

# THE SWITCHER

## CHAPTER 4

Ben's mum and dad stared at him in astonishment.

Ben barked in alarm.

"I don't believe it!" Ben's mum gasped.

Rocky came panting up the stairs.

"I'm sorry Rocky!" howled Ben.

"Ben," his mum grabbed Rocky, "did you know that your dog could do this?"

"Er," said Rocky scratching his ears. "Yes!"

"You did?" his mum frowned.

"Yes," said Rocky. "I... trained him!"

"That's so clever! Why didn't you tell us?" his mum asked.

Rocky paused. "We're entering 'The Most Talented Pet Ever!' competition. We wanted to surprise you."

“What else can Rocky do?” asked Ben’s dad.

“Well,” said Rocky, thinking quickly. “He can sit.”

Ben’s four knees were starting to ache.

“And he can give you his—”

Suddenly Ben’s knees gave way. He tumbled off the toilet and landed with a crash. Rocky picked him up.

“I think that trick needs some more work,” his mum smiled. “We’ll leave you to it. Can’t wait to see you perform!”

“That was so embarrassing,” whimpered Ben after they’d gone. “But you were brilliant Rocky, coming up with that explanation.”

Rocky beamed. “I just repeated what you’ve been telling me.” He stroked Ben and put him back on the floor.

“Except now, they’ll be expecting us to win the competition,” Ben woofed.

“Oh,” said Rocky. “I don’t think I could be as good as you Ben.”

Ben's ears pricked up. "You don't have to be." His tail thumped. "I'll be the dog! I can do the tricks! I bet we won't have switched back by then."

Rocky clapped his hands. "That's a brilliant idea."

"We have to put our names down tomorrow lunchtime at school, otherwise we can't enter," Ben explained. He trotted to the stairs.

"Great," said Rocky. "What's school?"

Ben stopped. Tomorrow Rocky would have to go to school. Ben had a sinking feeling in his tummy. Was that really a good idea? But he so wanted to win. 'It's just one day,' Ben thought. 'Then Rocky can pretend to be ill until the competition.'

Ben turned to Rocky. "Don't worry about school. If you do as I say, everything will be fine."

"No problem," Rocky beamed. "I always do as you say."

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The next morning, getting Rocky into Ben's school uniform was hard work. All Rocky wanted to do was run around with Ben's socks in his mouth. Afterwards, Ben jumped over the garden fence so that he could meet Rocky and sneak to school with him. Rocky was carrying

a large sports bag. Ben planned to hide in it when they got there. Rocky would pretend it had books in it.

“This is so exciting!” Rocky jumped up and down. “I’m getting to see where you go every day.”

A teenager walked past and gave Rocky a strange look.

“Maybe a bit less jumping?” Ben quickly growled. “Come on.”

Ben took Rocky the long way to school so that they wouldn’t see many people. They arrived a few minutes late. Ben hopped into the bag and Rocky closed it just enough so that Ben could still breathe.

“Remember everything I’ve told you Rocky. Plus, it’s only until lunchtime and then say you’ve got to go to the doctors. For the rest of the week, you’ll pretend to be ill,” Ben reminded him.

Rocky nodded and walked into the school. ‘So far so good,’ thought Ben.

They arrived outside Ben’s maths lesson. “Open the door and walk in,” growled Ben.

Before Rocky could reach for the handle, someone spoke: “Ben! Why are you carrying that ridiculous bag?”

'Oh no,' thought Ben. He recognised that voice. It was the strictest teacher in the school: Mr Watson, the deputy head.

Rocky turned and faced Mr Watson. "It's extra books to help me with my school work," he said.

Ben peeked at Mr Watson through the gap in the zip.

"Really?" Mr Watson raised an eyebrow. "Well you can't carry that bag around. It's far too big."



Rocky's fingers tightened around the handle.

"Give it to me please." Mr Watson reached out his hand. "Now!" Mr Watson took hold of the bag.

Rocky didn't let go. Mr Watson tugged the bag. Rocky giggled and tugged it back. Mr Watson went pink and tugged harder. Rocky jumped back and tugged harder still. Mr Watson went red and tugged the bag harder again.

Ben was bouncing around inside the bag in alarm.

"Let go now!" shouted Mr Watson. "This is not a game."

"No way," laughed Rocky. He leaned right back and yanked the bag to his chest.

"I said NOW!" Mr Watson gave one last pull, but Rocky was too strong. Mr Watson's hands slipped from the bag and he tumbled backwards. The classroom door flew open.

"What on earth is going on here?" demanded Miss Scott, Ben's maths teacher. "Oh," she said, noticing Mr Watson sitting on the floor. "Mr Watson, are you alright?"

Mr Watson got up. His face was almost purple. "Yes, thank you Miss Scott," he answered crossly. "I was just taking Ben's bag and I must have slipped."

Miss Scott looked puzzled. "I see," she said.

Mr Watson snatched the bag. Inside, Ben hit his tail on the zip. He clenched his teeth so that he wouldn't yelp.

"I will see you after school Ben," Mr Watson said. "You might get your bag back then."

Rocky gave a low cry.

Miss Scott frowned. "It's only a bag, Ben," she said. "It's not like you're losing your best friend. Now come inside. We are going to do a very important maths test. I expect a high mark from you."

Mr Watson stormed off to his office. The bag thumped against his legs. Ben was starting to get a headache. 'This is terrible,' he thought miserably.

Mr Watson placed the bag under his desk. Ben heard him open a window, then his phone rang. "Yes," Mr Watson answered. "I'm just leaving for a meeting. I won't be back at school until home time."

'Great!' thought Ben. 'When he leaves, I can escape.'

"I'm going now," Mr Watson said, and he put down the phone. Ben heard the door close, followed by a soft thudding sound.

'Right,' thought Ben. 'Time to go.' He pushed his head out the bag. Then stopped. A pair of large green eyes were staring right at him. They didn't look friendly.

