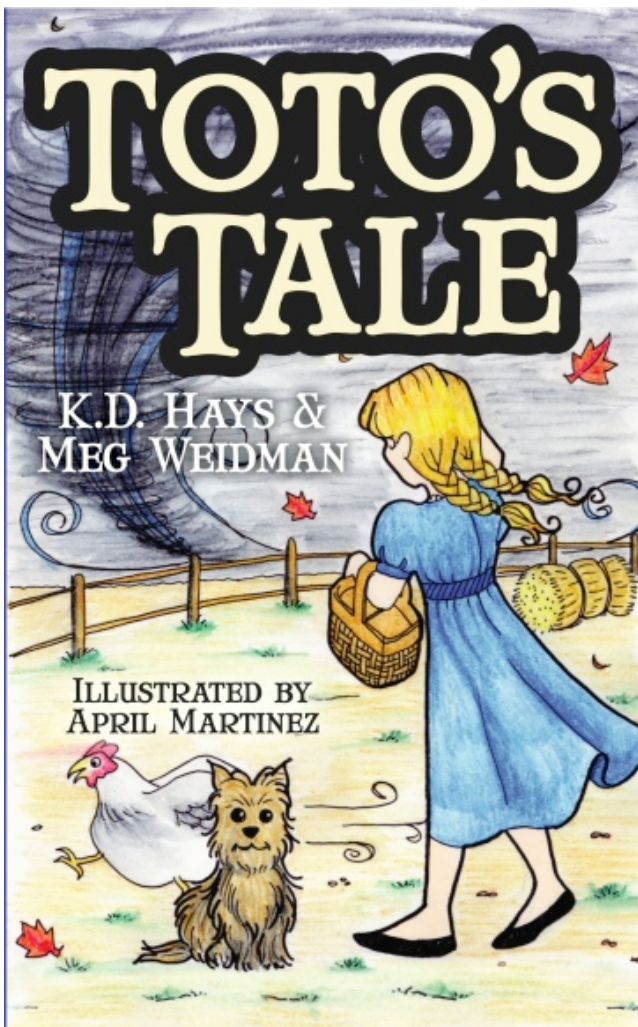


# TOTO'S TALE

K.D. HAYS &  
MEG WEIDMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY  
APRIL MARTINEZ



***Humans are so slow! Did I have to spell it out for her?***

I decided I did. But just as I started to twist my tail into the shape of a P, she nudged me toward the door. My disappointment about the food was quickly forgotten when I realized she had set the shiny shoes down near the door. Now I could finally find out what they smelled like!

Scampering over, I stuck my nose down inside the nearest one and took a deep whiff. Everything got blurry for a moment as I inhaled the scent of frog water, snakeskin and dried roots I could not even begin to name. What could possibly smell like all of those things at the same time? It was a powerful combination, and as soon as I felt normal again, I was ready for another sniff. The second time, the aroma was even more intense.

As I leaned in for a third sniff, Dorothy snatched the shoes away. I stared at her in disbelief as she kicked off her torn-up loafers. Was she going to put on the creepy frogwater shoes?

She was. Before I could utter a single bark of protest, she slid the shiny shoes onto her feet. Oh, no! Now Dorothy would turn into a dark, shriveled smelly thing like the one we'd crushed with our house. Desperate to show her her mistake, I rolled over onto my back and stuck my paws up in the air to demonstrate what could happen to her if she kept the shoes.

She thought I just wanted a tummy rub.



# TOTO'S TALE



*as told to*

K.D. HAYS  
&  
MEG WEIDMAN

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

TOTO'S TALE

© 2010 by K. D. Hays and Meg Weidman

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*This book is dedicated to all those—canine and otherwise—who are looking for a home. There's no place like home.*

*And to Terry (1933-1945), who will forever be "Toto."*

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# Introduction

I met Toto at a fantasy convention in El Dorado. He was chasing my cat across the hotel lobby, so I'm embarrassed to say that my first words to him were somewhat less than cordial.

But he apologized for knocking over my luggage, and I apologized for allowing my cat to corner him under a sofa, and after that, we became friends.

Toto told me he was tired of being a cute sidekick at Wizard of Oz parties. And it bothered him that people didn't know the whole truth about what happened in Oz.

I'm glad he finally got the chance to set the record straight.

--Catherine Asaro

“But what do *you* want?” he continued, speaking to Toto. Toto only wagged his tail; for, strange to say, he could not speak.

— L. Frank Baum

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*



# Chapter 1

I'd smelled fear on the humans all morning, and the stink was really getting on my nerves. I mean, we all knew a windstorm was coming, and it was going to be rough; but the humans didn't have anything to worry about. They'd just go down into The Hole and wait till it was all over.

It was the chickens who should have been worried. Their house was so flimsy it was likely to take off and fly away in the next windstorm. But chickens are too stupid to think about these things, so they weren't worried yet. Meanwhile, Auntem gave off enough worry scent to cover every living thing in the entire state of Kansas, and as I said, the smell was pretty annoying.

So, yeah, I knew I wasn't supposed to chase the chickens, but I couldn't help myself. When those lame-brained layers started bragging about which one of them could fly fastest, I decided to let them prove it.

I took off after Eggy, baring my teeth like I was going to rip all the feathers out of her tail. It felt really good to run. It also felt good to get some re-

venge on the chickens. Ever since yesterday, when the nasty old neighbor tried to stab me with a pitchfork just for digging a little hole in her garden, everyone here had teased me for running home with my tail between my legs. They would have done the same thing—it was a big *sharp* pitchfork, and the neighbor is as mean as a wet cat.

The chickens, in particular, had acted like I was the only one who had ever shown fear in the history of forever. Now I decided I'd put a little fear in the chickens so *they* could demonstrate why their name means being a coward.

“*Squahhhhh!*” Eggy yelled as she ran across the farmyard with me right on her tail. “That giant rodent is going to eat me!” Her big fat feathered body bounced ridiculously from side to side as she dashed around on long spindly legs.

“I thought you could fly,” I barked. “And you know I’m not a rodent.” I chased her into a corner between the water trough and the barn.

“I can’t fly in this wind, you fool,” she squawked.

“Excuses, excuses.” I got ready to pounce on her, but she turned fast and hopped out of the way. Then she ran straight for the henhouse.

“Oh, no, you don’t,” I muttered as I shot after her. She would have to pay for that rodent remark.

The other animals always make rude comments about my size, but I think they’re just jealous because I get to sleep in the house with the people. I’m small, yeah, but I’m a lot bigger than a rat. And I have a much nicer tail.

“He’s coming this—*squaaah!*—way,” one of the other chickens shrieked.

They had been pecking in the yard, trying to eat up all the loose bits of corn before they were blown away by the storm coming across the plains. Now, instead of eating, they scrambled frantically to get away

from me, squawking and flapping and looking about as ruffled as they could possibly get. I loved it. I ran in circles, snapping occasionally to keep them moving.

Then I saw one obnoxious old hen who had pecked at Dorothy's ankle last week. I really did want to bite her. So, I opened my mouth extra-wide and headed straight for her big fat chicken butt.

"*Toto!*"

I had to stop when I heard that voice. It was Dorothy, my pet girl.

"Stop something chickens, Toto," she said.

With her flat face and small mouth, she can't really talk properly, but I still love her. Auntem and Unclehenry, the other people, are always making her work when what she really wants to do is roam the fields with me, chasing grasshoppers and digging for shiny beetles. She needs me to protect her from work. If you do too much work, you end up dull and sad like Auntem, or pinched and mean like the mean neighbor with the pitchfork.

I want to protect my girl and keep her just the way she is. I love everything about my Dorothy, from the smell of her shoes to her sloppy habit of throwing things everywhere. She throws a stick or ball, and I have to go pick it up for her. Then, instead of putting it away, she just throws it someplace else, and I have to pick it up again. It makes no sense at all, and sometimes I get tired of cleaning up after her. Still, I love her, and I'll do anything she asks.

When I *know* what she's asking, that is. I have to pay attention really hard to understand human speech, and usually, I don't bother

Right now, though, even if she didn't use many real words, I could pretty much tell what she wanted me to do just from the tone of her voice and the way she looked at me, as if she wanted to tie me up like a shock of wheat and throw me into the barn loft. She

was annoyed, and I could smell a little anger on her, too. But underneath it all, there seemed to be more fear than anything else.

Fear of the storm, probably.

With one last look at the fat old hen, I turned and trotted over to Dorothy. I wagged my tail and hoped she would pet me for a minute and that I could help her forget her fears about the increasing wind and the dark clouds growing like mountains in the sky. Maybe she would also forget I'd been trying to scare the chickens and that I'd chewed on one of her shoes this morning before breakfast. She would forget it all, and we'd just...

It didn't happen.

She looked at me for a bit, like maybe she was going to pet me, but when she bent down, it was just so she could tuck a loose flap of leather back into her shoe. That piece of leather is always coming loose and tripping her, so she really should let me chew it off for her, but whenever I try, someone always stops me.

"Dorothy!" Auntem barked as she stepped out of the back door of the house, "Something up something chickens."

She can't talk any better than Dorothy. They practice a lot—it seems like they're always barking about something—but their language is so different it's difficult to translate into real words.

Anyway, I guess Auntem had just told Dorothy to round up the hens, because that's what she did. She ran around waving her arms, herding them all into the henhouse. I could have helped, but somehow I didn't think she wanted me to run around after them again.

So, instead, I trotted over to the barn to watch Unclehenry bring the cows and the horses inside. He was having a hard time holding the door open because the wind blew it closed. He kept turning to look over

his shoulder, as if there were a monster behind him. But it was just dark clouds and grass bent low under the weight of the coming storm. The wind moaned almost like a voice as it gusted along the eaves of the barn.

That sound made me shiver, and I had to admit I couldn't wait until it was time to go into The Hole.

The Hole is, well, a *hole*—dug out under the house—and since the house is very small, The Hole is even smaller. It's not much bigger than the ones I dig out in the yard to bury my pork chop bones. But it's deep and smells of worms and roots, a rich aroma that reminds me of underwear. It's a damp, comforting place much more interesting than the hard dry ground above. So, I never mind the wind and storms, because I know they mean a visit to The Hole.

With a loud thud, Unclehenry slammed the barn door shut and started toward the house with a lantern and pail of water. Maybe it was time already! I hurried to get Dorothy so we could go down into The Hole together.

I couldn't find her. The henhouse was closed up tight and sounded and smelled full of hens. I could tell Dorothy wasn't in there. She couldn't have gone into the barn, or I would have seen her. So, she must be in the people house. I pushed through the hole in the screen door, ran inside and headed straight for the door in the kitchen floor, expecting to see she was on her way down into The Hole.

She wasn't.

## Chapter 2

**A**untem was crouched down inside The Hole, crying.

“Toto!” Unclehenry yelled when he saw me. He reached out to grab my collar, but I twisted away from him. I had to find Dorothy, and I couldn’t do that if they pulled me into The Hole.

Faintly, over the roar and moan of the wind, I could hear my name. Dorothy was calling me. *She* was out looking for *me*!

I ran toward the sound of her voice—out the kitchen door, down the steps and into the yard. At first, I thought she was in the front yard, so I headed that way. But the wind roared and swirled, carrying her voice in every direction, along with clouds of dust and straw. It was getting harder to see with each passing second.

I turned every which way, trying to find her scent or hear her call again. Then, just when I was afraid I’d never find her, I felt her arm around me. She scooped me up and carried me up onto the front porch. The wind pushed us back each step of the way. It seemed to take all Dorothy’s strength just to get to the

door, and then, no matter how hard she tugged, it wouldn't open. Wind whipped my hair into my eyes, and the roar made my head ache.

The full fury of the storm was almost on us now, and instead of being safe inside the wonderful Hole, we were out on the porch being attacked by flying bits of straw. I barked and wriggled out of Dorothy's arms to run to her bedroom window, which was open almost enough for us to crawl through. Dorothy was smart enough to understand right away what I wanted her to do. She pushed the window sash all the way up, set me inside then crawled in after me.

For a moment, we just lay on the floor together panting. The wind still howled and moaned, but the walls protected us from the grass and straw that stung like bees. We weren't in The Hole, but we were safe.

Or so I thought.

As the roar of the wind grew even louder, the whole house started shaking like it was tired of being attached to the ground and wanted to get up and move. That made both of us start crawling toward the kitchen so we could get down inside The Hole. Wind shrieked all around us like a demon, and the house was pitching and swaying so much it was hard to move forward.

Just as we reached the kitchen, the house gave one huge lurch, and everything tipped sideways. The roar of the wind was almost drowned out by a horrible ripping sound, as if the ground were being torn into pieces. We tilted the other direction, and I slid into a cabinet full of crackers, soup cans and jars of pickled eggs. Food? The food cabinets were too high for me to reach. How could I be seeing crackers? It made no sense.

Smells swirled by so fast the odor of henhouse poop mingled with the scent of the neighbor's apple

pie. I thought I was going crazy. How could I smell the neighbor's pie when her house was 5280 steps away?

When I looked out the window, I saw why. The pie was sort-of hovering outside our window. And that wasn't the weird part. The weird part was that *we* were sort-of hovering above the ground. So was the henhouse.

The hens were not amused. Their feathers stuck out at all angles, and half of them were upside down. An egg hit the windowsill, leaving a stringy, goeey mess that stretched in a long line as the house spun around. Some got stuck in my ear. After that, the roar of the wind became less noticeable because I was too busy trying to rub the egg mess off my head. Every few seconds, I had to stop to watch for more flying eggs.

I watched for other flying things, too. After all, most of the smells of the farmyard don't come from eggs.

Dorothy wasn't watching as closely as I was, and she got hit in the forehead with a grade-A extra-large. She cried out in pain, and I ran over to her to make sure she was alright. I rubbed against her knee—I'm not tall, and when she's standing, that the highest part I can reach. She picked me up and held me against her cheek and whispered nonsense words. Together, we watched the chickens, hay, feathers and pie blow past the window over and over, like we were in the center of some weird merry-go-round.

The house had risen up to the top of a swirling cloud, which should have been very scary. And it was...for a while. Dorothy clutched me tightly, and my hairs all stood up and got itchy.

But things went on like this for so long, eventually it started to seem almost normal. Dorothy relaxed her grip on me. I relaxed my hair. She yawned. I yawned. She set me down. I didn't pay much attention to the



window after that because I spotted a pork chop on the floor.

Or was it the wall? The reason I wondered was that the pork chop was lying on a picture of a grumpy-looking family. I didn't remember seeing pictures on the floor, but people did put them on the wall. Or maybe they grew that way. Anyhow, it was a small pork chop, so I finished it in a few bites and looked for a place to bury the bone.

There was an opening in the floor where the cellar had been when the house sat on the ground instead of floating. If I put my bone in there, it might keep up with the rest of the house and bury itself when we landed.

But what if it didn't? I decided to bury the bone in Dorothy's bed.

I guess she thought I was scared. She followed me and climbed onto the bed and poked around under the covers until she found me. We snuggled together for another long time, listening to the wind howl and feeling the house pitch and turn with a rocking motion that grew steadier after a while. It was way past time for my early-mid-late-morning nap, so I closed my eyes. Dorothy snored, but I never fell asleep. I did rest my eyes a little, though.

Suddenly, the bed fell out of the sky with a loud *whump* that hurt my ears. The house fell, too, of course, since the bed was still in the house. The view out the windows was different from back on the farm. I could see trees, lots of beautiful, tall trees. We don't have many of those back home, so it's hard to find a good stick to chew or the right target for marking territory. But now they were everywhere. I had never seen so many trees in one place.

"Dorothy," I barked, "I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

But of course, she couldn't understand me.

## Chapter 3

I ran to the door and barked to tell her to follow me, but she hung back, and I could smell that she was scared. I wondered if she was afraid of so many trees. Or maybe it was all the new smells. The wind brought the scent of rainwater, cherries, ground roses, clover, pie spices, apples and strange birds, plus lots of other things I couldn't even name. What could all of these new smells be? Where did they come from?

I was just about to start out the door without waiting for Dorothy when I realized some of those smells might come from large creatures that eat dogs. Enormous creatures with teeth the size of cattle horns.

I decided to go back to get my pork chop bone. Dorothy thought I was trying to hide in the bed, but I was just whimpering because I had a furball stuck in my throat, not because I was scared. Why should I be scared? After all, if there *were* enormous long-toothed beasts out there, they would eat Dorothy first because there was no way I was going out before her. She *is* my pet, after all, and is supposed to look out for me.

But she thought we were going out together, apparently. After pausing to tuck the loose piece of leather back into her shoe, she picked me up and carried me to the door, where the smells were even more powerful.

Sunlight filtered through the trees on a lush landscape of flowers and plants. I could hear birds that sounded like chickens, only less annoying. And there was a burbling sound that reminded me of Auntem pumping water into a tub for a bath. I would have to stay away from that sound. Baths in Kansas were bad enough. I had no intention of getting one here in this strange place. Wherever it was.

The difference became really obvious when three people appeared. I decided to call them “people-who-can’t-quite-reach-things” because they were shorter than Dorothy, even though they walked and frowned like grown-up people who worked too much. I hoped these shorter people might store their food lower than the people in Kansas did.

These shorter versions of people were also mostly bald, and covered up their lack of fur with silly-looking clothes. They smelled terrible, and they had blunt teeth that weren’t a whole lot longer than mine. So, I told them exactly what I thought of them without worrying they would eat me or trample me into the ground.

Dorothy clamped her hand down over my nose and stopped me in mid-bark.

When the people-who-can’t-quite-reach-things got close to our house, they bent forward and looked down as if they were searching for something on the ground. Unclehenry, Auntem and Dorothy do something like this every night before supper, and I have never figured out what they’re looking for. I used to think it meant they’d dropped some food under the table, but every time I looked, I never found any.

When the short people straightened up again, one—a female—stepped forward as if she were the leader of the pack. This surprised me, because in addition to being a female, she also looked awfully young to be the leader. But she was taller than the others, so maybe that made her important.

Then, when I looked at her more closely, I realized it was just her clothes that made her look young. She wore a light-colored dress, with a big frilly skirt and puffy sleeves, that reminded me of a lampshade. There was glittery stuff all over her, too, as if she'd sneezed into a pile of metal shavings. In the bright sunlight, she sparkled like pond water. When the sun ducked behind a cloud, though, I could see that under all the makeup she was wearing her face was wrinkled like a prune.

She was *old*, but she walked with pride, like she was important and she knew it and she knew that everyone else knew it, too.

“Are you a good something?” she asked Dorothy. “Or are you a bad something?”

This surprised me. Usually people just tell you whether you're good or bad. They don't ask your opinion.

Dorothy seemed surprised, too. She shook her head and barked some words that made it sound like she didn't understand what the old lady with the lampshade dress was talking about.

“You killed the something something,” the Lampshade Lady explained.

“No!” Dorothy exclaimed in horror.

The accusation made no sense. Dorothy can't run fast enough to catch anything, and her teeth aren't sharp enough to kill anything if she did. And I'd been with her all day, and she hadn't even been mean to any living creature, let alone tried to kill one.

Maybe the Lampshade Lady was really talking to me, but I swear all I do is *chase* the chickens. I've never killed one.

The Lampshade Lady only laughed.

"Your house killed the something something, and that's good because something."

I sniffed around for signs of blood or gore. Did the house fall on the chickens? I wouldn't consider them good. And anyway, it wasn't like we asked the house to fall on anything. It just sort of happened.

I saw no signs of crushed chickens, but when I ran around the side of the house, I finally understood what the Lampshade Lady was talking about. Sticking out from underneath were two bony legs that looked like they'd belonged to a person about Auntem's size. At first, I had this sick feeling we *had* dropped the house on Auntem. Then I realized it couldn't possibly be Auntem because (1) her legs are stout, like an ox's, and the dead creature had legs more like a chicken's and (2) Auntem would never wear such fancy, shiny shoes. In fact, no one in the state of Kansas had shoes like that. Or legs like that. Just where the heck were we, anyway?

The Lampshade Lady led Dorothy around the house, and Dorothy shrieked when she saw the legs.

"Oh, no!" She turned and clutched at the lady's puffy sleeves. "Help! Something help her!"

But the Lampshade Lady just laughed. That was kind of obnoxious, I thought. I mean, our house had killed this person, so it wasn't all *that* funny. And the lady's laugh was real annoying, too. All high-pitched and squeaky.

"She was a bad something," the lady explained. She pointed to the east and then to the north and went on about being good. Then, with her face set in a grim frown, she pointed to the west, where the sun was already starting to sink toward the horizon. I couldn't understand what she said—except the word

*bad* once or twice more—but just the tone of her voice made me shiver. There was probably a mean neighbor with a huge-normous pitchfork who lived somewhere in that direction.

Dorothy and the Lampshade Lady jabbered on for a while about good and bad things in various directions, but I figured I didn't need to pay attention anymore. Our house had killed the bad whatever in the east. So, if we just stayed away from the bad whatever in the west, we'd be fine.

I decided to go over to sniff the legs with the shiny shoes, but as the sun came out from behind a cloud and cast its rays over the side of the house, the legs started to dry up and shrink. By the time I got there, nothing was left but the shiny shoes.

I barked to get Dorothy's attention. She couldn't feel bad about killing something that wasn't even there anymore, could she? What *had* those legs belonged to? The smell in the shoes would give me a good idea.

But just as I turned back to get a whiff, the Lampshade Lady jumped over in front of me. She moved with amazing speed, almost like magic. Before I had a chance to get my nose in place, she reached down, plucked the shoes up off the ground and handed them to Dorothy.

I groaned. What a waste! Dorothy couldn't tell anything about them from the smell. And she hardly ever took the time to chew shoes, either. The Lampshade Lady should have given them to me.

Dorothy tucked the shoes under her arm without even trying to sniff them. She nodded toward the house.

"I need to get home to Auntem and Unclehenry," she said with a frown of worry. "Can you tell me how to get to Kansas?"

The Lampshade Lady and the other short people just sort of looked at each other for a moment. Then

they all started talking at once, and though I didn't hear the word *no*, they all seemed to be saying it in one way or another. There was a lot of head-shaking and sour looks and pointing in various directions and gloomy low-pitched voices.

Dorothy didn't seem to believe them at first, but the longer they talked, the more I smelled fear rising in her. Tears welled up in her eyes and spilled over onto her cheeks, and soon she was sobbing. The others kept talking; but now instead of pointing in various random directions, they all started pointing at a road made of bricks. As if that would solve anything. We didn't have a car.

I don't know how they could keep talking when what Dorothy needed was a hug. Even I knew that, and I'd never hugged anyone in my life. I nuzzled her ankle, but without arms, I'm not much good at hugging. Auntem does it really well. Dorothy needed Auntem to give her a hug.

She also needed a tissue. I realized that when she picked me up and gave me a hug. Her nose was running like crazy, and as much as I love my girl, I really don't like the feeling of wet snot in my hair.

Still, I tried to ignore the wetness as Dorothy held me close.

The Lampshade Lady raised her hand, and the others stopped jabbering like they knew she was going to say something important. I concentrated real hard so I could understand.

"You must swallow the Jell-O brick road," she said with finality.

Now, that was something I could do. I licked Dorothy's chin to cheer her up. Jell-O was a little weird but definitely eatable. It might take a while to eat a whole road, but I knew I could do it. If that was all it took...

Wait a minute.



I turned to look at the road. Those bricks weren't Jell-O. They were bricks of bricky stuff—hard, heavy and non-edible. How were we supposed to swallow them?

Maybe I misheard that part. She probably said to *follow* the road.

But how was that narrow track of bricks going to help us? We'd flown here through the air. We couldn't just walk back. And there weren't any brick roads in Kansas, so this was probably going to lead us someplace else weird. If she'd told us to follow a *dirt* road, I'd have felt a lot more comfortable.

"Can you come with us?" Dorothy asked the Lampshade Lady.

"No." Then she said something about shoes.

Coward! She was as bad as a chicken and just about as ugly. She knew this place, and we needed her help, and she wouldn't help us. I was starting to get mad, really mad. I wriggled down out of Dorothy's arms ready to bite the Lampshade Lady, but she disappeared before my very mouth.

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