OLIVIA WAKEFORD

MY DOG



HC
CB
HARPERCOLLINS
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

First published in the United Kingdom by
HarperCollins *Children's Books* in 2025
HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

HarperCollins*Publishers*
Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland

1

Text copyright © Olivia Wakeford 2025
Illustrations copyright © David Litchfield 2025
Cover illustrations copyright © David Litchfield 2025
Cover design copyright © HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd 2025
All rights reserved

ISBN 978–0–00–865858–8

Olivia Wakeford and David Litchfield assert the moral right to be identified as the author and illustrator of the work respectively.

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Typeset in Aldus LT STD 11/14pt
Printed and bound in the UK using 100% renewable electricity at
CPI Group (UK) Ltd

Conditions of Sale
This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd.



This book contains FSC™ certified paper and other controlled sources to ensure responsible forest management.

For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

CHAPTER 1



There's a dog under Mam's bed.

He's my favourite kind: a black Labrador with conker eyes and ears like triangles of velvet.

I know loads about dogs and, when I grow up, I'm going to be a vet like Dr Jimmy Mackenzie from *The Dog Rescuers*. One of the main things about dogs is that they're supposed to have a strong sense of smell and sensitive ears, but this one doesn't seem bothered by the stink of disinfectant or the beeping machines.

I don't know where the dog came from or where its owner is, but as a Junior Dog Rescuer it's my job to find out.

Me and Dad are standing in the doorway of Mam's room. The sounds of the nurses' slappy feet and wails from Moany Gwen, the woman in the room next door, float down the corridor behind us.

Dad doesn't mention the dog. He says, 'Your mum needs rest so only a few minutes, okay, Champ?'

His voice wobbles, like he's upset, even though he has no right to be. I'm the one who should be upset: he's calling me that stupid name again.

'Okay.'

I refuse to look at him and stride over to Mam. My trainers squeak on the hard floor. I feel his gaze on me, like it's been for weeks. Always watching.

The door clicks, and I let out a sigh of relief.

Just Mam and me again.

And the dog under the bed.

Her eyes are shut, long eyelashes fluttering on pale cheeks. I squeeze her hand; it's cold and clammy.

'Hiya, Mam.'

She looks small and not Mam-like. White sheets come to her chin, and her hair, which is usually bright red and spiky like mine, is flat and stuck to her forehead. But, when she opens her eyes and smiles, she looks just as she always does. Like fizzy pop and chocolate-covered doughnuts.

'Hi, Reese's Pieces,' she says, quiet and slurry. 'Come on.' She pats the bed. 'Gimme a cuddle.'

I climb on to the bed and tuck under her arm, even though it's not comfortable because her shoulder is pointier than it used to be, and the sheets are scratchy. She smells like lemons and sweat.



'Mam?' I whisper in case Dad, or the nurses, or Moany Gwen can hear. 'Did you know there's a dog under the bed?'

'A dog? Really?'

I lean over the side. He's sitting between the wheels, staring at me. If it was a surprise for me, Mam would know about him. But it doesn't seem like she does. A dog this cute has to belong to someone. Moany Gwen doesn't have a dog. I'd have noticed that because she moans so loud a dog would think she was singing and join in like they do on those funny YouTube videos that Bampy likes. There are other rooms on the ward, I'm not sure how many, but the dog could belong to one of the other patients.

On Mam's bedside table, I spot the box of Worthington's Toffees. The lid is open, and I can see the little brown squares of chocolate-covered toffees inside.

Of course. He's a greedy Labrador!

According to Dr Jimmy, the whole world is a Labrador's plate, and it's their job to keep it clean at all times. The dog probably smelled the toffees and came to investigate. He can't eat them though: chocolate is poisonous to dogs.

I curl back into Mam. 'Really.'

'What's he doing?'

I check again. He's lying down now, head resting on his huge paws. There's a gentle thump as his tail hits the floor.

'Wagging his tail.' I snuggle into her again.

'That's good.' She takes a big breath. 'You're going to do amazing things, Rhys. Remember that, okay?'

I'm too busy thinking about where the dog came from to answer. What's his name? Charlie? Whizz-bit? Something old-man-ish like Howard? Hopefully not Champ.

'Rhys?' Mam gives me a serious look. 'Amazing things, yes?'

I grin. She always makes me say it back to her. 'Amazing things. Like being a great vet like Dr Jimmy?'

'Like being you! You can do anything, my love.' She licks her lips. 'And I know it's not always easy with your dad, but he does love you. Give him a chance, okay?'

My grin falls away. The dog whines. I want to tell him it's okay, that I'll find his owner for him, but Mam's looking at me like what she's saying is important. But it's only about Dad.

'Come on . . .' Mam presses her forehead against mine. 'Try? For me?'

'*Fiiiine*.'

Dad never tells me I'll do amazing things. Since he's been staying the last few weeks, all he's told me is to turn my bedroom light off, do my homework and not worry about Mam.

The door squeaks, and Dad pops his head into the room. His eyes are red. When he sees us, he makes a weird gulping sound.

Mam smiles at him, then whispers to me, 'Go on now – remember what I said.'

I hop off the bed, give her a peck on the cheek. 'See you tomorrow, Mam.'

'Bye, love.'

'Come on, Champ. Visiting hours are up. We'll leave you to rest, Haze.'

Dad ushers me from the room before I've had time to come up with a dog plan. I glance back under Mam's bed and frown.

The dog's gone.

Dad's arm is still round me as we pass the other rooms. White sheets and beeping machines. No black Labradors.

Myra, the nurse, heads towards us; she gives me *the* smile. Everyone gives me *the* smile now, the one where they don't show their teeth, and it looks more sad than happy. It's how a frog would smile.

'Hiya, Rhys. Ben.'

I wrestle myself from Dad's grip. 'Myra?'

'Yes, lovely?'

'Are dogs allowed in the hospital?'

'Dogs?' She chuckles. 'Only assistance ones. Not planning on on smuggling one in, are you?'

If the black Labrador is an assistance dog, he's very badly trained.

'Has anyone got one? Here?'

She shakes her head. 'Not on this ward.'

'What about on the other wards?' He must belong to someone staying in the hospital, or maybe someone who's visiting.

'Sorry, Myra,' Dad says with a sigh, like loving dogs is a bad thing. 'He's . . . got a thing about dogs. Champ, I'm sure Myra's got a lot to do.'

'No problem. I'd be all for having more dogs here; they always cheer people up,' she says with a wink.

Dad wrinkles his nose. 'Not very hygienic though.'

All I can think about is how upset the dog's owner must be, not knowing where he is. If Dr Jimmy found a lost dog, he wouldn't leave him. Neither can I.

I run back down the corridor. Maybe the dog was hiding under the chair, and I couldn't see him?

'Rhys!' Dad shouts.

'Forgot something in Mam's room!' I yell back.

Dad won't understand, but I have to help the dog. He'd say something like, 'There's people who are paid to do that sort of stuff, like that vet you love off the telly. Leave it to the professionals, Champ.'

Mam's asleep already. The machine next to her beeps steadily.

'Here, boy,' I whisper, checking behind the chair. He's not there. 'Where are you, doggy?' I look under the bed again. *Nope*.

Where could he be?

Mam looks peaceful so I don't want to wake her to ask if she's seen him.

I glare at Dad through the glass window in the door. He must have scared the dog away.

He's on his phone, probably video-chatting Lucy and making goo-goo-gah-gah noises at my baby sister, Evie. Evie's only six months old so she can't even recognise faces on a screen. I looked

it up online. I haven't met her yet, but Mam says I'm going to be the best big brother.

The dog could be anywhere by now. I blink back tears, forcing the sadness down to my toes. I wish I could search all the wards for the owner, then tell Mam about my real-life dog rescue.

But Dad nods to the lift.

Time to go.

I peck Mam on the cheek again and whisper, 'Sweet dreams, Mam, love you.'