

Houseguest

Mary opened the door and with her was a leasher I'd never seen before. The leasher was shorter than most with a white fur top, wrinkled ankles, and spots on her feet. She moved slowly. She held tightly to the handrail and put both feet on the same step before moving to the next one.

When she talked, she sounded like Mary. Mary called her *Mom*. She smelled like Fig Newtons and medicated lotion. I barked loudly, and she backed away from me. I barked louder. She was afraid of me, and I felt powerful. Mom unzipped one of the bags Mary had carried in from the car and pulled out a bone, which I quickly took off her hands. Okay, maybe she's not so bad after all. She looked at me while I was eating. I barked again, and she looked away. Mary told me to stop.

I could sense my liking Mom was important to Mary, so I eased up on the barking and started working on the liking.

After a few days, I realized Mom was not much trouble and didn't get in my way or come between Mary and me. I still got to sleep in Mary's bed, play ball, and go to the park. We took Mom to the beach, but she stayed in one spot instead of walking and playing ball with us.

At night, Mom sat on the sofa with her eyes closed and head down. Growling sounds came out of her little lips. When a growl was particularly loud, she popped her head up and looked from side to side to see where the sound came from. A few minutes later, she'd drop her head again and start growling some more.

Mary slowed down the pace of her life so Mom could keep up. She took good care of Mom like she does with me. When Mom wanted something from the refrigerator, Mary got it for her. When Mom went to bed at night, Mary helped her up the stairs. When Mom watched *Wheel of Fortune*, Mary watched it, too.

Just when I was getting used to the slow little leasher, Mary came home without her. Our lives returned to normal. But while Mom was here, I saw a different side of Mary. As with most of the others, I like that side.