

INGO Tales
The Great Escape

INGEMAR VON ULMBACH
as told to
ILANA G HOLLOWAY

Dedication;
To humans of all ages,

*If you love dogs,
if your family has a dog,
if you have been blessed with the love of a dog, then
I dedicate this book to you.*

Ingo

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Preface

I am Lani, the Master in Ingo's tale. I may not be sure of many things in life, but I know this—

A dog doesn't know how to lie.

A dog never says anything stupid.

Dogs are honest, smart, devoted, and friendly.

Dogs are great companions.

They are compassionate and caring.

They are intelligent, funny, and obedient.

They all qualify to be my best friends.

But most of all,

A dog is the only thing on Earth that loves you more than he loves himself. —

Josh Billings

Dogs can't talk, but I do understand all the messages they send my way. Humans communicate through speech and body language. Dogs do, too, through all their movements, noise, and the sounds they make, but they also use their sense of smell. Dogs can smell our joy, our stress, our sadness and are ready to share them.

Ingo and I lived these stories together. He asked me to put them down on paper because he can't write. At least not yet. He is fourteen years old in human years—age two in dog years.

He can't speak, but he can understand human speech. A small, magical creature cast a spell on him, and you will find out about it soon.

I wrote this book for him, showing life as seen through a dog's eyes.

You know what? A new way of looking at things is always helpful because we can learn a lot from it.

Let me give you a simple example.

A child receives half a glass of juice. He can think about it in two ways depending on the child and the conditions. One way is to be upset that the juice glass is not full. The other way is to be grateful for the juice because he is very thirsty.

Growing up is hard to do. Children learn each day about life, school, friendship, family, responsibility, honesty, joy, play, happiness, and much more. Children learn from their successes but mostly from their failures.

Discovering how dogs learn and understand can be very helpful. In *Ingo's Tales*, readers have the opportunity to find the many ways to look at life's events. They show us how fortunate we are to be humans and how much in life we take for granted. By comparing children's lives to the life of dogs, we can all learn empathy, responsibility, devotion, true friendship, and love.

In this book, we will travel back in time and space to get to know Ingo well. We will look through his eyes at the world of his childhood and then return to today's time.

Ingo Tales is full of magic realism. Don't worry because I can explain what that means. Most of the stories happened, so it means they are real. In art and writing, realism with touches of magic is called magic realism. It paints a realistic view of the world while also having magical elements.

This book is about Ingo growing up and adapting to the many changes in his early life before starting new adventures.

I'm looking forward to the new adventures, also. Enjoy the story!

CHAPTER ONE -The Magic Gift

My mother, Heidi, says that my main goal in life should be to find the love and friendship of a good master. I am still a baby dog, but at least I have a dream.

Call me Ingo, although my full name is Ingemar von Ulmbach. Yeah, it's a pompous one. My friends call me Ingo.

It's the end of April. The sun finds its way in through the open door. The patch of warmth and light makes the straw-covered shed floor into a puppy's heaven. I can hear, and recently I can see, those big guys playing outside behind the fence.

Mom Heidi spends her time inside with us pups. My three sisters and I are still too young to be out there with the rest of them. But we got to meet them all a few days ago. They came in, one by one, to sniff us. My father, Nino, is stunning looking. His coat is as golden as Heidi's and mine. Judging by how he carries himself, you can tell that he is either the alpha dog or has a severe attitude problem. Uncle Hugo and Aunt Karen look very elegant in their shiny black coats. The rusty masks give them a melancholic look, ready for a romantic masked ball.

I wonder who am I going to take after?

The rest of the family are a couple of older ladies in their conservative and spotless black coats. So, these guys are my biological

family. We all have Anglo-Saxon names because of our origins, but now we live at Norbert's farm in Morania, an Eastern Bloc—communist—country.

The big hairy guys start barking with excitement. We have visitors. A small white car parks in the backyard, and Norbert greets his guests, a tall slim gentleman, and a girl. Norbert brings them straight to us. My little heart is pounding so hard that I can't hear anything else. The visiting-girl picks me up and holds me close. The height and bright sunlight make me dizzy. I can only see her blue eyes and a few glimmering drops of water running down her face. Salty little drops of water they are.

“Oh, he's kissing me, see? He's tasting my tears. I think he likes me. He smells like raisin muffins,” the Blue-eyed Girl giggles while talking to the Tall Gentleman.

What are raisins muffins? I hope they're something good. I like her. She smells happy, and she is very gentle with me. She is my favorite visitor and will make a good master for me. I'm sure she likes me licking her face, but I'm not sure about the raisin muffin smell. Is it a good or a bad smell? I hope she likes me, and maybe she'll adopt me.

The Tall Gentleman has white hair and wears seeing glasses. He scrutinizes me, checking the bump on top of my head, my ears, and my paws. When he's done with the inspection, he lowers me gently to the ground and puts his arm around my Blue-eyed Girl's shoulders. They start walking back to the little white car.

“What do you think? Will he do?” The Tall Gentleman jokes with her. “In another world, he would be the ultimate Best in Show dog.”

“He is gorgeous, isn’t he? The girl turns around and says,
“Soon, Ingo. One day I’ll be able to show you a better world.”
What does she mean? Where are they going?

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In the following days, Norbert leaves the shed door open so we can explore the outside. It’s a world of smells.

When it first begins to rain, the earth’s perfume, the new grass, the flowers, the wind, they all have a dizzying smell. My sisters and I discover the world with our little noses—they are useful tools, and we use them all the time.

We spend the days in the big dog pen with the hairy bears—relatives of mine.



**I’d better make sure these hairy bears
don’t step on my little boy.**

Norbert often allows us, the little ones, to go in the garden with him. The days get longer, and the sun grows brighter and warmer.

Around noon, we have a short rain shower. My sisters, Norbert, and I are in the garden. As usual, my mind is on one thought. When am

I going to see the Blue-eyed Girl again? Will she adopt me and take me away with her? It will be my job to make her happy.

My sisters finish with all the flower-sniffing they can handle and return to the dog pen. I'm the only pup still in the garden.

The flowers are blossoming everywhere, and their aroma gathers these buzzing-flying things that don't leave me alone. I grunt and whine in their direction,

“What do you think I am? A flower or something?”



Maybe they like my raisin muffin smell.

One of them lands on my nose, and it tickles me, but I let her be. Yes, she is a *Bee*.

Soon, she calls upon her swarm of bees, but they're missing a crown on their heads. The one on my nose must be the Queen Bee. They buzz a magic dance above and around me and then vanish.

I sit there, giddy, among the flowers and the butterflies.

I hear Norbert call me, “Ingo, get out of the garden and back to the shed, boy.”

I can't believe my enormous ears. I understand Norbert's words. Wow. Is this for real? I feel different and powerful. I know things I didn't before. Something magical is happening to me.

I hide behind the watering can next to the garden's gate to test it. My sisters are already in the big dog pen. I hear Norbert say again,

“Ingo, we need to get out of the garden. I can see you behind the watering can.”

Yes, I understand that, too. Amazed, I rush out of the gate and head full speed to the straw-covered shed.

My mom, Heidi, is in there, enjoying a moment of peace without us pups.

“Mom, I need to tell you an important thing. I understand Norbert's words, Mom”.

“Interesting, you're just like Maggie, your great-grandma. Did you get the Queen Bee to sit on your nose today?” Mom asks me knowingly.

“I did, I did. Why, Mom?”

“It's curious because usually, only the girls on Maggie's side of the family have the magic power but never a boy. You must be quite special, Ingo,” says Mom and gives me a big lick on the top of my head.

“You must have smelled the petrichor, right?”

“Mom, what is petlichol?”

“Petrichor, Ingo, not petlichol ... is the perfume of the earth. It's that special smell the earth puts out when the first drops of rain come after a warm day,” responds mother Heidi.

“You need to taste a tear of your master and smell the petrichor. If you are lucky and the Queen Bee sits on your nose, you have a chance

to get The Gift. If you don't chase her away, she will honor you with a magic bee-dance and the power to understand human speech."

"Yes, I did. I did smell the petli...trishol, Mom."

"Use your gift wisely, my son," she says, giving me another motherly and loving lick.

My head is spinning, and all this information makes me tired.

I lay down to take a nap, and I remember the blue eyes. It makes me dizzy. I fall asleep, and the Blue-eyed Girl is there in my dream.

Every few days, Norbert brings in more visitors, but none of them picks me up. My sisters are in great demand, and soon, one by one, the three of them leave with their favorite visitors.

Only my Blue-eyed Girl is not coming back. Maybe I was wrong, and she didn't like my raisin muffins' smell or me licking her face. It goes to show you I've got a lot to learn.

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We have a spring shower again. The rain sound makes me want to go ... outside—if you know what I mean. But it's so muddy, and my stomach is full of mashed potatoes and eggs. If I go out, it will drag in the dirt. I'm debating this thought when I see the little white car pull in. It's the same car that brought my Blue-eyed Girl here a few days ago.

The surprise startles me, and ... I don't have to go anymore. I did it right here on my front doorstep, and I'm lying in it. I had an accident, but I'm still a pup and not fully trained.

My initial joy turns into sadness because my Blue-eyed Girl didn't come this time. The Tall Gentleman is alone. He's a well-mannered and distinguished older man whose fine breeding is visible to the naked eye. Norbert chats with his guest while filling a big box with straw.

“So, what do you think about our only boy? Isn't he perfect?” Norbert, always proud of the pups his canine produces, asks the Tall Gentleman.

“He is quite the specimen. In America, he would have an exceptional career at the Westminster dog show. Unfortunately, in this communist country we live in, there aren't any career prospects for him, and nothing good awaits him. He is lucky to be adopted by a fine family who will love him and care for him.” The Tall Gentleman's face shows sadness and regret. He puts me in the straw-covered box, and into the little white car I go—on the backbench.

What's going on? Where are we going?

The Tall Gentleman is an okay guy because he's friends with my girl, but he's no favorite visitor material. I don't think I'll find the love and friendship in him Mom talks about.

CHAPTER TWO- Journey to the Unknown

The inside of the small car smells friendly and familiar. Is it her smell? I remember her scent, and this isn't it. It smells like the Big Guys behind the fence.

I'm in the box of straw, looking out the window when the sun's warmth does its trick. Raindrops glisten on the window and the blue sky beyond put me to sleep. My Girl is there again in my dreams.

It's a long trip, and I wake up in the box when the Tall Gentleman is carrying me up a whole lot of steps.

I wonder how on earth I'm supposed to go out when I need to go out?

The door opens and, by God, the Tall Gentleman has a Hairy Bear of his own. That's what I thought was the familiar smell in the car.

Now the box is on the floor, with me in it. A big, furry-black-head with huge curly ears shadows me and my little square piece of "sky." This guy is so big and so dangerously close. I'm getting ready to be made into a mashed puppy.

"Astor, be a good boy ... Good boy!" I hear from behind the war zone.

Wow, I got that. I'd forgotten that I could understand what humans are saying. So, the giant's name is Astor. It does me no good since I won't live to tell. What a pompous name, anyway!

When I think I'll never live to chew on a bone, the Tall Gentleman's wife, Monica, saves me. She pushes Astor away, picks me up, and holds me in her arms. Her dark shiny eyes grow watery.

Monica is a nice, tall young woman. She's much younger than the Tall Gentleman but equally well-mannered and distinguished.

I found out later that she was Astor's favorite visitor when he was a puppy. This means she probably came back for him because he didn't smell like you know what.

But, to my surprise, I hear her say,

"He's so cute. His smell reminds me of Astor when he was little."

I have no idea what that's supposed to mean. I am confused. If Astor smelled like raisin muffins when he was a pup, and she came back for him, that must mean ... I have no idea what it means.

She puts me down, and I hear a man call my name.

"Ingo, come, come Ingo."

The accent is not too good, but it's in German. Hey, this is good news. He knows my people speak German. He shows me a small bowl of food and a big one of water. Astor follows me closely and seems extremely interested. First, I go for the water—which I find out later to be the wrong choice—then I gulp down the fine meal.

I'm full and all I can think about is that flight of stairs that separates me from the garden. I need to get down there soon, or right now would be great. Oops, I'm going on the kitchen floor. It doesn't look good for me, but you have to do what you have to do. According to my mom, there is a saint who protects dogs. His name is Saint Rocco.



He must be on duty today and watching over me. Astor is so upset that I drank out of his water bowl that he turns it over. Guess what? They're so engrossed in conversation they don't see me do it—my puppy accident. Also, the spilled water washed away ... all the evidence.

Thank you, Saint Rocco!

Shimmy, Monica's father, the one who invited me to dinner in his best possible German accent, ends up mopping the floor. He thinks he's cleaning up after Astor. It looks like I got away with it!

But Monica picks me up and takes me to a tiled room with newspapers on the floor. I can tell that this is where humans go when they can't make it down all those steps to the garden. I can tell. My nose can.

Do they even have a garden?

I'm doing the best I can. I sit on that newspaper for a full five minutes for Monica, but I can't get the paper wet. I try to walk away, but she puts me right back on the newspaper.

I guess this is a ritual for them that follows the food and water bit.

I don't have it in me anymore. I push until I can deposit about fifteen drops on their paper.

Hurray! She lets me out of the tiled room so I can wander around and check out the place.

The apartment air is dense with the Astor smell, so it doesn't matter where I crash for the night. Oh, wrong choice of words—he can crush me no matter where I sleep. I might as well pick the most comfortable spot. They have this gray throw tucked away in a nice cozy corner away from all the light. I curl up on it and begin dozing away as soon as I settle in. I deserve peace after a tiring day. I am comfy and I am safe.

I wake up in the middle of the night and find Big Bear Astor spooning me. It shows you that I don't know how life works, but it's working out fine so far. I visit the paper in the tiled room and cuddle back in Astor's spoon. I am afraid of him because he's so big, but it looks like I'm wrong. He's a sweet, big teddy-bear of a dog. I think we'll be good friends.

Cool! I mean warm. I mean cool ... What do I know?

At breakfast, Shimmy doesn't take any chances anymore. Before calling me to the bowl full of creamy mashed potatoes and hard-boiled eggs, he carefully papers the kitchen floor wall-to-wall. He also has a little water bowl for me. I guess I didn't fool them after all. The newspapers on the floor sure make it easy for me instead of all those steps.

The doorbell announces a visitor.

“Hi Arthur,” the Tall Gentleman greets the young newcomer.
“You’re right on time.”

“Hi, Relu,” answers Arthur. “Where is the little guy who is flying today for the first time?”

Arthur is a young man who smells familiar. I’m sure he has a big Hairy Bear at home, too.

The Tall Gentleman, whose name is Relu, picks me up and walks towards Arthur. He has a brand-new box in his hands. The box has a thick layer of straw, and I hop in. Young Arthur takes me, in the box, down the infernal stairs. It’s scary not to know where they’re taking you. I’m thinking that now my Blue-eyed Girl will never find me. What do they mean by “flying for the first time”? How could I possibly fly? I am not a bee or a bird. They must be terribly confused. My ears are large, but they won’t help me fly. What are they making me do?

I’m mulling this over in my box while I look out the car window. New buildings, streets, cars, people, and noises appear and disappear fast. Then, I see fields of grass, cows, and bright green trees. We must be already out of town. With no hope of seeing my Blue-eyed-Girl ever again, I start crying. I curl up, feeling sorry for myself. I am only a two-months-old, and I don’t have a master yet.

Arthur stops the car.

“Here we are, Ingo, at the airport.” He takes me out of the box, picks the straw off me, and gives me a little kiss on my head. He puts me down in the grass, and I do my business immediately.

“Have a good flight, Ingo. A big surprise is waiting for you at the other end.” Arthur hands me to a couple of young women who seem happy to see me and take me toward a roaring gigantic monster. I’ve never seen anything so large.

“Don’t be scared of the airplane. It will fly very smoothly, and I will be there to take care of you,” the young woman whispered to me.

I got that, and I’m trying to replace my fear with trust and confidence. The young woman’s words calm me. I may not know yet what all the words mean, but I get it. I’ll be okay.

All alone in this big world, and I’m scared. Where am I going? What will happen to me?

I’m in the roaring monster on the last row of seats. The sun is warm and I soon fall asleep.

CHAPTER 3- My Master and her Family

I wake up when the roar of the monster stops. The young ladies put me in a leather bag but I don't fit. My head and my big ears are sticking out. Where are they taking me? All the smells are new, and I'm hungry and thirsty.

Everybody gets out, and we all head for this big house with a long row of windows. They call it an airplane house or an airport, I'm not sure yet. The roaring monsters move about on the ground, obeying one man's directions. He wears earmuffs and carries orange flags. The noisy monsters do this complicated dance while the man with the orange flags flails his arms like an orchestra conductor. They all follow his directions.

The glass door of the airport opens as people get close to it.

Heavens, there's my Blue-eyed Girl, waiting for me!

Am I still asleep and dreaming?

I can't believe my eyes. My Blue-eyed-Girl is here. She pulls me out of the bag and into her arms. She brings me close to her face, and I can see the little salty water drops running down her cheeks. My little heart is beating like a drum from the surprise.

"Hi, baby Ingo. I waited for you so long to grow enough to be able to come all this way. I love you so much." My Girl kisses me on my forehead, and I get a taste of her salty drops.

She holds me close and caresses me on my belly. I hear her say again, “You still smell like raisin muffins. It must be your sweetness and all the milk you drink that makes this wonderful smell.”

So, now I’m sure that raisin muffins are a good thing. It’s settled.

“I’ll take care of you. You will want for nothing.”

As I think how thirsty I am, she puts me down on the stone floor and gets out of her purse a little bowl and a water bottle. She offers me a drink.

“Have a little water, Ingo. You must be parched.”

Wow, she can read my mind. Maybe she can speak German or, better yet, maybe Dog-ish. Oh, I forgot, I can understand her in any language. I have The Gift.

I need to, you know, go.

“Come on, let’s go outside. Quick, quick, quick.”

I can’t believe it, my new master picks me up, and we rush outside. She puts me in the grass, and she sits on a nearby bench. I’m lucky to be blessed with the best master in the whole wide world. I did my business fast and easy. Then, I find a nice little grassy place near her bench and curl up next to her feet.

My favorite visitor, my Blue-eyed Girl, my master, is not only here with me, but she can also read my little dog’s mind. It can’t get any better than this.

But it did get better. My master some delicious food for me in her purse. She pulls out a small bag with little cubes of meat and a hard-boiled egg. In my entire two months-long dog life, this is by far the best

meal I've eaten. I can't stop licking my lips. Then, she gives me a slice of something sweet and a little sour. It's crunchy when I bite.

“Ingo, here, let's see if you like apples, my sweet baby.”

The apple is delicious and refreshing. Apple, yes, I'll have to remember this word. I learn the meaning of new words every day.

We're enjoying the lovely spring weather. I notice this airplane nest—or whatever they call it—is much bigger than the little one I came from. Master must be living in The Big Town. She's looking over the papers she received about me. They are my legal documents showing my family history.

Soon, she picks me up, takes me to a small car, and sets me on a fluffy, folded blanket in the back.

“Ingo, we're going home. Everything is going to be okay.”

She opens the windows for fresh air, and we start our trip. There are many cars on the road and many tall houses, one next to the other. The air doesn't smell as good as it did back at the farm. None of these houses look like they have a garden. What do these people do when they need to “go”—you know—on the grass, I wonder?

It's a long trip, and the sun is getting lower in the sky.

When we arrive at her house, there's good and bad news for me. The good news is that there are no steps from her apartment to the outside. I figure I can always hold it long enough to get to the grass. The bad news is that she doesn't have a garden and her entire apartment is

barely as big as the straw-covered shed where my sisters and I were born. Where am I going to play and run?

I check out the place and sniff around a little. It's just one room with everything in it. There are a tiny kitchen and an even smaller room with a sink, a toilet and a hole in the cement floor. This small room smells like Monica's tiled room but not as nice. But none of this matters because we're together.

Later, at mealtime, a terrible thought comes to me. I think Master is poor. She opens a round metal container—I don't like how it smells. She heats that up and cuts a piece of bread. That's all she has for food.

For me, she has more of the little cubes of meat and smelly white food she calls cheese. I don't eat it all, so I can share it with her. But she looks so happy I forget that thought and finish it. I'm still ashamed of that, but I'm very young and don't know any better.

*

Master sets a white lamb pelt for me at the foot of her bed.

"Ingo, come here." She touches the pelt to show me where to go.

"This is your little bed during the day. At night, I will put it over my blanket, and you can sleep with me, Ingo." She looks at me with love.

She makes a few phone calls to Relu and her dad. Master tells them that I arrived well and we are safely home. She thanks them for sending me to her and says how much she loves me.

Later on, she makes her bed for the night, turns on a little light, grabs a book, and sets it aside. I hop on my pelt next to her, and she talks to me until I fall asleep.

“My dear, dear, Ingo. Life will get better for us, I promise. I have to finish school first. Then, I’ll figure out how to find a better place for us in this big world. Just be good, stay healthy, and I’ll always be with you. I love you, sweetie. Good night.”

I have a loving master, and I don’t even know her name. I feel myself falling asleep. I need plenty of sleep to grow.

*

Master stays home with me most of the time. When she has to go somewhere, she always takes me with her.

“You’re such a good boy. You can walk on a leash without me having to train you. I’m so proud of you, Ingo.”

I always walk at her heel so I can see her whenever I look up. She smiles with pride and tells me, “I love you,” when our eyes meet. We mostly go out for walks in the neighborhood. But today, we take a bus crowded with people. She puts me in her lap and holds me close with both her arms. I can feel her heart and every breath she takes. It feels so good to be protected.

After ten stops, we’re at the house where her family lives in the middle of the town. There are many big homes. They look like homes on top of each other and, of course, there are stairs with many steps to walk down, when you need to ‘go’ outside.

The big house we enter has a steel box going up and down, much faster than you can do on the stairs. It's called an elevator or lift and I enjoy traveling up and down in it.

We take the steel box up, ring the doorbell, and a dark-eyed-girl opens the door. Oana, my master's sister, greets us and we walk in.

I'm amazed at how big the house is.

My Blue-eyed Girl introduces me to her family. The matron of the house is Granny Paula—Master's mom. We will call her Granny because she's the only granny I have. Then, there is Oana—Master's sister—who opened the door for us, and Kivutza—Granny's helper who has lived with them for years.

What I love best about Granny's place is the way it smells. My nose tells me that this is the most delicious food smell ever.

But that's not all. Guess what Granny does after she meets me? She gives me some of that delicious chicken stew. Yes, she cooks for humans and dogs, too. What a fantastic cook!

After the meal and a little water, Master takes me to their tiled room. She puts a newspaper on the floor, and I do what she expects. "Good boy, Ingo, what a good boy. I'm so proud of you."

Granny sets the table for four, and my new human family—all ladies as I can see—sit to have lunch. I'm full, so I just watch them enjoy the food, especially my Blue-Eyed Girl. She eats fast and a lot.

"Hey Sis, take it easy. You eat as if you haven't eaten in a week," says Oana mockingly.

“You’re only half-wrong, my dear. I ate a few cans of beans and some bread this past week. Things are tough at our house.” Master looks at me and pets me on the head. “But Ingo and I make do with what we have,” and she finishes the food on her plate.

“Do you want more, Lani? Granny asks Master, ready to give her seconds.

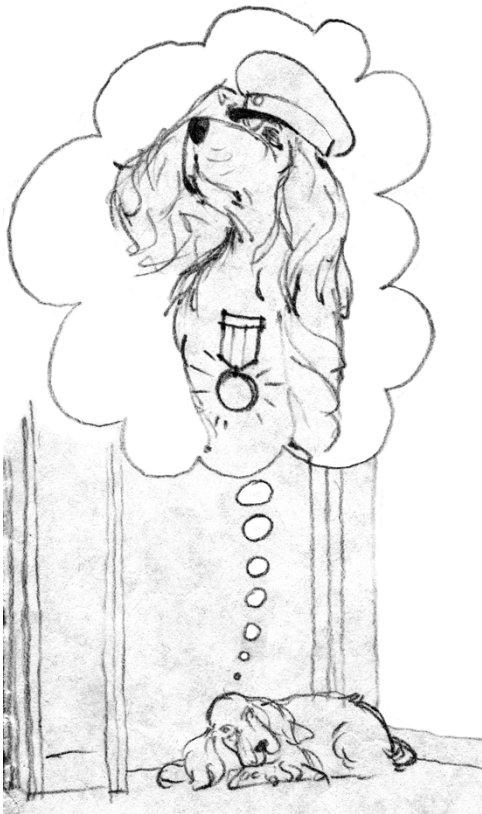
Ah, so my master’s name is Lani. I like it.

“Just a bit more, please. Thank you, Mom.” Lani knows she’s overeating, but she doesn’t have much at home for tonight.

Oana finishes her lunch and is ready to head to class. She goes to the Construction school to become an engineer, following Grandpa’s footsteps. But before she walks out, Oana adds,

“You must be spending all your money on Ingo and on books, but never mind, I have to go. I’ll be back for dinner, Mom.”

We go to a room where Granny and Mommy Lani sit on the bed and have a chat. I curl up next to the door of the room and take a nap. I’ll dream brave dreams of a dog’s first job.



“Lani, dear, how is school? Granny asks Lani.

“School is fine, Mom, but it takes me forever to be happy with my designs. I spend hours and use miles of tracing paper on sketches,” Lani reports to her mom.

“Do you enjoy it, or is it a hassle?”

“Oh, I enjoy it all right. I’m not sure why it takes me so long so long to find one I like. Maybe I go overboard.” Lani pauses a little and then says, “or I’m just slow.”

“I can tell you for sure you’re not slow. You’re the smartest and most hardworking person I know, aside from your dad.”

“Thanks, Mom. You’re right about Dad. He’s anything but slow, and he works sixteen hours a day.” Lani hands her mother Ingo’s pedigree documents and says,

“Take a look, Mom, at the documents I received on Ingo.”

“Lani, this is a purebred dog. Look at these documents,” Granny said.

“Yes, Mom, and not only that, he’s so smart. He obeys everything I tell him. Did you see how he made peepee on the paper? He practically did it on command. He’s really something, my little Angel.” Her eyes fill with happy tears when she talks about me. Yes, I found my master. My Lani.

“Mom, I’m going to tell you something I’m sure you’ll like.”

“What’s that, Lani?” Granny places the papers in her lap and is ready to hear the story.

“Ingo has three sisters. He was the only boy, and you know how I wanted a male Cocker.”

“Yes, I remember that.”

“Well, Norbert had promised the first golden boy to be born this year to Lica.”

“Lica, who? I don’t know any Lica ...” Granny stops talking, and her face shows she’s sorting names in her mind. Lani is watching her to see if she guesses.

“Think, Mom, think again.” Lani is waiting with a funny crooked smile on her face.

Suddenly, Granny’s eyes turn big, and her mouth opens,

“Are you serious? Lica, the daughter of the old Moranian President? The actress?”

“Yes, Mom.” Lani is delighted by the shock she sees on Granny’s face.

“So, how did Ingo end up yours?”

“Well, Lica didn’t show up on the agreed-upon day, nor did she send anybody for him. So, Relu went and grabbed him.”

*

My papers—called a pedigree—tell my entire family history. I’m a hunting dog and Cocker Spaniel of English descent from a celebrated show-dog family. Lani continues reading out loud for Granny from the papers the story of my family. I learn that about 100 years ago, my family moved from England to the Ulmbach Valley in the Hesse district,

in Germany. They were all busy giving love, companionship, and hunting help to Europe's royal families. That was a long time ago.

Lani shows her mom an old photograph, with one of my ancestors in hunting gear. She tells Granny, "You can see the origin of the "crown mark" on Cocker's head above the ears."

**But, don't go telling people that.
It's only one of Lani's silly jokes.**



I'm amazed at what Lani reads next. I learn that one of my Great-Grandmothers, named Maggie, was a magic lady-dog. She had the power to understand human speech.

Magic Maggie was such a smart and beautiful dog that people worldwide wanted to have one of her puppies.

The legend has it that some of her pups get the magic power, like Maggie. It only happens,

IF one had The Gift from birth,

IF one gets to taste a tear of their future Master,

IF one smells Petrichor and



IF a Queen Bee sits on their nose, and the dog doesn't chase the bee away.

Many IFs.

The cutie in the picture is Magic Maggie, a painting at the old castle.

Skeptical, Granny interrupts Lani,

“But, Lani, this must be just a myth, a legend, as they say. Can it be true?”

“I don't know, Mom. He sure acts as if he understands me.” Half asleep, I hear Lani, like in a dream at first, and then I slip away into real dreams.

This is my grand grandfather's picture in the walnut library back at the castle. The resemblance to the Austrian emperor Frantz Joseph is a simple coincidence.



My fancy pedigree and noble titles are a pile of dusty papers in an old drawer, a thing of the past. I am a modern dog, so all that “von Ulmbach” stuff is only in official documents. I am just Ingo.

Only Mommy Lani calls me “Ulmbach” when I am not a good boy and get in trouble. I can understand there is no need to get too familiar at times like that.

As I’m waking up, I hear an interesting thing. Granny is preparing to move to another town, a smaller one, on the other side of the country. Grandpa John, whom I haven’t met yet, is already working in that town and he’s preparing another house for his family’s move. Let’s call that town—The Smaller Town.