
THE PLAN



When I came back into the house, everyone was sitting around the table. *A second supper? Great.* I waggled over to see what we were eating. But there were no dishes and no food.

Mom jotted down some things on her iPad. “Okay. Tomorrow, Henry will enroll Molly in school and check out the after-school childcare. On Tuesday, I will pick up Sloane from high school, Kaden from middle school, and, last of all, Molly from kindergarten. House rules are for everyone, including Molly. Henry will be responsible for disciplining his daughter if it is needed.”

Everyone agreed, except Kaden, who had slid his chair back and was watching cartoons. He giggled at something the cartoon people were doing.

Mom cleared her throat.

Kaden sat up. “Sounds good, Mom.”

“You and Sloane need to be diligent about your chores. Two additional people in the house will mean more laundry. You can’t leave clothes sitting in the washing machine or dryer. There will also be more dishes, so don’t forget if it’s your turn to

load or unload the dishwasher. And there may be times you'll be asked to watch Molly."

"Sure, Mom." The Girl smiled.

"Mm-hmm." Kaden had no idea what Mom had said. He was focused on the TV.

As much as I loved this family, they weren't the smartest. No one asked me what I thought of the plan. Nothing was said about consequences for pulling dogs' ears or squeezing cats. They still did not understand a word of Bark. I could not communicate well with Princess, so it fell to me to come up with my own plan.

Henry stood and scooped up Shrieking Kid, who had fallen asleep on the couch. "It's been a long day for the two of us. I'm going to try to put her to bed without waking her."

He failed. The wailing started about halfway down the stairs.

When I followed Kaden downstairs, sounds of splashing and talking came from the bathroom. By the time Kaden settled into his gaming chair, and I settled onto the couch, the sobbing began—this time from the storage-room-turned-bedroom. Kaden seemed to tune out the noise, but I lay awake wondering if it would ever stop.

It didn't. All through the night, I woke to the sound of sobbing through the adjoining wall. After the third crying fit interrupted my sleep, I felt like bawling too. Fortunately for Kaden, dogs don't cry out loud.

When Kaden's alarm went off, we both groaned. And at least one of us was grouchy.

"Get off the blankets, Hank." Kaden pushed me rudely.

I nosed open the bedroom door as he dressed.

Shrieking Kid sat on the downstairs couch, swinging her legs out and back. *Thump. Thump. Thump.* “Hi, doggie.” She wiggled down and headed for me.

I bolted upstairs. Mom gave me a distracted pat as she opened the door for me to do my business in the backyard. I checked the fence, but I saw no squirrels on their way to breakfast. I gave one loud, fierce bark and circled the yard again.

Since the day I’d found Princess hiding under our rosebush, I’d always checked the yard to make sure no critters were hiding anywhere. I loved Princess, but one cat was enough. All clear today.

When Dad opened the door for me to come back in, the usual before-school-and-work chaos was in full swing, only doubled. Shrieking Kid sat at the table with a spoon and a bowl. Mom held out a box of cereal. “No, I don’t like that one.” She held out another. “Nope. Not that one either.”

By the time she offered the fourth box, Mom’s face turned a bit red, and a frown replaced her smile. “Well, this is all we have. Choose one, or I can make you a piece of toast.”

Shrieking Kid pointed to the Cheerios, and Mom poured some into her bowl and topped it with milk. Princess and I were fond of the dribbles of milk everyone left in their bowls. I licked my lips and watched.

Henry popped upstairs, dressed like Dad. He wore a shirt with buttons and pants, not jeans. “Molly. You were supposed to wait for me.”

Mom smiled at him. “No problem, Henry. She was hungry. But you might put it on your list to stop by the grocery store and pick up some foods Molly likes for breakfast and snacks.”

Henry nodded, patting Shrieking Kid’s head. “Do you have an extra hairbrush? I can’t find hers.”

Sloane slid onto her chair. "I can do her hair." She turned to the kid. "Would you like me to do your hair?"

"Uh-huh." Shrieking Kid shoveled spoonfuls of Cheerios into her mouth faster than a boxer with a plate of meat scraps.

Kaden took the stairs two at a time. I could tell, because I counted the thumps. He grabbed a bowl, a spoon, and the Cheerios box, and slid onto a chair. He shook the box. "Hey. Who ate all my Cheerios?"

Mom laid a hand on Kaden's shoulder. "We'll buy more tonight. There's granola, or you can make toast." Kaden's face grew red like Mom's as he looked at Shrieking Kid picking out the last of the Cheerios stuck to the side of her bowl. She tipped it up and drank the milk. So much for me getting some. Kaden stood and put two slices of bread in the toaster.

Mom said, "Fix those to go, Kaden, or we'll be late."

Sloane grabbed a brush and some gooey stuff and began smoothing Shrieking Kid's hair.

Dad left first. Then Henry and the kid. For once, she wasn't talking or shrieking. She clutched her dad's hand tightly, and before they went out the door, she turned and waved.

A short time later, Mom, Sloane, and Kaden left in the kennel-on-wheels. My furry ears were ringing from all the noise and chaos.

Princess wandered out from Sloane's room. She must have been hiding until they all left. That was one plan, but not a great one. I didn't want to adjust my life to Henry and the Shrieking Kid. I wanted them gone.

Kaden's homework required science projects. One thing he did was observe. He observed plants growing in dirt, crystals growing in a dish, and even a little lizard growing in a terrarium.

I decided that would be Step One of The Plan. I would observe the Shrieking Kid and find out all the facts.