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THE PROMISE

Robert Crais

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS | New York

"She is?"

"Yeah. She's fine. Come see for yourself."

Scott felt better after talking to Budress. He didn't think about Stiles and her question again until he reached his car, and then it began to bother him.

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Maggie

USMC MILITARY WORKING DOG Maggie T415 finds herself standing on a dusty road in the central provinces of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The mid-morning sun is so harsh the Marines surrounding her hide their eyes with sunglasses. Maggie, who stands with her Marine K-9 handler, Pete, does not know she is a military working dog. She does not know her serial number, T415, is tattooed inside her left ear or that she is in Afghanistan or the men around her are Marines. She is a German shepherd dog. She knows what she needs to know. Her name is Maggie, she and Pete are pack, and Pete is currently pouring water onto her head and back. In her dream, Maggie does not feel the brutal heat or the sand burning her pads or the dust blowing into her eyes or the itchy feel of the cool water Pete scratches into her undercoat. In her dream, she remembers only Pete's strong scent, the joy of Pete's attention, and the happiness she shows by wagging her tail. The other Marines are shadows without scent or substance. Only Pete and those memories

she associates with Pete are real to her. In her dream, Maggie does not remember Pete has only twelve minutes left to live.

Maggie does not dream in sequential images as humans dream. Humans are visual. Maggie dreams first of scents, which trigger emotions and images she associates with those scents.

Pete. The scent of his gear and battle rifle and sweat and soap and the nylon and steel leash that bound them together.

The green tennis ball hidden in Pete's pocket. Felt, rubber, adhesive, and ink. The green ball was her favorite toy and her reward when she found the special scents Pete trained her to find. The scent of the green ball was the scent of a promise. Pete's promise to reward her.

The game they play. Maggie dreams of their game often. They walk together on a long road, far ahead of the shadow-Marines. Maggie is searching for the special scents Pete trained her to find. If she finds a special scent, she will drop to her belly, stare at the source of the scent, and Pete will reward her. He will pet her, squeak his approval, and throw the green ball. Pete happy. Maggie happy. Pack happy. Maggie loved to chase the green ball. Maggie loved to play their game.

Her dreamscape unfolds in bits and pieces, snaps and flashes, sometimes connected, other times not. She dreams of walking with Pete on the long road. She dreams of the sweet diesel scent when they ride in the Hummer. She dreams of petting, strokes, Pete giving her water, and the two of them sharing chow.

She dreams of the wild Afghan dogs that attacked her one desert evening and the hot scent of thunder as Pete rushed to her side, pack against pack, the feral dogs screaming as they died. She dreams of the fierce elation she felt at the taste of their blood, and, after, in dominant victory, the warm joy of grooming, Pete checking her for bites and wounds as Maggie licked the gun-smoke from his face, Pete safe, Maggie safe, pack safe.

As Maggie dreams of this canine combat, her paws twitch, her sleeping eyes roll, and she softly huffs.

In her dream, as was the case in life, Maggie and Pete sit together when they rest, sleep beside each other in the cold desert night, and eat apart from the others. Maggie grows wary when others approach, not for herself but for Pete. Pete is hers. Her instinct is to protect him. Maggie and Pete are pack. The others are not.

Her dreamscape turns again.

Maggie and Pete are playing their game when the stink of goats and men smelling of coriander slams into her. Her paws twitch and flicker. Her scent memory screams a warning, but she cannot escape the terrible scents crashing into her like runaway train cars, the goats, the coriander, the first whiff of the special scent, a scent that promised a reward.

Snap snap snap—her dream memories unfold.

Maggie sources the scent to one of the men.

She alerts, and Pete is beside her.

Pete's fear envelops her as he moves to the man and in the same moment Maggie's world explodes.

Her kaleidoscope nightmare turns faster.

Pete is torn and dying before her.

Maggie whines in her sleep at the bitter scent of his death.

She drags herself to him, compelled by instincts bred into her and her kind for a hundred thousand generations. Guard. Soothe. Heal. Protect.

A hard blow kicks her into the air, rolling her end over end. She snaps at white-hot pain in her hips, rights herself, and returns to him. She stands over him now, guarding him.

A second devastating blow throws her into the air, screaming, spinning, so high into the bright blue desert air—

Maggie's nightmare shape-shifts to a warehouse near the Los Angeles

Scott James

River, where she stands over Scott. The scent of burnt gunpowder is sharp again. The scent of Scott's dying body is stronger.

Though Maggie has no measure of time, almost two years after she lost Pete in Afghanistan, she finds herself in Los Angeles with Scott.

Scott is now alpha.

Scott and Maggie are pack.

The terrible awful dying scents of Scott and Pete melt together in her scent memory as one, and once more her pack is threatened.

The nightmare shifts again. Maggie races through the building. She powers up the scent cone left by Scott's attacker. This is no longer a game she plays. The man she hunts is prey. A green ball is not the reward she seeks.

The other's scent trail is as clear to Maggie as a path of living fire. She runs harder, powering after him with a hunger passed down from the mountain wolves and wild canids who chased their prey for miles, never stopping never sated until their fangs sank deep, their prey came down, their muzzles dripped with blood.

Maggie sees her prey ahead, a living furnace of scent.

She smells his fear.

The other turns to face her, raises his hands, an act of challenge that fuels her primal fury.

The scent of Scott's pain and blood spurs her across the distance. Her bone-deep instinct commands: If the pack is threatened, the threat must be driven away or destroyed.

This other will not harm Scott again.

Scott safe.

Pack safe.

Her devotion is absolute.

Maggie growls deep in her heavy chest, bares gleaming fangs, and leaps into the flames . . .

SCOTT BELIEVED THE SEARCH had gone well. Budress, Evanski, and Peters had all congratulated him, but he couldn't fault Stiles for her question. Scott had seen the suspect disappear between the houses, he had been closer to the suspect than anyone else, and Maggie could cover forty yards in two-point-eight seconds. But Scott hadn't known whether Carlos Etana was dead or alive, or if other individuals were in the house. Chasing the suspect would have meant letting his partners face the unknown without Maggie's help. Scott chose to back up his teammates. He didn't think twice about it, and no one had mentioned it until Stiles. Scott was still brooding about it when he reached Glendale.

The Platoon's training facility was a low cinder-block building at the edge of a fenced grass field. The building was divided into two small offices and a makeshift kennel, where dogs could be penned between sessions. The Platoon's daily shift didn't begin until mid-

Maggie

MAGGIE WAS NOT THINKING OF Pete when the bright green ball dropped from the sky ahead of her and bounced away. The flash of green and familiar bounce triggered a rush of scent memories: Pete, the approval Pete lavished on her when she found a special scent, and her joy when Pete threw the green ball to reward her. Maggie instinctively charged after the ball, but she slowed when the scent memories dimmed, and watched the ball roll away. She sniffed, and knew Pete had not touched this ball. She sniffed, and Pete was gone.

A skinny white dog raced to the ball, but Maggie paid no attention. The green ball was no longer her favorite toy.

Maggie returned to Scott's side.

Wag.

Scott was pack. Her favorite reward was baloney.

Scott and the woman were talking. Maggie knew they weren't talking to her because Scott looked at Maggie when he spoke to her,

and now Scott and the woman were looking at each other. Maggie did not understand their words, but their tone was warm, and Scott often laughed. Laughter was play. Maggie felt joy when Scott laughed.

Wag wag.

The woman was not pack. Maggie was comfortable with the woman, but Scott was her world.

Maggie was a German shepherd dog. She was bred to protect what was hers, and selected by the Marine Corps based on the strength of her drives. Maggie stayed close to Scott. She watched passing dogs and people for signs of aggression, and checked the air for unusual or threatening scents. She smelled coyotes and deer, and the rabbits that crossed the trail before dawn, and the dogs and people who had walked the trail earlier, and the dead eggs of a lizard at the base of a yucca. She smelled gophers hidden in tunnels on the slope above them, and the fading scent of a dead owl in the canyon below. None of these scents were unusual or held special meaning. This was good. In Maggie's German shepherd world, the familiar meant safety.

Scott safe.

Maggie safe.

Pack safe.

Wag.

Scott touched her head.

"Good girl."

Wag wag wag.

Maggie loved being near him. This close, Scott's scent enveloped her. Maggie did not know she was smelling the millions of skin cells a person sheds with each step and the bacteria that thrived on those cells and the amino acids and oils produced by Scott's skin. She did not know this snowstorm of cells swirled in the air—falling, climbing, drifting, settling—and left a spreading cone of scent like a boat's invis-

ible wake. Maggie knew nothing of skin cells and amino acids, but she knew what she needed to know.

Maggie knew they were returning to the car. She knew this because their walks always followed the same pattern. Ride in the car, get out, walk, return to the car, get in, ride. Now, as they neared the gate, she smelled the two sweating men and the older female with the little pug dog. The men smelled of sweat, but not the threatening scent of adrenaline. The older woman smelled of bitter flowers, and the little pug dog smelled of fecal matter and a growing infection.

Maggie followed Scott around the gate into the parking lot, and that's when she caught a faint scent. The scent tickled a memory, but was too faint to identify, so she lifted her nose, and tasted again.

Sniff sniff sniff.

Each time she sniffed, scent molecules collected on bony plates in her nasal cavity. These molecules collected a few at a time until enough were gathered for Maggie to recognize. This didn't take many. With more than two hundred million scent receptors in her long shepherd's nose, and almost a fourth of her brain devoted to her sense of smell, Maggie could recognize scents so faint they were measured in parts per trillion.

Sniff sniff sniff.

Sniff.

The memories of Pete and the special scents he trained her to find rushed back, exactly as they had the night before, and joy filled her heart. Finding the special scent led to a reward. Love. Approval. Baloney.

Maggie trotted away, working the edges of the scent cone. She sourced the scent to Scott's car, where the air underneath was hot with the special scent. Pete had taught her never to approach or touch these special scents, so she pegged the hottest point, and dropped to

her belly. Maggie glanced proudly at Scott, pleased and giddy with anticipation.

"Maggie, out! Out!"

Scott's alpha voice was commanding.

Maggie bounced to her feet and ran to his side.

Scott squeaked approval, stayed her, and went to his car. Maggie sensed something was wrong by the change in his gait. She desperately wanted to follow, but Scott had stayed her. She obeyed, but whimpered anxiously when he crawled under the car.

Maggie saw him tense, and the frantic way he scrambled to his feet, and heard the strain in his voice when he spoke to the woman. Then the woman shouted, and Scott ran to the street. His smell reached her, and was ripe with the thorny scents of danger and fear.

Maggie trembled and quivered.

Scott's fear poured into her.

Danger.

Threat.

Maggie broke from her stay, and ran to him. His thundering heart filled her with fury.

Protect Scott.

Defend.

Scott pulled her close, but his closeness did not comfort her. His fear screamed they were in danger. She bunched and coiled, and tried to pull free to find the threat, but Scott held her close.

Her huge ears swiveled and tipped, seeking their enemy. She sniffed frantically, searching the air, but found only Scott's fear.

His fear was enough.

Scott was hers.

Maggie growled, low and deep in her massive chest; a primal warning to whatever might hear.

This pack was hers.

The fur on her back and shoulders bristled like wire, and her nails raked the asphalt like claws. A danger she couldn't see or smell or hear was coming, but a fire passed down from a hundred thousand past generations prepared her. Maggie knew what she needed to know.

Hunt.

Attack.

Pull the threat down with her fangs, and destroy it.

Maggie didn't need to know anything else.

Nothing else mattered.

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Scott James

AFTER THE AREA surrounding the gate was cleared, the Bomb Squad's senior bomb technician, Jack Libby, asked Scott to describe the box and its location on Scott's vehicle. Libby was short and dark, with calm eyes and a spiky flattop. Scott and Cowly wanted to watch Libby de-arm the bomb, but were moved to a protected location on the far side of the curve.

Two Criminal Conspiracy Section detectives named Mantz and Nagle were waiting. CCS handled investigations involving explosives and explosive devices for the Major Crimes Division. Mantz identified himself, and asked Scott to join him in the command vehicle.

"My dog has to come."

"Sure. Bring him."

Scott followed until Nagle told Cowly to remain outside.

Scott said, "What the hell? You don't have to separate us."

Joyce said, "It's okay, babe. Go. It's how we do it."

"Locked m up tight, and threw away the key."

Stiles seemed thoughtful.

"You know what the gentleman told me? He was very nice, by the way. Latin, of all things. '*Si Ego Certiorem Faciam*'—I don't recall the rest."

Stiles focused on Scott. Her voice didn't change, but her gaze was pointed.

"I could tell you, but I'd have to kill you."

Stiles cocked her head, and stared even harder.

"Your Mr. Cole has interesting friends."

Stiles took a quick step back, once again warm.

"I apologize again. I'll let y'all get back to what you were doing Maggie, you're such a sweetie."

She touched the binder Scott held.

"Look through, and let me know. Y'all have a good night."

Stiles opened the door, and disappeared into darkness. A few seconds later, Scott heard the gate.

Cowly said, "Bitch."

Three minutes later, Maggie charged to the window, and filled the guest house with thunder.

Maggie

MAGGIE PACED THROUGH their crate with her head down. She paused in the bathroom, whined, and rounded Scott's bed to the window. The window was closed, but outside air seeped in through hairline gaps in the window's frame. The tiny drafts were too small to be noticed by Scott, but were as obvious to Maggie as plumes of colored smoke. She pushed her nose under the drapes, found nothing alarming, and returned to the living room. Maggie whined at Scott, but Scott ignored her. She pawed the floor, turned in a circle, and lowered herself.

Scott's scent was rich with the rancid oils of tension. Their crate was alive with unexpected sounds and unfamiliar scents. Each time Maggie heard the gate, she barked and charged to the door.

"Maggie, shut up! They're friends!"

Scott's manner with the uniformed strangers told Maggie they weren't a threat, but Maggie remained alert. Each time a visitor left,

her ears swiveled, tipped, and followed their footsteps through the gate.

Scott safe.

Pack safe.

Most dogs could hear four times better than a person, but Maggie's enormous, upright ears evolved to detect quiet predators and distant prey. She could control each ear independently of the other. Eighteen muscles articulated each ear, shaping and sculpting her sail-like pinna to gather and concentrate sounds at frequencies far beyond any a human could hear. This allowed Maggie to hear seven times better than Scott. She could hear the whine of a jet at thirty thousand feet, termites chewing through wood, the crystal in Scott's watch hum, and thousands of sounds as invisible to Scott as the scents he could not smell.

When sounds and scents were normal, Maggie lay on her belly with her head between her paws.

She listened.

She sniffed.

She watched Scott.

Not long after they returned from the park, Maggie heard an approaching intruder and raced to the door, but this time the intruder was Joyce. Maggie wagged her tail.

Scott happy.

Maggie happy.

Maggie went to the kitchen, drank, roamed through Scott's bedroom, and returned to the living room. Scott and Joyce were talking. Maggie lowered herself, sighed, and closed her eyes, but did not sleep. She listened to Scott and Joyce, and the world beyond their crate, and heard the gate open as loud as a gunshot.

Maggie scrambled to the door, barking.

"Maggie, down! Quiet!"

Maggie recognized the intruder's scent, and remembered the tall, human woman as friendly and nonthreatening.

"Hi, pretty girl! What's all that barking about?"

Scott allowed the woman to enter.

Maggie picked a new spot on the floor, settled, and listened. The tall woman left a few minutes later.

Scott and Joyce ate their chow. Joyce sometimes stayed, and slept with Scott in the bed, but this didn't happen tonight. They sat on the couch, and talked. Maggie heard strange sounds. The first time, she rushed to the door. The second, she raged into the bedroom. Joyce soon left, and Scott took Maggie to do her business.

When they returned to the crate, Maggie followed Scott to the bathroom where he urinated, showered, and made the blue foam in his mouth. Maggie stayed close.

She followed him through the crate as he turned off the lights and stretched on the couch. Maggie knew patterns. This was their time for sleep. She sniffed a spot near the couch, turned in a circle, and lay.

"Night, dog."

Thump thump.

Maggie's nose crinkled as she tested the air.

Her ears swiveled to listen.

She heard cheeps and chirps from the police car on the street and the mumble of the old woman's television. She heard Scott's heart-beat slow as he fell asleep.

Maggie sniffed.

She listened, and raised her head.

The high-pitched squeak of branches rubbing together was unusual. A board in the fence behind their crate popped. Leaves rustled, and rustled again, closer.

Maggie charged to the door, raging and fierce.

"Maggie, please. I'm begging you."

Her bark was deep-chested, and furious. She ran to the bedroom, reared up, and hit the windowsill with her paws.

"SHUT UP!"

Maggie listened.

The pops and rustle had stopped. Nothing was approaching, but she heard nothing move away.

Maggie sniffed the plumes of outside air—sniff sniff sniff, sniff sniff sniff. She smelled nothing out of the ordinary, but she growled low and deep in her chest.

The air was still. Scent would spread slowly. She sniffed again, and waited.

Mr. Rollins

MR. ROLLINS was surprised when Eli called, but the call made his night. That crazy fuck, Eli, had really come through.

Now, later that night, Mr. Rollins stood in deep shadow next to a motor home, across the street and two houses away. He had a clear view of the Trans Am in the old lady's front yard, the patrol car parked by their drive, and the two cops in the car.

Eli, on the phone, whispered in his ear.

"You hear the dog?"

Mr. Rollins, whispering back.

"Where's your man?"

"The house to the west. In the backyard."

Eli was on a roof behind the old lady's property, up on the next street. One of his men, Hari, had a car over by Eli. A second, some guy with a name Mr. Rollins couldn't pronounce, was parked at the mouth of the clown's dead-end street. Eli had called to discuss the

Before fervent fans complain, consider that the star of "Suspect" isn't just any animal. Crais has created a unique, endearing canine crime fighter that steals every scene she's in.

Here's the setup. Los Angeles cop Scott James barely survives a high-powered shootout with a mysterious criminal gang. His partner is killed. Scott is left broken, both physically and mentally. Worse, he blames himself for his partner's death. Now unfit for duty as a patrol officer, he moves to the Los Angeles Police Department canine unit, where he is paired with a German shepherd named Maggie.

Like Scott, Maggie is on the mend. She served three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, using her powerful sense of smell to sniff out explosives, before losing her handler to a bomb blast.

Both man and dog are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Together this pair of wounded warriors must help heal each other, while searching for clues in a last-chance case that could be their salvation or their untimely end.

Like all of Crais' work, "Suspect" is an intense, fast-paced and thrilling page turner. He's winning raves from critics and has even made a fan out of the editor at Dog Fancy magazine, Ernie Slone, who says, "The power of the human-animal bond, and the amazing ways that dogs comprehend our world, have never been better portrayed."

CNN recently spoke to the author from his Los Angeles home about his latest book as well as old dogs and new tricks. The following is an edited transcript:

CNN: What was the spark behind your new novel?

Robert Crais: I had a big Akita, Yoshi, who was fabulous. I loved him. We lost him when he was 12, and I've never been able to replace him. Normally, most people lose a pet and get another and keep going on. But it just felt wrong to me; it felt disloyal. That was 15 years ago. I've been thinking more and more about him recently. That connection caused me to start doing research into the whole human-dog relationship. Through that I became aware of and interested in military-working dogs.

I learned about the super-intimate connection between these dogs and their canine handlers. In many cases, when they're deployed, the handler and dog literally spend 24 hours a day together. They eat together and sleep together because of the nature of their job. It's a bond unlike any other human-canine bond.

I encountered stories where a handler would be injured or killed, and the dog would be so protective and defensive of the handler, even though the person might be dead or seriously wounded, that the dog wouldn't even let our guys who were trying to help approach, because the dog and handler are a pack. I started reading every book that was available on how dogs think, how they perceive the world, the nature of the relationship between man and dog. It was a world that simply swallowed me because I found it so fascinating and interesting.

CNN: You also spent time with police dogs?

Crais: From military-working dogs, I got involved and educated in police canine units, which are different but in many ways the same thing because the human handler and the dog are partners. I went out with the LAPD canine units. The dogs are amazing and to talk with these guys, to see them work with their dogs really informed the book. It was a whole new world for me.

Everyone knows dogs. Most people love dogs. I think most American families probably have a dog, but I don't think people really realize or understand just how wonderful and special dogs are. The more I learned about the co-dependency between man and dog and how deep that relationship can be, not in an anthropomorphized way but in a genuine and real way.

I found it so beautiful, so moving and special that I just had to write about it. Scenes were just popping out of my head. With this particular book it was probably the most emotional that I've written out of my 19 novels. It was a book that I absolutely attacked because I felt so passionate about the subject matter.

CNN: Part of "Suspect" is told through Maggie's eyes. Was it difficult to write from a dog's point of view?

Crais: Actually, no. I guess I should say yes, but surprisingly it wasn't. I had read so many different books and articles on how dogs perceive the world -- their sense of smell, how dogs think, why dogs do what they do -- that when I finally was writing from Maggie's point of view it came very naturally. It was easy for me to imagine how in fact a dog does perceive what's going on around her. I found it a very, very natural thing to write. I fell in love with Maggie. I tried to make her as real as possible. Maggie isn't a cartoon dog. She doesn't think the way we think. I wanted her to represent for real how dogs perceive us and the world around them.

CNN: In "Suspect," Scott and Maggie both suffer from PTSD, but I didn't know that affected dogs?

Crais: When I was doing the research, I learned about military-working dogs suffering from canine PTSD. Until that point, I wasn't aware that military dogs or police canines or any animal can suffer from PTSD, just like any person. Quite a few of the dogs that come back from Afghanistan or Iraq or police dogs that are involved in violent confrontations where there's gunfire can in fact exhibit the symptoms and suffer from PTSD.

At Lackland Air Force Base, they make an effort to retrain military dogs that suffer from PTSD. It's a lengthy, long process. The treatment is much the same as it would be for people, but it's a difficult road back. It seemed to me that a dog like Maggie would certainly suffer from PTSD and ditto her handler Scott. These two characters, they needed each other. She can help him heal; he can help her heal. I really wanted to explore what they're going through together.

CNN: So after this are you ready for another dog?

Crais: In a wonderful way I think the immersion that I went through with this book has been very healing. It's much easier for me now to imagine sharing my life with another dog. Maybe another Yoshi, maybe a German shepherd, but I can see that happening again now. All I have to do is convince my wife.