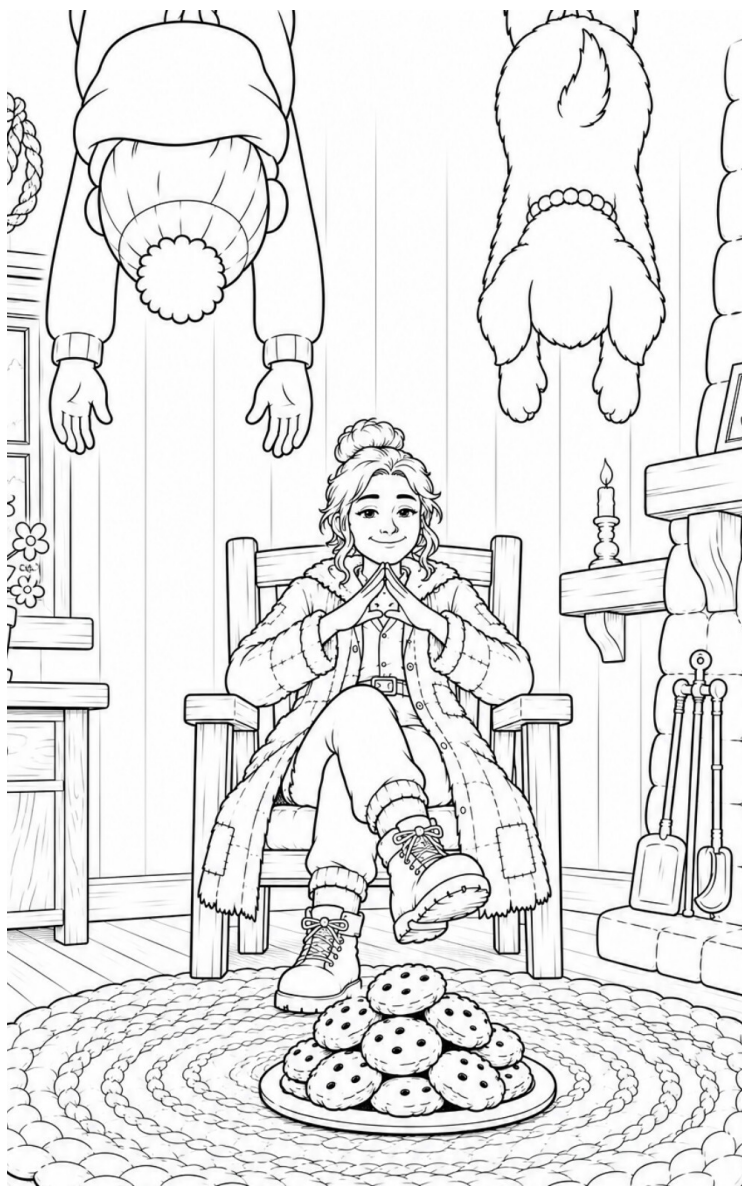
SMUDGE DREAMS BIG

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## Landing

### ***Journal Entry***

*Fresh starts feel good.*



Smudge blinked. His head felt fizzy from all the truth that had just exploded out of him.

“We... uh... we want to find the Sanctuary,” he said at last. “The one with—well—impossible shapes and glowing geometry and all that. We want to find it.”

Tether’s expression softened—only a fraction, but enough for Smudge to notice.

“Ah,” she said quietly. “So that’s your dream, is it?”

Smudge flung his hands up (technically down, given his predicament, but let’s not get technical).

“You know it?!”

Ignoring the question, Tether wandered over to them, reached up, and gave one of the ropes the slightest, most elegant tug.

Smudge and Biscuit’s return to earth, however, was anything but elegant. They landed with an “oof” and a “woof,” respectively—Biscuit on top.

“Well,” she said, “you’ve got a fresh start now at least. A clean slate. Truth. Honesty. Without that, you weren’t going to get very far at all.”

Smudge frowned. “So... what happens now?”

Tether turned toward the door. “Now? You sleep.” She gestured lightly toward a neatly made bed and a small dog basket. “There are some ordinary cookies in the cupboard. Help yourselves. And in the morning...” She paused, glancing back at them. “In the morning, we’ll see what we can do.”

And with that, she left.

Smudge watched her go, feeling just a little more hopeful.

Biscuit, meanwhile, was already in the cupboard.

Zero shame.

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## The Test

### ***Journal Entry***

*Little boxes can contain bad things.*



In the morning, Smudge and Biscuit lay sprawled across the bed, both staring thoughtfully at the ceiling.

It was the kind of thoughtful staring that suggested something important was happening inside their heads. Something significant. Something weighty and serious and possibly even world-changing—the kind of deep, focused contemplation that great decisions are made of, that destinies are shaped by, that history is built upon.

Smudge furrowed his brow.

Biscuit furrowed his, too, in the way dogs do when they are concentrating very hard.

“I hope there’s sausages for breakfast,” said Smudge at last.

Biscuit wagged his tail, which suggested that this would be more than acceptable.

They both fell quiet again as they thought carefully about exactly which type of sausages they’d like. Smudge was partial to a good thick pork one, slightly crispy at the ends. Biscuit, for his part, was not fussy—he was fond of all sausages equally.

The sausage silence lingered for a moment.

Then it was broken by a slow, deliberate knock at the door.

Another followed, and then a third. Three firm taps, evenly spaced.

Smudge and Biscuit froze. They looked at each other, and then at the door.

“You get it,” said Smudge.

Biscuit gestured, quite clearly, for Smudge to get it.

They stared at the door for another couple of seconds.

“Come in!” called Smudge.

“Woof!” added Biscuit.

The door creaked open and Tether stepped inside.

Immediately, Smudge felt something was afoot. Tether

seemed even quieter than before. More serious. She was not smiling at all, and under her arm she carried a small plain box—thin and flat, more like a case than anything else.

“Sleep well?” she asked finally.

Smudge and Biscuit nodded.

Tether gave a small nod of her own and walked slowly across the room. She placed the case on a small table with a soft, careful thud, then sat down opposite them.

“So,” she said. “You want the Sanctuary of Symmetry.”

It wasn’t a question. But Smudge answered it anyway.

“Yes,” he said, sitting up a little straighter.

“Good,” Tether replied. “You know what you want. And if you know what you want, then I can help you.”

Smudge’s face brightened immediately. Biscuit’s tail began to wag.

“But only,” Tether added gently, “if you can prove it.”

The room seemed to grow quieter.

“Prove what?” Smudge asked.

“That you really want it. Really, *really* want it.”

Smudge blinked. “I just said I did.”

“Yes,” said Tether calmly. She rested her hand lightly on the case. “But words are easy.”

Smudge frowned. Biscuit’s tail slowed.

“We *do* want it,” Smudge insisted.

Biscuit gave a firm “Woof,” which very much supported this claim.

Tether nodded once again, in a no-nonsense sort of way. “Then this will be easy,” she said, and pushed the case gently toward them. “Take off your socks.”

Smudge paused. “Sorry... what?”

“Take off your socks. Sit comfortably. Feet up.”

Biscuit tilted his head. Smudge frowned even harder. This was all very confusing.

“What’s in the box?” he asked.

Tether did not answer. Instead, she turned the case to face them and opened it carefully.

Smudge looked.

Biscuit looked.

They both looked.

Inside lay a feather.

A single, very ordinary-looking feather.

Smudge went pale.

“You wouldn’t,” he said.

Tether picked it up and held it lightly between two fingers.

“You can’t,” said Smudge. “That is—I mean—there must be another way. Any other way. I’ll do something else. I’ll climb something. I’ll jump something. I’ll—Biscuit, back me up here—”

Biscuit had already deserted Smudge and was hiding behind the cushions.

A small, almost mischievous smile appeared on Tether’s face.

“This,” she said, “is the tickle test.”

