



ONE

mackenzie lay under his covers in the dark. He counted each flat footstep slamming up the stairs.

One, two, three . . . He pulled his pillow close and peered into the night.

Seven, eight, nine . . . His bones locked.

Eleven, twelve . . . The door swung open. Bright light from the hall invaded his room, and a dark figure walked up to the bed. “Here,” a voice grunted. “Tried to cash in my chips and ended up with this for my trouble. Mind you don’t let it chew up my shoes.”

A wet lump landed on Mackenzie’s bed. Seconds later the door slammed shut. The bedroom was black again.

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Mackenzie curled away from the damp weight that trembled on top of the blanket. He could feel hot air whistle past his ear. He could smell fear. And he could make out the splotches of white. When he found the courage to touch one of them, it crumpled in his hand like heavy silk.

It was an ear, a soft, silky ear.

Something began to whack his leg. Mackenzie figured it out. A tail was beating against his leg. The prod in his tummy was a paw. And the cold, dry poke under his neck, well, that was a nose.

The thing on his bed was a dog. A dog! His father had thrown a dog on the bed.

In the dark, Mackenzie lay still, holding the ear lightly. Just as he was getting used to the soft way it folded in his fingers, the dog licked his chin, a slurpy ice-cream lick.

Mackenzie slid his hand from the ear to the smooth, damp head. He ran his hand on down



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the neck and curled his fingers into the loose, skinny folds. He waited. After a while the dog stopped trembling and settled into the covers like warm butter. It was going to sleep.

“Cash,” whispered Mackenzie. His father had called the dog Cash. Mackenzie closed his eyes and breathed carefully, breathing in with the dog, breathing out with the dog. He stayed as still as a sleeping boy.

It wasn't that long before he was a sleeping boy.

So that's how Mackenzie and Cash spent their first night together, wrapped up close, nose to nose. In the morning they got quite a surprise when they opened their eyes. Both of them jumped. They didn't know that the other was really there. They thought it was just a dream.

Mackenzie took a good look at the dog lying on his pillow. It yawned, so he got a view inside and out. It had a long, pink tongue and bright



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brown eyes. And it was a puppy, a girl puppy. Mackenzie was pretty certain about that.

The puppy looked back at Mackenzie. She saw a freckled nose. She looked right into Mackenzie's blue eyes with her big brown ones, and sneezed. She blew spit all over his face.

They both scrambled out of bed.

Mackenzie followed Cash down the stairs. The puppy was in such a hurry, her paws slipped on the bare wood and Mackenzie had to grab her tail to slow her down. He pushed her out into the backyard. It was early spring and still chilly, so they both shivered while the puppy did her business. She was as glad as Mackenzie was to get back into the house, especially when the morning train whistled shrilly beyond the fence.

Standing in the middle of the kitchen, the puppy looked at Mackenzie and wagged her tail. Where was breakfast?



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Mackenzie didn't know what puppies ate for breakfast. Whatever it was, he knew they didn't have it in the house. Finally he gave the puppy a bowl of bran flakes swimming in milk, and a piece of bread and peanut butter. She seemed to like that a lot.

With fifteen minutes to go before the school bus, Mackenzie and Cash climbed back upstairs. Cash didn't know that going up steps was just as tricky as going down. She slipped and knocked her noggin. Mackenzie picked her up and hauled her the rest of the way so she didn't come to any more harm. It was a tough job. The puppy wriggled, and bits and pieces of her kept slipping out of his grasp. It was like trying to hang on to a sack of rubber balls.

When they finally got to Mackenzie's bedroom, Mackenzie took a long look at his new dog. He had to go to school, and he wanted a picture to carry with him all day long. She looked good



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enough to eat. Her coat was a caramel color, laced with brown sugar and milk. Next to her nose, where the hair was short, you could see her skin, pink as bubble gum. Mackenzie thought she was going to be a big dog, a beautiful big dog. But right then, she was just a pudding pot of puppy with a wet nose and a plump rump full of wriggles.

All the while Mackenzie was memorizing Cash, she was memorizing him. She must have liked the way he looked. Her tail wagged the whole time.

Anybody could see they were love-struck.

At the last minute Mackenzie remembered to leave Cash a drink. He filled his old fishbowl at the bathroom sink, letting the water run until it was ice-cold. He put some newspapers in the corner, too, just in case. Then he gave the puppy a hug and closed his door. "I'll be back before you know it, Cash," he called as he ran downstairs. "We'll go out!"

Cash was asleep under the blankets before the school bus got to the end of the road. She



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hadn't felt so warm and safe for a long time – or so full, either. She stuck her pink snout into the pillow, where it still smelled of the boy, and let her belly spread out wider than a jelly doughnut.

At school, Mackenzie didn't have it as easy. But he did his best to make the day go by. He did some addition on the board and read a poem out loud. In between classes he thought about Cash. *I've got a dog*, he thought.

At lunch he cleaned the chalk ledge for his teacher and emptied the recycling bin. *She's waiting for me*, he thought.

During music class he kept time with the rhythm sticks. *We'll go to the park*, he decided.

Mackenzie looked anxiously out the window. The sun was shining. The sky was bluer than a robin's egg.

I've got a dog named Cash, he wrote in the corner of his notebook.

