

It's the Dog's Fault

Hank the Rescue Dog - Book One

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To all my brilliant and beautiful grandchildren. You are joy and inspiration. I love you, and Jesus loves you more.

THE SHELTER



Kaden changed my life. I never did manage to cure him, but I loved him just as he was.

On the day we met, I lay in my kennel, waiting. Because that's what you do in a shelter. You wait. You wait for meals. You wait for outside time. But mostly, you wait for someone to come and like you enough to take you home. In my favorite waiting position, my front legs stretched out with my head resting on my paws, I could see all the way down the hall to the door where humans appeared.

When the door clicked open, I tilted my ears. Some of the other dogs, especially the puppies, barked. The most rambunctious ones jumped at their doors, wagging their tails and yipping like babies with their mothers. I saw a tall woman, who I later learned was 'Mom,' a long-legged girl, and a boy—Kaden. He slouched behind Mom, wearing a hoodie pulled over his head even though it was warm inside. His hands were stuffed in his pockets, and he didn't even look in the kennels as he passed by. One of my favorite staff members, Mike, followed them.

“Oh, look at this one.” Mom stopped at the cocker spaniel’s kennel. The cocker wagged its pathetic little stub of a tail and looked up. Her brown eyes always looked like they were ready to burst into tears. Mom knelt and poked a finger through the wire mesh, touching the soft, drooping ears.

Cocoa’s leaving with her today. I turned my head and closed my eyes.

“Mom, Mom, come look at this one!” The Girl pressed her face against the shih tzu’s kennel two doors down from mine. “Come here, baby. You’re so cute. You want to come live with us?” she cooed.

Well, maybe it will be Murphy. I wouldn’t be sad to see him leave the shelter. His high-pitched yipping annoyed me.

They slowly walked down the hallway, stopping at most of the kennels to comment or offer a pat to the eager dogs. At each stop, Mike told the family how wonderful the dog was.

When they passed my kennel, I raised my head and thumped my tail. Twice. Kaden looked at me briefly from under his hood. I thumped my tail one more time for good measure. But nobody stopped or put their fingers through the cage to touch me.

When they reached the end, Mom turned to Kaden and said, “You need to pick one. This dog is for you.”

A scowl darkened his face. “I don’t want a dog.”

“Your therapist thought it would be a good idea. A dog can be very calming, and he would be a buddy for you. Just pick one you like, and we’ll spend some time getting to know him.”

Kaden’s shoulders heaved as he sighed. He walked the length of the hallway as Mom and The Girl talked with Mike. When he came to my kennel, he paused and pointed. “Get him.”

The three hurried over. No one spoke for a minute as we stared at each other.

"He's so big," Mom whispered.

"And he's kind of ugly," The Girl added.

Kaden shrugged. "He's the one I want."

Mike opened my door and snapped a short leash on me. "Let's go to the meet-and-greet room, and you can get to know him before deciding."

I charged into the meet-and-greet room, pulling Mike with me. I couldn't believe it—comfy couches, a rug to stretch out on, and baskets filled with all kinds of toys. I wiggled all over. Maybe I wiggled too much.

"Oops." Mike grabbed a paper towel and wiped up the puddle I'd made. "Hank's just excited."

When the family entered, Mike unsnapped the leash. "I'll be back in twenty minutes."

After he left, Mom, Kaden, and The Girl stood, watching me as I smelled the entire perimeter of the room and everything in it.

Mom patted my head as I wandered past. "He's so big, Kaden. Didn't you see something smaller that you liked?"

"Nope." Kaden picked up a tennis ball from one of the baskets and threw it against the opposite wall, where it bounced back to his hand. I jumped for the ball and knocked into Mom, who wobbled to the couch.

The Girl stepped around me and sat in a chair. "Watch out, Kaden. That dog about knocked Mom over. Why can't you act your age?"

Kaden waved the ball in my face, "I *am* acting my age. I'm eleven, and eleven-year-old boys throw balls." He tossed the ball upward, and it hit the ceiling. After he did this twice, I put my paws on his shoulders. I'd get the ball now. Kaden gave me a shove. Maybe he wanted to play. I bowed down and barked. He rolled the ball across the floor, and finally, I grabbed that squishy thing and chewed it.

The Girl sat on the couch, and I laid the slobbery ball in her lap. I backed up so she could throw it for me. “Mom,” she wailed. “He put that yucky ball on me. All those cute dogs and Kaden picked this one.” She stood, and the ball rolled. I pounced and chewed it some more.

Mom patted her knees. “Come here, boy.”

I padded over to her and laid my head in her lap. She smelled nice. She stroked my head and then found that itchy spot behind my ear that flops down. I reached up and kissed her to thank her, and she laughed. “Well, if this is the dog you want, Kaden, I guess we can all learn to love him. What are you going to name him?”

Kaden squatted by the dog toys, searching through them like he wanted to chew one. He picked out a fuzzy duck and made it squeak. “I dunno. Mike called him Hank. We could just keep his name.”

Mom frowned. “You have an uncle named Hank.”

“So? We can name him after Uncle Hank.” Kaden kept squeaking that duck, so I jumped and pulled it out of his hands. “Hey!” he hollered, like he didn’t know it was a dog toy.

The door swung open, and Mike entered. I greeted him with my paws around him, just like a people hug. He nudged me down and fastened the leash to my collar. Then he stole my stuffed duck and put it in his pocket. “As you can see, he can use some training. But he’s smart. He’ll learn fast.”

“Unlike me,” Kaden muttered.

Mike ruffled my shaggy coat. “He probably could use a bath and a trip to the groomer. Well, what do you think? Want to adopt Hank?”

Mom reached for the leash. “I may regret this, but yes, we’ve decided to take him.”