



dog

A NOVEL BY SNEED B. COLLARD III

sense



dog

A NOVEL BY SNEED B. COLLARD III

sense



Published by  
PEACHTREE PUBLISHERS  
1700 Chattahoochee Avenue  
Atlanta, Georgia 30318-2112

*www.peachtree-online.com*

Text © 2005 by Sneed B. Collard III

First trade paperback edition published in 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover design by Loraine M. Joyner  
Book design by Melanie McMahon Ives

“Sheep,” by George Roger Walters, p.103. © 1977 (Renewed) Roger Waters Music Overseas Ltd., Warner/Chappell Artemis Music Ltd. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Printed in the United States of America in November 2011 by RR Donnelley & Sons in Harrisonburg, Virginia

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 (hardcover)  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 (trade paperback)

### **Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Collard, Sneed B.

Dog sense / by Sneed B. Collard III.-- 1st ed.  
p. cm.

Summary: After he and his mother move from California to Montana to live with his grandfather, thirteen-year-old Guy gradually adjusts to the unfamiliar surroundings, makes a friend, and learns to deal with a bully, with the help of his Frisbee-catching dog, Streak.

ISBN 13: 978-1-56145-351-1 (hardcover)

[1. Dogs--Fiction. 2. Bullies--Fiction. 3. Schools--Fiction. 4. Moving, Household--Fiction. 5. Grandfathers--Fiction. 6. Montana--Fiction.] I. Title.

PZ7.C67749Dog 2005

[Fic]--dc22

2005010821

dog

A NOVEL BY SNEED B. COLLARD III

sense

## *Acknowledgments*

Howls of gratitude go out to the many mammals who inspired and helped me write this book. Major “Aaaooooos” to my writer’s group—Dorothy, Bruce, Jeanette, Peggy, Hanneke, and Wendy—who helped me chew the first chapters into shape. Jennifer Walworth, Mark Kayll, and my father Sneed B. Collard Jr. also spent extensive time reading, commenting, and slobbering over the manuscript. A good back scratch to my wife Amy for helping me with the counselor scene. My editor, Vicky Holifield, provided essential expertise and ideas to help me get to the marrow of the story. Lastly, there wouldn’t have been a story without my wonderdog Mattie. Her keen intelligence, Olympic athleticism, and sense of humor provided not only the idea for the story, but its heart and soul. Woof! Woof!

*For Mattie,  
the best dog a boy could ask for.*

*AAA-OOOoooooooo!*

*—S. B. C.*



# Chapter One

**M**y body hits the wall like a feed sack. My head smacks the stone and I hear ringing in my ears. Then one of the ugliest faces I've ever seen appears in front of me. The boy—he looks more like a gorilla—weighs at least twice my 120 pounds and the grin on his face spreads wider than a jack-o'-lantern's. His crooked nose almost touches mine. He's so close my eyes can barely focus, but I can make out a scar running across his left eyebrow and several whiskers poking like hog bristles from his chin and upper lip.

“Welcome to B. S. Middle School,” he spits. His breath hits me like volcanic sulfur, and even though my body is trembling, I find myself wondering what kind of rotten meat he's been feeding on.

“What do you want?” I ask, trying to smooth the quaver in my voice. From behind Sulfur Breath, I hear mean-sounding chuckles from a couple of guys who are obviously part of the welcoming committee. I glance over the gorilla's shoulder to see that one of them is

tapeworm skinny, stands about six feet tall, and wears a dirty red National Rifle Association baseball cap on his head. The other lurks like a maggot. He's short, has bad teeth, and looks more than a little unhappy about the gene pool evolution has handed him.

"You the new California kid?" Sulfur Breath hisses.

"Yeah, I'm from California."

"Then what I want is your nuts in a vise. I *hate* Californians, so don't do anything to piss me off. You understand?"

I try to hold his gaze, but he presses me harder against the stone. His forearms feel like steel as they drive into my chest. I look away.

"*Yo comprendo*," I say.

"What?" he says, slamming me into the wall again. "This is America, got it? We speak English here. Not no friggin' Italian."

"I understand. I get it," I say, not bothering to point out I'd been speaking Spanish.

With one last shove he says, "Good." The two parasites in tow, he lumbers off in search of his next prey item.

"Geez," I mutter, checking my shirt for blood. "If he needs to mark his territory, why doesn't he just pee on the building or something?"

"Aw...don't worry about him. He does that to all the new kids."

I glance up to see a lanky, sandy-haired kid watching me. The zits on his face look like they're holding a convention.

“I’m Luke Grant,” he says, holding out his hand. This kind of throws me, because no one shakes hands in California.

I put out my hand. “Guy.”

Now he looks confused.

“That’s my name,” I tell him. “Guy Martinez. Guy is a family name.”

“Oh,” Luke says, but then he studies me for a moment. “You don’t look Mexican. Isn’t Martinez a Mexican name?”

“Spanish,” I correct him. “My great-great-great-grandfather came over from Spain.”

“Aw...you don’t look Spanish, either.”

“I’m not. I’m from California.”

“Oh,” Luke replies, apparently satisfied. “You an eighth grader?”

“Yeah.”

“Me too. Maybe we’ll have some classes together.”

*Just what I need*, I think. I nod toward the T-rex who slammed me against the wall and ask, “Who’s Sulfur Breath?”

“That’s Brad Mullen. He’s just a jerk. Stay out of his way and you’ll do okay.”

“What’s his problem?” I ask.

“Hey,” Luke exclaims. “Look at that cool dog!”

My head snaps around just in time to see my Border collie Streak dash in front of a honking school bus and bolt across the street into a crowd of students.

“Crap,” I moan, rushing toward him. “Streak, come!”

Happily wagging his stump of a tail, Streak dances and darts from one group of kids to another, sticking his nose in crotches, licking backpacks, and nipping at people's shoelaces. Some of the kids squeal or laugh. One girl shouts, "Get away, you mutt!" I give my special two-note whistle before Streak can give Brad Mullen a butt sniff. Streak hears the whistle and lopes over to me.

"Is that *your* dog?" Luke asks.

"Yeah," I sigh, clutching Streak's collar. "He's mine."

Just then the eight o'clock school bell blares across the school grounds. Streak lets out a long howl in sympathy and all the kids around me laugh. I can feel my face turning red. "I've got to take him home," I tell Luke.

"You'll be late."

Let's all state the obvious.

\* \* \*

It's hard to believe, but my day actually started out okay. Mom made me pancakes to set a positive tone for my first day at a new school in a new town in a new state. Grandpa snored his way through breakfast, allowing me to get ready in peace. As I strolled the four blocks between Grandpa's house and the school, I had actually said to myself, "Well, maybe Montana won't be such a bad place to live after all."

Right.

Now, only fifteen minutes later, I've already become

a target for a homicidal bully and my dog has escaped Grandpa's backyard and followed me to school.

I hear the second school bell ring behind me. "Well, you dummy," I say, looking down at Streak. "It's official. I'm late for my first day of school."

Streak wags his stump and jumps up on me.

"Off!" I say, gently kneeling him in the chest. "Don't try to make up with me. You are a *bad dog!*"

Streak's ears go back and I immediately regret yelling at him. I've read that Border collies are especially sensitive and you can't bawl them out too much or they turn schizo. "Oh, it's okay," I tell him and give his head a good rub.

My mom got Streak for me right after we moved to Montana—part of a guilt-induced payoff for making me leave all my friends and move to the end of the known solar system. I think she also thought a pet would help take my mind off of Dad's unannounced departure a year ago. A few days after we got here, she spotted Streak's picture in the local paper under "Mutt of the Week" and said, "Guy, I think we need a dog."

I'd never really thought about it, but the next day she drove Grandpa and me down to the Coffee County Humane Society. When they let Streak out of his kennel, the first thing he did was pee on the kennel-keeper's foot. That sold me. I didn't care that his tail had been lopped off. I just laughed and said, "I want him."

In retrospect, I should have predicted that Streak would pee on some of Grandpa's furniture, too, but

fortunately he only ruined one old chair before I got him housebroken. Grandpa took it pretty well.

I jog the last block to Grandpa's house, Streak trotting along beside me. When we reach the front porch, I wonder how I'm going to keep Streak from following me to school again. "You can't come with me, okay?" I tell him.

Streak looks up with his intense chestnut eyes and I notice again what a handsome dog he is. His black coat gleams in the sunlight. A white ring spreads around his neck and down his chest, and one lightning bolt of white fur runs over his head and down his nose. That's why I named him Streak, but it could have been for his lightning speed. As he looks up at me, I can tell that all he wants right now is a good game of chase-the-ball.

"No game," I say. "We'd better put you inside for the day." I ease open the front door, trying not to make any noise.

"Guy, is that you?" Grandpa calls from upstairs.

I glance back at Streak and whisper, "Now look what you've done."

"Guy?" my grandfather yells again.

"It's me, Grandpa!" I shout, wondering if he's got his hearing aid in yet. Not that I really think he needs it. When he wants to, he seems to hear a lot of things—like front doors opening, for instance.

"Bring me up a glass of V8, would you, son?"

"Okay!"

I walk to the kitchen and pour a glass of the thick, blood-red liquid. When I get upstairs, my grandfather

is sitting up in his bed adjusting the tiny volume knob on his hearing aid. I hand him his drink.

“Thank you, son.” He takes a big slurp and sets the glass down, a bright ring of crimson painting his upper lip. I shudder. You couldn’t pay me to drink that stuff.

Then Grandpa asks, “How was school today?”

I roll my eyes. Sometimes right when he wakes up, Grandpa acts a little confused, but this time I think he’s faking it to keep the conversation going.

“Grandpa,” I say. “I haven’t *been* to school yet. I’m late and have to go.”

“Oh? Well, you’d better get crackin’. In my day when we were late, the teacher gave us the shoe!”

Not daring to ask what “the shoe” is, I hurry out of the room. “Good-bye, Grandpa!”

I’m only halfway down the stairs when I hear his voice again. “Guy?”

I sigh and stop. “Yeah?”

“My ’roids are actin’ up again. Can you get me my ‘H’?”

Oh man, I think, not the hemorrhoids again. Reluctantly I hop back up the stairs and head to the bathroom. I look in the medicine cabinet, but the white-and-blue tube isn’t there.

“Where is it?” I shout.

“Where’s what?”

“Your Preparation H!”

“Look in the drawer.”

I can pretty much guarantee it’s not going to be in the drawer, but I open it anyway and, surprise, there’s

the tube—lying right on top of my toothbrush. Even better, the tube’s cap is missing and some of the yellow ointment has leaked out onto the toothbrush bristles.

“Oh, gross,” I mutter.

“What?”

“Nothing!” Grimacing, I dangle the tube between my thumb and forefinger and walk it in to Grandpa.

“It won’t bite you! It’s just Prep H,” Grandpa tells me.

“Yeah, I know,” I mumble, already planning to buy a new toothbrush after school. Before Grandpa can ask me to actually *help* him with the Preparation H, I rush down the stairs and out of the house.

## Chapter Two

I run all the way back to school, even though I know it makes no sense. I'm late, so I might as well take my time and enjoy it. But I can't. I'm a worrier. Mom says Dad was a worrier, too. He just worried all the time about everything—losing his job, getting in car accidents, catching fatal diseases, and almost anything else you can think of. But I think it went deeper than that.

When I was younger, everything seemed fine. We had fun together and joked around a lot. As I got older, though, Dad started keeping to himself more and more. Once I found him sitting in the garage alone, tears streaming down his face. I asked him what was the matter, figuring I'd done something wrong, but he just wiped his face and shook his head. Several times I overheard Mom say Dad was “depressed” when she didn't know I was listening. I thought she meant he was unhappy, but looking back, I think he was Depressed with a capital *D*. Depressed as in sick.

I think Mom tried to get him help, but it didn't work.

One day about a year ago, I woke up and he was just gone.

Of course, Mom's never been depressed a day in her life—at least not that I know about. Even after my dad left, she seemed sad, but she just kept going like everything was going to work out. I don't know how she does that. Take today, for instance.

It isn't working out at all.

Hurrying down the street, I see Big Sky Middle School loom ahead of me for the second time today. The school is a two-story beige stone building with the date 1928 chiseled into the corner foundation. I figure it must have been built about the same time Coffee became a town. Of course, Coffee isn't a *real* town. People here think it's the New York City of the West with its population of 8,000 people and three grocery stores to choose from. Not me. It feels more like 80 people live here, not 8,000, and they all seem to look and act the same.

Climbing the school's front steps, I pull the comb from my pocket and run it through my hair. I don't know why I bother. Combing my black hair just makes it get wilder. It's like it has anti-gravity molecules that make it float up toward the stratosphere. And even if I *could* make my hair submit, it wouldn't make me any better looking than I was yesterday or the day before. I'd still have the same boring brown eyes, big nose, and whiskerless face. The same average build that no self-respecting girl would glance at twice.

But when I slide the comb back into my pocket, I

suddenly realize that I have a more immediate problem than my looks. To my horror, I discover that I'm no longer carrying my backpack and the Lakers jacket Mom got me for my thirteenth birthday. I know I had them when I left for school the first time. *Where are they?* I ask myself. *Did I leave them back at Grandpa's house?*

Then I remember. I dropped them when Brad Mullen slammed me against the wall.

I take a quick look around the front of the school for my lost possessions, but they are definitely Missing in Action. Crap. Mom and I barely have enough money to buy stuff like books and notebooks. There's no way I'll replace that jacket. To top it off, I now have to go to the school office and explain why I'm late.

\* \* \*

As I'm telling the school secretary about Streak and Grandpa and everything else that's happened this morning, a man in a gray suit comes up behind her and says, "You're Guy Martinez, aren't you?"

"Yeah," I say, staring at the gleaming yellow Donald Duck tie around his neck.

A large hand appears. "Welcome to Big Sky Middle School," the man says.

Again with the hand-shaking. What is it with this place? I pump the hand a couple of times and say, "Thanks. I just need a pass to go to my homeroom."

"You're from California, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Santa Barbara."

“Well, I need to explain a few things about this school to you. First of all, children address adults as ‘sir’ and ‘ma’am’ here at Big Sky. Do you understand?”

I can feel my heart pick up speed. This isn’t chitchat. This is a lecture. Why didn’t I see it coming?

“Yeah...I mean, yes sir.”

“Good. Also, we *all* have reasons we could be late every day. Maybe my coffeepot broke. Maybe a good song was on the radio. Maybe I just felt like sleeping a little longer.”

“But this wasn’t a—”

The man holds up his hand. “It doesn’t matter *what* the reason is. Late is late. And here at Big Sky, we don’t tolerate late. You understand?”

“Yes...sir.”

“By the way, my name is Principal Goode, with an *e*. Mrs. Bellweather, please give Guy here a note so he can get to class. And welcome to Big Sky, Guy.”

“Thanks...I mean, thank you...sir.”

*Some welcome*, I think, walking down the long hallway toward my homeroom. By now I’m totally freaked and the long hallway doesn’t help. Just walking down an indoor hallway creeps me out. In my school in California, all of the walkways were outside with overhangs. I wish it was like that here, but maybe I’ll feel differently in February.

I stop outside my homeroom and take a deep breath. Opening this door is one more thing I’m not looking forward to today, but I muster my courage and turn the handle. As I walk in, twenty-eight eighth-grade faces turn to look at me. A primeval shudder cascades down

my spine. I force myself to walk up to the teacher, a small, blond-haired woman.

“Hello,” she says, turning to me. “My name is Mrs. Minneman.”

As she says her name, all I can think of is Mini Me from the Austin Powers movies.

“Hi,” I say, handing her my note. “I mean, hello, ma’am.”

Fortunately, she doesn’t bless me with the same lecture I got from the principal. All she says is “We’re starting in on our first book, Guy. Please take a seat over there.”

“Over there” happens to be right next to Luke—the tall dweeb I met before school. I’m going to run out of the room screaming if he tries to shake my hand again. Instead, as I near my seat he holds up my backpack and Lakers jacket. “I picked these up for you. I thought you might want them.”

Relief floods through me. I wonder if this is how Grandpa feels when he uses his Preparation H.

“Thanks,” I tell Luke, almost calling him “sir.”

“As I was saying,” Mrs. Minneman tells us, “literature is an adventure. That’s why I use it to teach English. You’ve all had English classes before, but as eighth graders you get to start *using* what you’ve learned. And that is the whole point of education. I’m here not only to help you strengthen your reading and writing skills, but to help you *enjoy* those skills. And there’s no better way to do that than to read good books.”

I stifle a moan. I hate reading. What I mean is, I

hate reading *fiction*. My mom devours novels. She gets up early in the morning before work, makes herself a pot of coffee, and reads—sometimes for an hour or more. I don't know what she gets out of it. I mean, I like to check out sports scores in the newspaper, and I read books about animals and things like that. But every time my mom or a teacher gives me a novel, by the third paragraph I feel like someone's planted an ice ax in my brain. *But maybe*, I tell myself, *this teacher will give us some good nonfiction for a change.*

"The first novel we're going to explore," Mrs. Minneman says, "is a newer book that's already becoming a classic. It's one that boys should especially like."

I groan inside.

"The book's title is *The Watsons Go to Birmingham—1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis."

I've never been to Birmingham, but already I know I'm going to hate this book. How? Because well-meaning English teachers and librarians have been feeding me books "for boys" since I was in fourth grade, and I've hated every single one of them.

But Mrs. Minneman has to do her duty. She passes us each a copy, explaining our assignment as she goes. "Your homework is to read this book by the end of the week and write a two-page description of what you thought about it and why—due on Monday. Are there any questions?"

*Yeah, I think. When do I turn eighteen so I can get out of here?*

\* \* \*

After English, things look like they're getting better. I go to social studies and Spanish, both of which I like all right. Then I have P.E., but since it's the first day, we don't have to dress in our gym clothes. At lunch I manage to find a corner table where no one bothers me, and after that I have typing—or "keyboarding." When I walk out of there, all I have left is math, and that's my best subject.

*Home free*, I tell myself.

Right.

When I walk into class, the first thing I see is Sulfur Breath and the Parasites. My brain goes numb. When the neurons start firing again, I wonder if I'm in the wrong room.

"Well, look who's here," Brad Mullen sneers. "It's the California Kid. Or should I say the Calf-Crap Kid?" This witticism draws a chorus of guffaws from Tapeworm and Maggot. Brad motions toward an empty desk on his row. I hesitate for a moment, but then I spot Luke. Grateful for anything resembling a friendly face, I walk over and take the desk in front of him. I pull out a pencil and start tapping the eraser on the desk.

"Hey, Calf Crap," Sulfur Breath says. "I want you sittin' over here."

Fortunately, before I have to respond, a tall, gaunt teacher wearing a rumpled suit walks in. His pasty gray face looks tired. Not the I-didn't-get-enough-sleep-last-night kind of tired. He looks tired of *life*. "I'm Mr. Krauss," he says. "This is Math Foundations."

I stop tapping the pencil.

Did he say math *foundations*?

“Welcome,” Mr. Krauss says. “And for those of you who are returning, welcome again.” As he says this, he takes a pointed look at Brad Mullen, but Mullen doesn’t flinch.

“Hi again, Mr. Krauss,” Brad says. “I liked your class so much last year, I decided to take it again.”

Tapeworm and Maggot laugh and even Mr. Krauss manages a weary grin. “Let’s see if we can make this your last time, Mr. Mullen. My records show that this is the only remaining class you need to pass to go to high school.”

“If I want to go to high school,” Brad says with a snort.

Mr. Krauss ignores him. “In this class,” he explains, “we are going to work on math fundamentals. Let’s not kid ourselves. You’re not going to become math majors and I’m not Albert Einstein.”

“As if you could even *play* baseball,” Sulfur Breath mutters.

I roll my eyes. Albert Einstein, a baseball player? Brad definitely isn’t the sharpest knife in the drawer.

Mr. Krauss continues. “Our only goal in this class is to teach you enough math skills to get you into ninth grade. We’ll try to make it fun, but let’s be honest here. If you don’t get through this class, you are not—I repeat—*are not* going to graduate.”

I can’t listen any longer and raise my hand.

“Yes, Mr...” The teacher looks down at his class list.

“Martinez,” I say.

“Yes, Mr. Martinez?”

“Uh, sir, I think I’m in the wrong class.”

Mr. Krauss checks his class list again. “Oh yes. You registered late so we couldn’t fit you into the advanced math program you requested.”

“I didn’t register late...sir.”

“You didn’t?”

“No sir.”

“Well, did you take the placement exam?”

“What placement exam?”

“That must be the problem. If you don’t take the placement exam, we can’t give you a choice of classes.”

Brad makes a fist. “I’ll place him right now.” The rest of the class laughs—all except Luke—and I feel myself getting angry.

“You mean I have to stay here?” I ask, grinding my pencil’s eraser into my desk.

“Get used to it, Calf Crap,” Mullen says.

“Talk to me about it after class,” Mr. Krauss says. “And that’s enough from you, Mr. Mullen.”

Mr. Krauss hands out textbooks that look like they’ve been used since the Second World War. I open mine and, with growing frustration, recognize the math as stuff I had years ago—even before I had it in school. My dad was a math whiz and he worked with me from when I first started to talk, giving me flash cards and taking me through all kinds of math problems, always ahead of my school classes. I loved it. That’s one of the things I miss most about my dad, sitting together working on math. I still don’t understand why he couldn’t solve his own problems with my mom and me, but as Grandpa says, that’s smoke up the chimney.

While Mr. Krauss explains a third-grade math concept, I try to keep from melting down. Instead I start working on how I'm going to get out of this stupid class. Not only will I be wasting my time if I stay here, but I'll be a walking target for Brad Mullen. I admit it's kind of nice being in a class with Luke, but I'll be happy enough to ditch him if I can keep Sulfur Breath off my scent.

Finally the bell rings, and as the other kids file out, I walk up to Mr. Krauss's desk. He's looking through a notebook, but after a moment, he notices me.

"Yes?"

"You were going to tell me how I can get into a more advanced class," I say.

Mr. Krauss's eyes look blank, like they belong to a deactivated robot. Then, as if someone has pushed his Power On button, his eyes slowly focus. "Ah, right, Mr..."

"Martinez. Guy Martinez."

"Well, Mr. Martinez. All the other math classes are full."

"But I've already had all of this stuff...sir."

"This is what happens when you don't take the placement exam."

"But Mr. Krauss. I just moved here. No one even told me about the exam. Can't I take it now?"

Mr. Krauss gives this a whole two seconds of careful consideration. "I don't think that would be fair to the other students, do you?"

I try to follow his logic. "What? Why not?"

dog sense

Mr. Krauss suddenly slaps the notebook closed in front of him. “Look, if you want, you can take it up with the principal. If not, I’ll expect you to have the answers to the problems on page 13 ready to turn in tomorrow.”