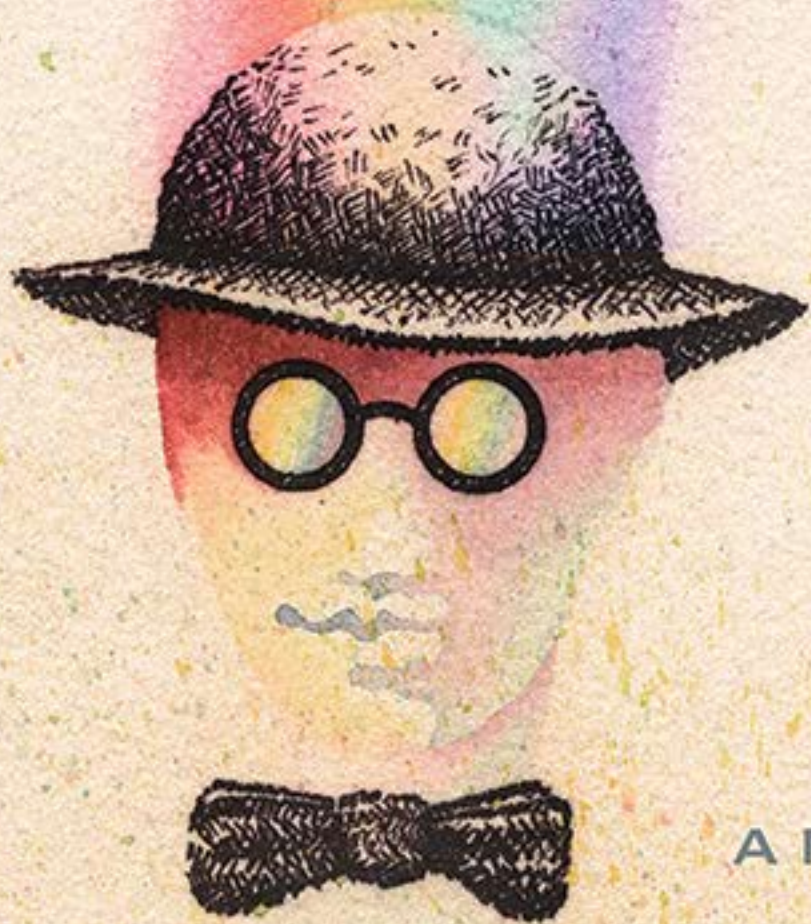


PORTRAIT OF A  
**RAINBOW**  
(AS A YOUNG MAN)



A Novel

Todd Crawshaw

PORTRAIT OF A  
**RAINBOW**  
AS A YOUNG MAN  
AKA  
Doberman's Angel

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ISBN-13: 978-1-7333502-3-5

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Published 2019

Cover art and design by author

[CrowsnestPublishing.com](http://CrowsnestPublishing.com)

Printed in the United States of America



END OF THE RAINBOW MEETS LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE

PORTRAIT OF A RAINBOW / CRAWSHAW

*“I have wanted to kill myself  
a hundred times, but somehow  
I am still in love with life.”*

— Voltaire, *Candide*

*“When I went to school, they  
asked me what I wanted to be  
when I grew up. I wrote down  
“Happy.” They told me I didn’t  
understand the assignment,  
and I told them they didn’t  
understand life.”*

— John Lennon

*“How narrow is the vision  
that exalts the busyness  
of the ant above the singing  
of the grasshopper.”*

— Khalil Gibran

*“Be a rainbow  
in someone else’s cloud.”*

— Maya Angelou

PORTRAIT OF A RAINBOW / CRAWSHAW

 1 

Doberman hated Christmas. Bristol Sparks loved everything about it. The shiny ornaments and twinkling lights made her happy. The artificial displays declaring *joy-to-the-world* gave Doberman a headache. Snowflakes began to fall from the sky, prickling his skin. His mouth released a cloudy vapor as he cursed these icy particles. He tugged at the red woolen cap he had found on a bench. It barely covered his ears. His head was scrunched into his shoulders. When he happened to look up, the aberration of a little girl startled him. She was smiling, bundled in a white parka. Her green skirt matched her tights tucked into furry-white boots. Her long blond hair framed her face. A white pom-pom was attached to the tip of her green ski hat pulled down to her eyes.

Doberman was sitting on the cement and huddled against the doorway of a shuttered art gallery. The alcove partially sheltered him from the wind and kept him away from the sidewalk with its parade of holiday shoppers.

“Blanket?”

The girl held out the folded cloth in her arms.

“Go away,” growled Doberman.



“You’re cold.”

“How would you know?”

“I’m cold too.”

“Then *you* wear it.”

She appeared to be alone, but he guessed the parents belonging to this do-gooder were hovering nearby, watching their little angel. He looked away, then up at her again. “Why are you here?”

“I’m Bristol Sparks.”

He grunted a laugh. “Sounds about right. BS, to me.”

“What’s your name?”

He clenched his teeth and shivered. “*Do-ber-man.*”

“Oh, like the dog?”

He snarled, “Do I look like a dog?”

“I like your beard.”

Reminded of its length, gone prematurely grey, now white, and flecked with ice particles, he said, “I’m *not* Santa Claus.”

“I know that,” she giggled.

A flurry of snowflakes stung his eyes and he ducked his head. “Maybe I was. Once. Long ago. Pretending to be Santa’s little helper. Like you. Not anymore. Just ... Go away.”

When Doberman looked up, the girl was gone.

The blanket lay at his feet.

## 2

Tober Chase was fourteen years old when struck by lightning. A rainbow appeared in the sky amidst a passing storm on Christmas morning. He had run outside to witness the arching spectral colors. The blast shredded his clothing and knocked him unconscious. He awoke to find his skin scarred with a permanent fractal pattern that trailed from his chest to his navel. The lightning strike had routed down the wires of his iPod, a present which he had unwrapped only hours before the incident. The emergency room doctor believed that this gift from his parents had diverted the 300,000 volts of electricity away from his heart and other vital organs and saved his life.

During his three-day hospital internment for observation, Tober had a mental reconstitution which he equated as being an epiphany. Whether (or not) this jolt of energy to his neurological system had somehow rewired his brain, he decided to interpret this electrostatic discharge to his body as a sign – that God had selected him to be a conduit for good and help make the world a better place.

As the holidays came to an end, Tober celebrated the new year by truncating his given name into one word: Chase. To his parents' chagrin, he discarded "Tober" because he said it represented a pupal

stage of his metamorphosis, like a disposable chrysalis, thereby of no further use. He next sought to overcome his heretofore disposition of shyness and timidity. While riding on the school bus, he witnessed an older boy bullying a smaller kid and Chase stood up to stop it. For his courage, he was slugged in the face. The crack of cartilage and blood that gushed from his nose, he had not anticipated. Chase staggered backwards and fell into his seat. He realized God had not provided him with any super powers. He was vulnerable, left to rely on his own volition, and prone to error.

Kay Foster, a girl he barely knew, came to his aid to nurse him. She put her scarf to his face and instructed him to look up as she held his head. Once the blood coagulated and the bleeding had stopped, Chase was smitten by this girl, by her beautiful smile and kind eyes. She too was a sign, he intuited, and predicted she would become an integral part of his life.



Chase decided to trust God and continue to be communicative. Previously, he had been afraid to voice his feelings. Settling into his desk for his first class of the day, he looked across the aisle at the boy who sat closest to him.

“Hi, I’m Chase.”

“I know who you are.”

“Not really. We’ve hardly ever talked.”

“Because you’re weird.”

“Not by choice. Your name is Norman, right?”

The boy gave him a cold stare. “What’s with your nose?”

Chase felt his nostrils. His nose was still sore, but hadn’t begun to bleed again. “Someone hit me this morning.”

“Were you really struck by lightning?”

“Yeah. Christmas morning.”

“That’s weird. What did it feel like?”

“It hurt. Really bad. I have a permanent scar now.”

“What kind of scar?”

“Across my chest. It’s called a fractal pattern.”

“Cool. Let me see.”

The teacher broke up their conversation by calling their names, asking them to solve algebra problems written on the blackboard.

“I’ll show you after school.”

“Okay. And don’t *ever* call me Norman. It’s Norm.”



Word spread about this scar caused by lightning. After the last bell, kids assembled in the parking lot waiting for the big reveal.

Chase arrived and was approached by a boy named Derick who, along with Norm, belonged to a club with a reputation for partying and wild behavior. Derick, a junior, poked Chase in the chest.

“Let’s see that scar.”

Chase obliged, unzipping his jacket, then unbuttoning his shirt. He spread open both articles of clothing, exposing bare skin and the disfigurement. The reddish scar resembled a fern leaf instead of chest hairs that trailed from his neck to navel.

Derick smirked. “I always knew you were a freak.”

This classification and snub bewildered Chase.

Derick laughed. “Look, Clark Kent thinks he’s Superman.”

He punctuated this remark with a sucker punch. Chase buckled over and dropped to his knees.

Norm said, “What the hell! Why did you do that, Derick?”

“I felt like it. What’s it to you? Let’s go.”

Derick turned to leave.

As Chase caught his breath, he said, “If you keep doing that, you’ll regret it someday.”

Derick turned around. “What’d you say?”

Still on the ground, Chase said, “Your fear. It’s misplaced.”

Derick stormed back. Norm stood between them. “Come on, man. Leave him alone. He didn’t do anything.”

Derick pushed Norm and pointed at Chase, “Hey, loser, I’m not afraid of anyone. Especially not you! You got that?”

Chase stood, holding his stomach. “Loud and clear. *‘There’s nothing to fear but fear itself,’* said FDR.”

“Who?”

“Forget it. I’m not your enemy, Derick.”



That evening while seated at the dinner table with his parents, his mother asked Chase how his first day back to school went.

“Pretty good. I made two new friends.

# 3

Doberman was shuffling along the city sidewalk clutching the large blanket. He resembled a bedraggled king with his long white beard, red hat, and large blanket held around his neck like a cape. The long cloth brushed the ground behind him. Shakespeare's King Lear plagued his mind. For he felt like a tragic hero whose hubris had caused his downfall. With no clear destination in mind, he moved along, lost within the swarm of holiday shoppers, theatergoers, and tourists, all of whom parted, like the Red Sea, clearing a path for him.

These sidewalk evening interlopers either stared or looked away. To some he was a pitiful creature, while to others invisible – at least, they pretended he was. It was hard to fathom, even for himself, how he had arrived at this point in time. This was not at all what he had imagined his life would become.

He paused to look up at the two-to-three story Christmas tree in the middle of Union Square. It was lit up with a swirl of colorful lights and gigantic glittering balls. Next came a skating rink created for the season, a flood of water frozen into ice so skaters could glide and twirl upon its surface. People were laughing and appeared to be

happy, or at least content, moving in family units, some as couples walking hand-in-hand, many carrying packages, others dressed up in their finery for a festive dinner, or to attend the theater.

His eyes threatened to expose tears and Doberman clutched the blanket, swiping with the back of his hand to stifle this overt display of sorrow. At a peering toddler nearby, he grunted a *ho-ho-ho* and winked, then grimaced, as he hobbled down the few steps to reach street level. A clanging cable car crowded with passengers, several hanging from its sides, was being pulled uphill. He walked across the tracks, causing cars to honk.

About to turn and head up the block to find another alcove for the night, he spotted the little girl in the white parka, green skirt, tights, and matching hat. She was standing at the curb, waiting at the crosswalk. Doberman paused and noticed the signal light changing from a red hand to a white man walking. The girl, looking straight ahead and waving at someone, stepped off the curb – about to cross over to the other side.

The downtown noise was deafening, but Doberman heard then saw the automobile accelerate, racing through the red light. He ran and dove – shoving the girl out of the path of the car.

The impact was severe, sending Doberman airborne. He landed hard on the road. The shock and pain stunned him. Facing upward, he lay there, unable to move, but felt ice particles landing gently on his forehead. Amidst the discordant sounds of horns, shouts, and a choir singing Silent Night, he heard screaming from the girl, prior to his senses shutting down, plunging him into unconsciousness.

# 4

Chase saw Kay Foster through the school bus window. He watched as she disappeared and reappeared, rising up the stairs. Bundled in a blue rain coat and holding a backpack, she stopped at the empty seat beside him and sat down.

“How’s your nose?” she said.

“Better,” he said. “I don’t think it’s broken.”

“Let me look.” She gave his face a closer inspection. She softly pinched the bridge of his nose. “Does that hurt?”

“It actually feels kinda nice.”

She withdrew her hand and questioned his smile.

“Thanks for yesterday,” he said.

“My mother’s a nurse. I guess I take after her.”

“What does your father do?”

She looked down to unzip her backpack and rummage around for something inside. “A business man. He went away.”

“Does he travel a lot?”

“You want to share this?” She held up a granola bar.

“Okay. Is that your breakfast?”

“Sometimes. What about your parents?”



“My dad works for the government. Social services. I’m not sure actually what he does.”

“Do you like playing sports?”

“Not especially. Sort of. Why?”

“I don’t know. Just asking. What does your mother do?”

“She’s a child therapist. Why is that funny?”

Kay shook her head. “It’s not. Sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

“Other kids say things about me. I know that.”

“My mother told me you were hit by lightning. She saw you at the hospital. She also said you’re lucky to be alive.”

“We all are. I think what happened to me was a sign.”

“How do you mean?”

Chase took a bite of the granola bar, hesitant to speak openly and risk losing a friend, assuming she considered him to be one. He swallowed, before prefacing with, “You’ll think it’s weird.”

“Maybe.” Kay grinned. “What kind of sign?”

His shyness briefly returned. “I like talking to you.”

“Same here. What kind of a sign?”

“From God. For me to start doing good things.”

Kay ate the last piece of her granola. She crunched the wrapper into a ball and gave him a direct look. “I’d call that weird.”

They both laughed.

“It is, you’re right,” he said.

“I know I am,” she teased. “Wow, how bad do you have to be to have God zap you with a lightning bolt?”

“I wondered that too. The odds of getting struck by lightning is like one in a million.”

“Less than that, actually.”

“Was I randomly selected? Which sounds stupid. More like it was wrong place, wrong time. Just forget everything I said.”

“No way. Let’s say it’s true. What’s your plan?”

“I don’t have one. I know it’s changed me.”

“How?”

“I’m not as shy. And I’m more optimistic.”

“About?”

“The future. Like what we’re going to become.”

“What?”

“I don’t know. Anything we want. We have to believe it.”

“Okay, you first? What do you want to be?”

“I’m good with my hands. Working with wood.”

“Wood?”

“Creating things. What about you?”

“I’ll end up being a nurse, probably, like my mom.”

“Why not a doctor?”

“Maybe.”

“You’ve never dreamed of being anything else?”

“It’ll sound stupid.”

“No it won’t.”

“Designing homes. Interior spaces. I’d like doing that.”

“Why?”

Kay zipped up her backpack and held it to her chest. “Because home is where you feel safe. A place to nourish your soul.” She made a face and laughed. “*Gawd*, that does sound stupid. And weird.”

“I don’t think you’re weird or stupid.”

“Thanks.” Kay stood as the bus pulled into the schoolyard. “I didn’t lie about my dad. He did go away, not because he’s a pilot or always traveling on business. He went away because he’s an asshole. He yelled and hit my mom. I remember being afraid of him. That’s all I remember. I was five when he left home.”



Chase’s world view was expanding. He had never ventured far from home. His travels amounted to a few trips to the city, a fifteen mile drive. For a vacation, his parents took him once to Disneyland. That was the extent of his exposure to other worlds. He now realized

there were many worlds to explore right in front of him. As the bus came to a stop, he said goodbye to Kay. They went separate ways. The courtyard was already teeming with student bodies assembled in its variety of groups defined by age, gender, and popularity.

Being struck by lightning caused Chase to see these groups as if they were foreign countries. He knew virtually nothing about these other kids. They were designated territories he had yet to experience. He would veer away, avoiding contact, moving between these cliques which projected vibes as palpable as force fields that repelled a stray electron. Once he had reached his locker in the hallway, he felt safe. Then inside the classrooms he felt protected wedged within his desk. He ate alone during lunchtime.

Today, he penetrated one of these exclusive magnetic fields to reach Norm who was standing with his friends. They were hovered loosely near the fountain before the first morning bell.

“Hey,” he said.

Norm turned and appeared surprised to see him standing there. “Hey, sorry about yesterday. Derick can be a Dick.”

“That’s okay. I’ve been hit harder.”

Norm grinned. “By lightning. You’re a legend.”

Chase shrugged. “I don’t think his anger was really meant for me anyway.”

“Once you get to know him, he’s not such a bad guy.”

“If you say.” Chase turned to go. “See you in class.”

“Later. Hey. That’s an awesome scar.”

# 5

Voice recognition. It was heard within the depths of a dream as he entered semi-consciousness. His head was throbbing. The side of his body, leg, and ankle, ached too. The pain was overwhelming. He lay immobile on a warm bed of cement. He was detecting a clean, antiseptic smell.

The voice came again. “That’s the name he told me.”

“Doberman. You’re sure?”

“Pretty sure. Yes, I’m very sure.”

“He has no identification. We labeled him a John Doe.”

“Will he be okay?”

It was the girl’s voice again. Doberman knew her. Someone from his childhood. He struggled to remember who.

“How bad was he injured?” It was a man’s voice.

“He had a concussion. It’s uncertain whether there will be any permanent damage. He suffered five broken ribs. A punctured lung. Broken leg and a fractured ankle. He’s lucky to be alive.”

*Lucky to be alive.*

The words came from a women. They seemed to float then fade. His eyes opened. He was adjusting to the sharp lights.

“Look, he’s awake!”

Doberman saw the elf, then recognized the girl from the street. Her excited smile was comforting.

“Where am I?”

Several other people were there. One was a doctor, identifiable by her green surgery scrubs and stethoscope.

“You’re a lucky man,” she told him.

“Why am I here?”

“A car hit you,” she said.

“You saved my life,” said the girl.

The doctor asked, “How much do you remember?”

“Bits and pieces.” Doberman scanned the room and determined he was in an ICU room. His arm was attached to an IV. There was also beeping equipment monitoring his body.

“You had no identification on you. What’s your name?”

“Doberman.”

“I told you,” said the girl.

A man put his hand on her shoulder. The father, he guessed.

“Is that your last name?” asked the doctor.

“It’s my only name.” Doberman saw two other men standing at the foot of the hospital bed. One was a police officer.

The other one spoke, saying, “Mr Doberman—”

“It’s just Doberman.”

The man went on to say, “One of the emergency room doctors recognized you. From having visited us before. This is now the third time you’ve tried to kill yourself.”

“How dare you! This man saved my daughter’s life.”

“Mr. Sparks, I appreciate your view. But I was notified by other physicians. And I’ve studied this man’s record.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m Doctor Stevens. I oversee the psychiatric unit”

“Excuse me, Doctor,” said the father. “This wasn’t an attempted

suicide. It was an act of heroics.”

“Mr. Sparks, this man lives on the streets. He’s homeless. And our records clearly indicate there is a pattern—”

“To hell with your records! I’m a retired army sergeant. I know bravery when I see it. I was on the opposite side of the street, waiting for my daughter to cross, when a speeding car ran the red light and nearly killed her. And he *would* have had this man *not* pushed her out of the way, sacrificing himself.”

“Nevertheless, because—”

“What do you plan to do with him?”

Existentially fascinated, Doberman observed this back and forth discussion about his fate and state of existence.

“Since he is homeless, has no means of support, or the ability to pay for his healthcare – which we, the taxpayers, are obliged by state law to provide free of charge – and given his history of emergency care, I have the authority to hold and commit him to the department of psychiatric care for evaluation. Either that, or we send him back into the streets. Do you have a better plan?”

“We could take him in,” said the girl.

“Bristol,” said the father. “That’s not something—”

“He could stay in our guest house. Where grandma was before she died. It’s empty now.”

“Sweetie.”

“Not advisable,” Stevens chimed in. “Really, it’s not—”

“Dad, until he gets better.”

“We don’t ... Excuse us, Doberman. We—”

Doberman waved a dismissive hand. “Not a problem.”

“Bristol, the doctors here know—”

“He saved my life!”

The father was in a quandary of emotions, painfully conflicted, wanting to do the right thing in the presence of his daughter.

The woman doctor was curiously taking it all in too, remaining

neutral, until she surprised them all. “From what I’ve been told by my colleagues, who have treated this man before, he’s shown to have a good heart, and has never exhibited violent behavior.”

“He needs our help, Daddy. Please?”

“As an incentive,” added the woman, “If you were to seriously consider this temporary housing situation, I’d be more than willing to make house visits, as his physician, until he recovers fully.”

“Seriously, Dr. Evans? What you’re proposing is—”

“Please?” Bristol pleaded. “He needs a home.”

“Hey, BS,” hissed Doberman. “Remember, I’m not a dog.”



Chase stopped in the hallway by the auditorium to peruse the bulletin board. The prominent flyer had dayglow images depicting a golden brick road winding toward a distant glittering emerald city. Posted by the Drama Department, it announced the Spring musical: Wizard of Oz. There was a sign-up sheet for any student wanting to audition. He looked closer to see if he recognized any of the names. As a freshman, he knew hardly any upperclass students, except for a few notable standouts who always made sure they were known. One name on the list of entries stood out: Kay Foster.

He determined the flyer to be another sign. Grabbing the pencil dangling from a string held by a pushpin stuck into the corkboard, he wrote his name on the list. Perplexed by what it all meant, since he had no experience performing on a stage or ever singing in public, Chase knew enough to know he needed to act. So he signed up. He re-read the print to make sure there were no requirements stating the participants needed to be students enrolled in a drama class.

A week later, he was among the other wannabe actors in the auditorium to receive printed handouts of the script to take home and read before returning the next week for auditions. During the commotion of the first assembled reading, the teacher, a Ms. Havish,



who would be directing this production, made it known she was a graduate of Juilliard in New York City and recited her achievements on Broadway and in Hollywood. Therefore, to make this enterprise worthy of her ample talent and precious time, she would require their adolescent undivided attention, respect, and devotion.

Chase was left wondering what career calamity had occurred to cause Ms. Havish's demotion, employed here to instruct high-school students. Her time-consuming lecture negated an opportunity to talk with Kay, who waved and greeted him with a smile, then departed promptly when the cattle call ended.

Chase chose to read for the part of the Lion, whose character flaw was described as being one who lacked courage. He felt his pre-lightning pre-teen years of cowardice was a gold mine he could draw for inspiration. Despite his best efforts, he wasn't given the part. Nor did he receive a minor role as one of the singing munchkins, flying monkeys, or dancing poppies. Kay edged out others to be chosen understudy for the lead role of Dorothy, a major accomplishment, since she was a freshman. The lead went to a senior. Chase tried to cheer Kay up by effusively congratulating her.

"Hurrah for me," she quipped sourly. "I'll be standing behind the curtain. Never to be seen. Invisible. *Woopee.*"

"You were great. She gave me nothing. And I don't care."

"No—*wait!*" she voiced aloud. "What about Toto?"

"Excuse me?" said Ms. Havish, annoyed by the interruption.

"Chase could be Toto."

"There is no relevant part written for Toto in this script."

"Dorothy needs a Toto. No lines are required."

"I could play a dog," said Chase.

"You'd only get in the way," said the director.

Kay continued to insist there be a role for Toto. Because of her unrelenting advocacy on his behalf, Chase believed the subsequent ire and harsh treatment that Kay received was the reason. Once she'd

broken the teacher's resolve – getting her to howl, “*Fine!* He can be Toto!” – Kay encountered overbearing criticism from Ms. Havish. Rehearsals came to a halt as Kay was berated before the entire cast for the way she delivered a line or sang a verse. It escalated until Ms. Havish achieved victory by tormenting Kay to the point of complete humiliation, causing her to run off in tears and threaten to quit.

Chase tried his best to console Kay by encouraging her to ignore the teacher's petty vindictiveness. “Her remarks are unjust, and not even related to your talent,” he told her. “She knows you're talented and feels threatened. You challenged her in front of the class. She wants to belittle you to show everyone that she is the one in control. It's *her* problem, not yours.”

Kay laughed and hugged Chase. They proceeded to join forces. They met after school and located on the internet a white one-piece pajama suit that, once delivered, they applied dark spots and painted paws on the feet. From a costume shop they purchased dog ears and face makeup to smear his face white before adding black patches.

Kay steadfastly remained positive during rehearsals despite the repetitive slights she received, disguised as constructive input from Ms. Havish. By now, Kay had accepted the fact she was being cast aside. Her resolve was to be cheerful despite it all and watch from the wings of the stage. Until opening night, when the lead Dorothy, plagued by a panic attack, broke out in hives and refused to perform. Horrified by this turn of events, Ms. Havish lashed out, irrationally shouting and expressing betrayal before reacting in a hair-pulling peevish reluctance – yet conceding there were no other viable options available – to hastily undress and redress (figuratively and literally) Kay as Dorothy and thrust her onto the stage as the lead.

Chase was in awe of Kay, trailing after her as her faithful dog throughout the show. At the reception which followed in the theater foyer, a congestion of attendees, comprising mostly of parents and friends, gathered to greet the cast. Kay was handed the bouquet of

roses initially intended for the other Dorothy and she professed her appreciation. Among the many well-wishers was a reporter from the local newspaper and, while complimenting the entire production, lavished his praise on Kay's stellar performance. Standing next to her was Ms. Havish who directed her frozen smile at the reporter.

"Ms. Havish deserves the credit for pushing us all so very hard, those in front and behind the stage, to bring out our full potential. Theater is about everyone. It's really a collaborative effort."

Kay's unexpected and gracious compliment produced from Ms. Havish an uncharacteristic emotional outburst of tears.

Chase had been watching nearby and listening, standing alone in his dog suit. A woman approached him.

She said, "My daughter wants to meet you."

Chase looked down and saw a shy little girl looking up.

"You were my favorite," she told him.

Her eyes were wide with an adorable look of admiration.

His heart melted. "Thank you."

Chase had no ambition or illusion of ever being a professional actor, yet, at that moment, he realized any future accomplishments or acclaim he'd receive would never top this girl's star-struck smile.