

Hope's Secret

By Terry Powell

I have always tried to be a good girl doggy to make my people Dad happy, but now, he was handing me out to a lady. My hair was all dirty and matted, and worst of all; Dad was trying to sell me! He just pulled me out of the cage a few minutes ago, and said it was time to sell me. I only knew this place as my home all my life! The lady he was trying to sell me to reminded me of my people Mom, but the angels came and took her away a long time ago.

Dad was getting tense, like he did when he was not sure of a sale. "Well, if you don't take her, she will just feed the fish in the river," he said to the lady. He nodded his head back toward the water.

"No!" I whined, and began to squirm. He slapped me. I stopped moving, because I was afraid of worse slaps. I looked at the lady, she looked scared, too. But she stood up to him; "Over the phone you said you have only one female Yorkie for sale. I asked for a puppy, this is an adult dog. Do you have any Yorkie puppies? I was hoping for a female pup".

"Look, lady, this is a pure breed Yorkie. If I had a puppy to spare, I'd sell her to you. The few young ones I have now are my breeding stock. This one is past that stage. Her grandpa came close to best of breed in some dog show my wife entered. She kept all their papers. This is a good dog; she gave me lots of puppies. Now, she's probably too old. No season in eight months. She rejected the males for the past few months. But she still has "pet years" left. No profit in that for me." Dad spat on the ground, just to make it look good. I used to watch him sell puppies to people; he did the same things when he spoke.

I liked the sound of this lady's voice. Maybe she knows where my babies went, after Dad let people take them away. My people Mom used to let me sleep in the house, but after she died, Dad put me outside, in a cage next to the other kinds of dogs. He said then, "It's about time you earn your keep!" I don't know what a "keep" is. Dad brought in boy doggies for visits to my cage. Then, after those visits, I was pregnant with babies that reminded me of the boy doggies. The boy doggies were lucky, some of them were happy to get taken away

after a few days by their people when they gave Dad something called a 'reward.' I don't know where the other boy doggies went.

Oh, how I loved my babies! The last two were so pretty! I thought if I bit one on his ear, Dad would let me keep him longer, because he would no longer be "perfect." Dad saw me. Then he hit me. My paw still hurts on rainy or cold days. Then he took my babies away. They weren't ready to go on their own; their eyes had just opened days before. I got no food for two days, no matter how much I cried to get my babies back. He gave my pups to another Mom doggy to love.

Oops, I did not mean to whimper then, but I did. Wait! The lady is reaching for me. I tried to back off, but Dad was still holding me out to her.

"She's shy, isn't she? Cute, though, and she's how old? Asked the lady.

"Seven years, or so. Look, she's up for sale. Do you want her or not? You won't have to housebreak her, not like you have to do with a pup." Dad was working his sales pitch. I knew his tone of voice. "She goes to one corner of her cage."

The lady paused, looked at me, then reached out and petted me, then looked at the watch on her arm. "Well, I asked my husband to meet me here to look her over. He should be here soon, he's just off duty."

"Off duty? He's a cop?" asked Dad.

The lady nodded. Why was Dad acting nervous all of a sudden?

"Look lady, best I can do is \$100 dollars. Take it or leave it. I'm giving you an extra discount because I haven't had time to groom her." He held me out further to her in one of his hands. He put out his other hand open and palm up.

Oh, she's opening her bag, just like other people did before they took one of my babies away! Then she put some of those same smelly paper dollars in Dad's other hand and reached for me. I felt one hand under my butt and one hand behind my front legs. She took me closer to her. Does this mean she will take me to where my babies were taken? She petted me, just like my people Mom did long ago.

"Do I get a receipt?" she asked. I watched as Dad went to his car, opened it, took something out, and came right back.

"This is my business card. I wrote today's date, the amount, the dog's name and birth date, and signed it. The card says all sales are final. My wife kept her papers in the house." Then, after a moment, he added, "I recorded all of her pups. I can find the records and send copies of them on to you... for a small fee."

"That's fine, but I can call you in a few days for them, and ask my husband to pick up her papers." She began to walk away, still carrying me, and then turned. "When Jim stops by, please tell him that I left already. I'll try to catch him on the cell phone. If he's coming back from a call, he may still be in the squad car, so don't get nervous."

"No, lady, I won't get nervous. I'll tell him." Dad grinned, just like he did before he hit me. Whine.

The lady carried me to her car. I liked how she held me, so I would not fall, and I remembered that another man, a nice man, had held me like this. I think Dad called that man a "vet"? That was before my first babies. I never saw that man again, just Dad. Where are we going? Will I be seeing my babies? Any of them? I had babies every spring, and also, just before winter came, every year. I can't wait to see them again! Woof!

"OK, little one, easy," this new lady said. "Let's get you wrapped in this soft old towel. It's chilly today. We'll stop at the vet for a checkup." The towel felt warm around me, and she put me in a box on the floor of the car, Wait! Did she say vet? Maybe he can tell me where my babies went. I gotta listen more, she's talking to me.

"I hope that he does not realize there's no one to look for me. I was getting nervous. Who would have thought he would lower your price that much? I did not have enough cash with me to pay the first price he gave over the phone, and hoped he would not go back to it. After you whimpered, I was afraid he might really put you in the river. You poor baby, I bet he kept you out in those cold cages!" she said. I tried, I really tried to stay awake to listen to her, but the warmth and rocking of the car, the warm towel and her soft voice, just did me in. I woke up when the car stopped.

"Ah, here we are, at the vet's office." She picked me up, and carried me, still in that warm towel, into a house. It smelled like dogs and cats and sounded like friendly people voices. She carried me to a place where a man and a lady were talking, and greeted them;

"Hello. Excuse me, I just got this dog from a breeder, near the river, she is an older female, and I want to get her checked out to see if she

needs any special care. She also needs a bath. Do you know of any groomers, and will they show me the correct way to give her a bath?"

The man walked up to us. He reached for me, "May I?" he asked. My new lady let him take me from her. Whinnne!. No, I want to stay with the lady, I looked back at her, Whinnne!

"It's OK, little one," she said, "This man is a vet, and just wants to see if you're healthy. Or if you need help." She petted my head as she said that.

The man walked into another room, stroking my side as he held me. He put me on a big flat thing. His voice got softer as he spoke "Five and half pounds. She does need some dental cleaning, but it's not an emergency. Her eyes and ears look fine. Ouch, she flinched... Wait a minute, she holds up her paw. Does it hurt, baby? Hmm, the paw she lifts is thinner than the other front paw, which is a little thicker than usual, telling me it's been hurt for a long time. Her heart sounds OK, but it's fast. She's scared. I'll check her again when she's calmer. Did the breeder tell you if she was given booster shots? He should have if he kept her this long. She was probably one of the puppy makers. Did he... No, I'll bet he didn't. I know of that breeder near the river. If you would prefer, I can either check her blood for titer, but most likely it would be better to give her regular shots, because I doubt if she had any shots in a while, except for shots to ensure the pups are saleable. I'll also check her blood to see if there is any illness." The vet looked up at my new lady. That's a quick assessment," he added. "She's very well behaved for a scared dog."

Of course I'm scared, and my heart is racing! My Dad never looked at this many parts of me. Or poked them either, or even looked at my teeth!

"Hmm, I'm only concerned about that front paw. She walks on it, stands on it, but favors it. And there is something else - but I want to be sure," he told my new lady.

"Is she OK?" She asked softly, and even I could feel the fear in her voice. That's when I realized that the vet knew my secret!

"I think so, blood and urine tests will tell me for sure. We can call you with the results."

All I could think was that the man knew my secret. Oh, please don't tell, please don't tell my secret. I'll be good, please don't tell. I'll even

give you a kiss like I gave my first people Mom. I kissed his hand and looked up to him.

“How old is she? She is gentle and friendly,” he said. Then he rubbed my back. Ahhh, that felt good...This vet person seemed nice.

“The breeder said she was seven years old. He wrote this birth date on his business card as a receipt. Wait, according to this, she’s almost 6 years old. I just want her to enjoy the rest of her life.” My new lady then showed Dad’s card to the vet.

“Yep, that’s him. Well, let’s check her blood to see how healthy she is. She will need to be clipped short, as her long Yorkie hair is all matted. That would make it easier on both you and her to brush and trim it as it grows back. You do know you actually rescued her from that place, don’t you? I’d like to do a sonogram on her. This is on me, to ease my mind, just because I think there is hope.”

“Hope, I like that. Maybe I’ll name her Hope,”

“Well, little Hope, let’s see. He gently rubbed my sides, “If what I think is true, you and your new Mom will have lots to hope for.”

My new MOM? O Boy! Woof! I like that! She is a nice lady! My tail began to wag all by itself! Maybe she will even help me find my babies! The vet carried me to a smaller flat thing. I heard a click, then he laid me on my back. “I bought this old sonogram when I began my practice. I’m amazed it still works so well.” His voice is still as gentle as his hands. Are vets a different kind of people than my Dad? Nicer people? With gentle hands? And what was that metal thing he slid all over my tummy, and even my sore leg? Soon, the vet stopped, then picked me up again and turned to my new Mom.

“Well, Mom, because that’s what you are now...” he smiled, “Her paw has an old fracture, healed, but not set right. If she walks on it, well, she’s lucky. If not, there are things that we can do to help her. Rest, therapy, medicine for pain, or at worst we can reset it. That’s only as a last resort. Let’s give her time to see how she does outside a cage. Now, lets’ see, the breeder said she can’t be bred, right?” he asked.

My new Mom was so still for a moment. Then she spoke in a shaky voice, “He said she’s past that stage, and no season in eight months - Is something wrong?” Mom’s hand was shaking as she reached to pet me. “I already love her,” she said, and a big teardrop fell from her face.

“Well, some dogs are late, and sometimes they don’t show changes, especially if she’s had multiple pregnancies. He probably never bothered to carefully examine her before he sold her, for whatever reason.”

“The breeder said he got lots of puppies from her, maybe that’s why.” My new Mom said as she took me back from the vet, then scratched behind my ears - ahhh, ear bliss!

“I’ll just bet he got lots of puppies out of her!” said the vet. His sudden anger scared me and I whined. Then he spoke gently to me, “It’s OK sweetie, no one here would ever hurt you.”

I whined again, pleading with him, please don’t tell my secret. I kissed his hand again. That new boy doggie was put in the cage next to mine a month ago. He scratched himself on the chicken wire between us. He was scared and cold, and wanted to be next to me for warmth. We even played during that night. He pulled the wire from the wood frame so he could be with me. In the morning we heard my Dad. The boy doggy went back to the other side of the chicken wire and pushed the wire part way back into place. He cried for his people. They came a few days later. Dad lied when he told them that he found the boy dog. Dad took him from his yard.

“Well, new Mom,” said the vet, “I think you will need to be very careful with Hope for the next 4 to 6 weeks. Maybe make her a new blanket, too. She will need vitamins and a special diet, at least for the next two months. We will give you a special feeding regimen. Watch her carefully, for any tummy aches, or any problems, and give her lots of love, especially in the next six weeks. Any questions or problems, please call me right away. She’s had too many babies in her life. She is pregnant now.”

Oh, no! I thought! I want to keep this one! My new Mom held me close. She did not notice that my messy hair made her shirt dirty. “Is she really OK? At first, I only wanted a female pup, but her whimper just got to my heart. Now, I just want to give her a nice home.” She paused, then whispered “She’s p-pregnant?”

He nodded, “Rescuers call that a “forever” home. Hope is about one month, or four weeks into her pregnancy, with one pup. The breeder probably figured no season, no breeding. She found herself a friend, didn’t you, Hope?” He rubbed my head, and I looked up at my new Mom. I whined, Oh, please let me keep this baby!

The vet kept talking, “An adopted or rescued dog tries harder to please its new owner, you, sometimes harder than a dog gotten as a

pup. They seem to know it's their second chance for happiness...Are you OK?" he asked.

Mom was still stunned. She did not move for a bit. "Pre-pregnant?" Mom said. "But he's an experienced breeder! Will she be OK to deliver her pup? What do I need to do, to know?"

"He probably let his guard down or there is an opening in the cage that he does not know about yet. He never knew that she's pregnant or else he'd never sell her like this. You may have to teach her to play and to definitely obey so she won't run into the street. Her pups were taken away from her, and she would have been kept for the next breeding.

My new mom held me tighter, "Oh, the poor thing, having all her babies taken from her! Well, we will be keeping her baby. After all the others, she deserves to keep this one. And to have a warm home, food and love."

Did she say I can keep my secret baby? Yip! I was so happy! I just love this new Mom! I had to do it, dirty and matted, I began to kiss her chin, thank you for letting me keep my baby, my precious secret. Thank you! Slurp! The vet and my Mom laughed.

"How often do you need to see her? I came here because my friends said you are a good vet."

"I want you to phone me weekly, and we'll look at her often to be sure she is doing OK. I am concerned about her history of many pups. I can stop by later in her pregnancy so she is less stressed. It's no problem, because I'm glad someone finally got something over that breeder. Good girl, Hope. We suspect him of kidnapping pure bred male dogs for the rewards, too. Maybe that's his male breeding stock. How did you do it?"

"I never even got to hold Hope before I paid for her. I was trying to get him to bring down his price. But he made me nervous, so I said my husband would stop by and meet me there after he was off duty", Mom explained.

"Off duty? I bet he thought he thought police."

"He did. Then he lowered his price to \$100. I had my money almost out, thinking and hoping that he would come down to \$200 or \$250. His original price was higher, but he came down in price over the phone, before I drove to his place. I kept my hand in my purse so he would not see the rest of my money." As Mom explained, the vet was

smiling, then he laughed out loud as she finished, then Mom laughed, too.

We stayed a while at the vet's office so I got a meal, a bath and a haircut. Then, I felt so pretty and clean. The vet said Mom got two for the price of one, and that we make a good team. He was very happy that day.

But not as happy as me. So far, Mom made a new bed and blanket for me and my baby. I want to keep that old soft towel that Mom first wrapped me in. I guard it all the time. It's just soft enough for a snooze, so it will be fine for my pup. Lately, I've been having so much fun playing with squeak toys and chew toys with my Mom, that I forget my belly is getting bigger. Mom lets me nap a lot, too, and sometimes we nap together. I feel better with this baby than I did with any of the others. Soon my pup will be born, and I can stop pretending that the soft fuzzy toy thing is all my other babies. Because finally, I can keep this one.