Callum Sees Spots

by andlat

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

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“And this is another hose.” Firefighter Mike said. How can you make a tour of a firehouse boring? Callum thought. Firefighter Mike was a big bear of a man with a booming, friendly laugh, but this had to be the most boring tour ever. Why were they even touring the firehouse? That was the sort of thing preschoolers did, not middle schoolers!

“Guess I'll just make my own fun then.” He muttered as the class passed a hallway. He quickly darted down it, relishing the opportunity to rebel even slightly. Anything was better than being bored to tears. They didn’t even get to turn on the fire truck's sirens! “Now, what to do?” He saw a sign that mentioned the cafeteria. A snack was always in order! Mom and Dad were always so strict about when he could or could not eat, but what they didn't know wouldn't hurt them, right?

Opening the door he thought led to the cafeteria, Callum came face to face with, not a snack, but a dog!

"Ruff!” The dog barked. Callum held his hands up.

“Whoops! Wrong door!”

“Ruff!” The dog replied.

“Sorry, girl.” He said. “You must be Callie, huh?” Firefighter Mike had mentioned Callie was resting, but if they were lucky, they'd see her at the end of the tour. “Are you Callie?”

“Ruff!” She insisted. It reminded him a little bit of when Mom or Dad would tell him to do something, and when were they not? “Ruff!” Not so much angry as assertive. It didn’t seem like she was trying to alert the firefighters. She was giving him some kind of directions! “Ruff!” She moved her head and he finally realized what she wanted. He closed the door behind him. “Arf!”

“Ok, guess that's what you wanted.”

“Rrf.” The dog said. It took her a few tries to get him to come over.

“Oh, you just wanted me to pet you, huh?” He scritched behind her ear. She seemed appreciative, but then suddenly latched her teeth onto his shorts and began to tug.

Over the next few minutes, Callie seemed to play tug of war with his shorts, then his shoes, then his shirt, tossing each article of clothing aside once she got it off him. If he tried to go grab it, she would tug him back and start in on the next seemingly offensive piece of clothing.

“You are not getting my underwear.” Callum said sternly.

“Arf!” Callie seemed very satisfied with the boy sitting in front of her in just his underwear and a single sock.

“I better get back to my class.” He got shakily to his feet.

“Ruff!” She declared, jumping forward and bringing her front paws down on the floor. “Ruff!” She repeated, giving him a look that seemed to say ‘get it, dummy’?

“I don't-”

“Ruff!” She persisted, bringing her front paws down on the floor twice more.

“I really gotta get back.” By now, his absence had to have been noticed and if Mom or Dad heard about him sneaking off, they wouldn't let him out of their sight until he was 20!

“Ruff!” She gave him a downright parental look.

“Alright, fine.” He dropped down onto all fours.

“Arf!” She approved.

Through a mixture of demonstration, nosing, and general determination, she made him crawl back and forth around the room, slowly getting further and further away from him as if to test if he would keep following her. Every time he tried to turn away, she would bound over and nose him back into compliance, so he quickly figured out that his only choice was to obey. He had never played with a dog like this before!

“Ruff!” Callie called from over by one of the walls. He began to follow, but stopped and stared at his hands. They had splotches on them, but not red like a rash. They were black and white! “Ruff!”

“In a minute.” This was weird. It had to be some kind of trick. He had been staring at Callie for so long, he was starting to see spots everywhere, right?

“Ruff!” Callie bounded over and pushed him back onto all fours with her head. “Ruff!”

“Alright, fine!” She shepherded him over to the wall where she had been. “No. No way.” He shook his head, looking at two silver metallic bowls, each filled with kibble. “Nope.”

“Ruff!”

“I said no!” He got to his feet. It was one thing for his class to see him crawling around in his underwear. There was no way he was letting them walk in on him eating dog food!

“Rrrf." Callie's bark came from deeper in her throat.

“Sorry, but no. I can't. I… ate kibble for breakfast.” Callie looked at him. “I… yeah, that was a lie, but I'm a human. I can't… eat that stuff. I'm sure it's good for dogs like you.”

“Ruff!” Callie sounded forceful now. She walked over to him and then suddenly jumped, pushing her paws into his chest and knocking him down.

“Ow!”

“Rrf.” She repeated, looking down at him. Satisfied he was not hurt, she began to headbutt and nudge him along until he was right by the dog bowl. “Ruff.”

“Ugh, it smells… well, not as bad as I'd expect, but still. I can't eat that!”

“Rrr.” That sounded a bit too much like Dad's ‘now, mister'. He held his breath and lowered his face down into the bowl. He could feel the maternal dalmatian's breath on the nape of his neck. He took a single piece of kibble into his mouth and chewed it.

“Good enough?” It was not. Callie hovered over him as he forced the kibble down, taking only short breaks to eat from her own dish. It was on one of these brief respites from her standing right by him that Callum made a desperate dash for the door. Callie seemed ready for it, chasing him down and biting onto his underwear surprisingly delicately to drag him back over to their dishes. His underwear in tatters, Callum sighed and tried to get through the dog food as quickly as he could.

“Arf!” Callie praised once he could finally see the bottom of the bowl. He could not help but feel a little proud, though he yelped as he felt something move. His head whipped around and he stared at his wagging tail.

“What?” He tried to grab it, but his hands had become more like big, thick paws and he could not seem to grip it.

“Rrf.” Callie said gently, nosing him.

“But I have a tail and paws!” She licked his cheek tenderly. “But” she nudged him and he sighed. “If I'm turning into a dog, why can't I understand you?” She gave him a look and began to walk. He followed her, slowly coming to realize that he had understood her, more or less, this whole time. Confused by this epiphany, he let her get him situated in a dog bed before she curled up around him and gave him another tender lick.

“I know I told you we'd get to see Callie.” Firefighter Mike said softly. “But I wanted to save a big surprise for you all. We have a new member of our family here at Station Number

Four. Callie's puppy, Callum!" He kneeled down and reached into the dog bed, pulling Callum free.

"Hey, what the?" Callum squirmed in his large hands, half groggy still from the nap he was being woken up from. "What…" Firefighter Mike seemed giant! Even his classmates looked so big now! Callum whimpered and wiggled as he was held up to his whole class.

"Aw, it looks like he's wearing a little sock!" Ashleigh Pfeiffer said, pointing at his left hind paw that was all black.

"Callie seems worried." Mrs. Radcliffe said.

"Callum's still a young puppy. She's been a very attentive mom teaching him everything he needs to know about being a firehouse dog." Firefighter Mike said, returning Callum to his mom's side. "If any of you come back in a few weeks, I bet Callum will be racing all over the place, getting into all sorts of trouble." Callie gave him a lick and a nibble, as if to remind him that she would be watching him closely.

"I'm not a dog though!" Callum protested, trying to get away from the overly attentive dalmatian. He knew enough to know that he now looked every bit like a dog, but surely they could hear him! "Please! Come back!" He made it a few steps out of the dog bed before Callie calmly got up and nudged him back to where she wanted him.

"Arf." She said lovingly as she gazed down at the perfect dalmatian puppy by her paws.