

Mum's Best Boy

Tape Transcript

TOP SECRET

Project Doolittle

Experiment: K9/1

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[Tape begins]...Is this thing switched on yet? OK, what do I have to do?

[Reply inaudible]

Just think, nothing else? How does it work? How's my voice made? [Reply inaudible].

OK, *OK!* I'm sorry I asked! Look, can't you explain it a bit simpler? [Reply inaudible]

That's fine, I get it now: a *Machine*. I understand about machines. I'm ready now, ready to begin - but be patient. You know, I've never done this before - *speak*, like a proper human being.

My name's Toby. I'm not sure, but I *think* I'm about twelve years old. At the moment I'm sitting in a white room, like a vet's or doctor's - only bigger, much bigger. All around me there are people in long white coats, and machines, hundreds of machines all whirring and clicking and buzzing.

I'm strapped to a sort of chair thing, on a raised platform, and I've got a big metal helmet on my head. It's got all sorts of wires and things sprouting out of it, and I've got a metal helmet on my head - and there are wires stuck elsewhere on me as well. But don't worry, it doesn't hurt a bit. In fact, it's all the wires and machines that are letting me speak for the first time in my life.

What's happening to me is very important and special. I know that because there are rows of seats in front of me with people sitting in them: *very important people*, all watching me and listening to me. I can't see the people properly because of all the lights shining in my eyes - but I can see my Mum, there, at the back. She's here in case I get frightened and need her, but I won't. I never get frightened when Mum's with me, because I know she'd never let anybody do anything bad to me. Mum looks after me and I do my best to look after her; that's how we get along.

My Mum's the most important person in my life. Without my Mum I wouldn't be able to do anything. She feeds me, baths me - not too often, because I hate baths - and takes me to the toilet. That's a lot, isn't it? She may look ordinary, but she's not: she's my Special Mum.

Special because she looks after me so well and special because she picked me. She chose me - out of everyone in the whole world!

Well you can see that, can't you? You can see that she's not my real mother, not the one that had me. But I don't care. She's the only Mum I've ever known and the only Mum I'd ever want...it's just that sometimes I have these weird dreams - about her, my real mother. I was so young when I was taken from her that I can't remember what she looked like, not even in dreams. But in my dreams she's with me - just a warm body curled around me, or just the smell of her.

Then I wake up feeling all peculiar and I have to get into Mum's bed for a cuddle until everything's all right again. Only Mum can do that - make everything all right again.

Me and Mum we live on our own. We don't go out a lot; we don't have many friends or people coming to visit. It's a quiet life, but that's the way we like it.

We listen to the radio a lot, and in the evenings we watch telly. I don't like telly much to be honest - there's too much noise, too many bangs and too much shouting. But I like the radio, especially the music. Sometimes when Mum's got the radio on I join in with the music - you know, sort of hum a bit. My voice isn't exactly what you'd call musical, but Mum never seems to mind.

But some people do, like the people next door. As soon as I start singing they start banging on the wall and yelling for me to shut up. Honestly! What a load of old miseries! I mean where's the harm in a little sing-song? But Mum just takes her shoe off and bangs right back.

That's another of the ways she looks after me: she stands up for me; she doesn't let people pick on me or bully me. You see there are a lot of people - like the people next door - who don't like folk like me. They don't trust us. They think we might suddenly turn violent or something. It's not my singing they get cross about, not really. It's fear - do you know what I mean?

Of course, they've got nothing to be afraid of. It's all a load of old rubbish, I wouldn't hurt a fly. But don't tell them. I like people being a bit afraid of me. I like to have a little respect. And Mum likes it too; it helps me look after her.

Because I do look after Mum, in my own way. I'm always there when she needs someone to talk to, so she's never lonely. And she never has to answer the door on her own: I'm always there, right behind her, just in case. I may be small but, like I said, people are a bit afraid of the likes of me. No one would dare try any funny business when I'm around!

Mind you, having people a bit scared of you can be bad at times. Like the other day when I decided to go out on my own for a little walk. (Mum's not been too well lately, and I need to get a breath of fresh air every day.) I

nipped out - just for a moment, no more - while Mum was having a little nap. It was a lovely day and I was strolling down the High Street minding my own business, when all of a sudden someone makes a grab for my collar - the Old Bill!

So off I go - over the road, past Tesco's and into the shopping precinct. Everything's going fine, I can see him miles behind and wheezing like an old horse. Then out of nowhere, some busybody leaps on my and holds me down until he finally staggers up to us. So I have to go off to The Station and they phone Mum to come and get me, as usual.

Of course there's no *law* that says I can't go out on my own, same as anybody else. But when you're like me they don't need a law, because there's always some nosey parker read to 'have a go' like that bloke the other day.

It's a *rule*, a secret rule: that's like a law, except you don't know it exists until you break it. Like *Grass Rules* and *House Rules* - you know? No? Ok, I'll explain. You know some parks are really great - you can go wild, run around, dig up the flowers and nobody minds? Then there are other parks where all you've got to do is just *look* at the grass and there's some bloke chasing you and screaming? *Those* are Grass Rules. And if you're like me, you don't know which sort of park you're in until somebody grabs you by the collar and throws you out.

Houses can be the same: there are House Rules, like Grass Rules, but House Rules can be even worse. Some houses I've been to, you can run up and down in the hall and jump on the furniture - just like home. But in other places all you've got to do is *sniff* at some mouldy old chair and the Mum and Dad panic - as if any moment you're going to do something really bad, like pee on the carpet! And in those houses - the bad kind - if Mum's not there, if she's left me to be looked after me, they'll do bad things to me. Dreadful things! I've been shut outside in the rain. I've been

locked in a dark room all on my own. All because I didn't know what the stupid *rules* were!

And I've heard them talking: they think Mum does that sort of thing to me. Mum! But my mum would never do that sort of thing to me! Mum! Never! Never! Mum! [Sound of rapid footsteps. Tape stops.]

[Tape restarts.] I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...it's just that I get upset - angry - with all the rules. That's how *they* get back at the likes of me: with all their rules and all their punishments when you break a rule. That's why I need Mum so much, to keep me safe from all that.

It worries me. There'll come a time when she's not there anymore. I've heard stories about what happens to folk like me when their Mums have gone. I've heard that you get taken away and put into Homes, and then one morning - vanished! And nobody ever asks: "Why?" "What happened?" "Where are they?" You just disappear like you'd never existed.

I can tell by the way you're looking at me that it's true - isn't it? You see, I'm not stupid. People say I'm 'dumb'; that's what they say, isn't it? Dumb. But dumb isn't the same as stupid. And I'm not even dumb, not really, it's just that I can't actually speak - not words.

But with Mum that doesn't matter. She understands me. I don't know how she does it, but she knows whenever I want something; it's almost as if she could read my mind. She says she can tell from my eyes, or the way I'm sitting if I'm happy or sad; if I'm hungry or thirsty. Best of all, she understands how much I need to have quiet. I do. I need quiet just like I need food or drink or sunshine.

My favourite time is on winter evenings, when there isn't even the sound of traffic outside. Me and Mum sit in front of the fire. I sit at her feet and she strokes my head and whispers to me: "I'm the luckiest mum in the

world and you're the best boy in the world. You're Mum's best boy!" It's so beautiful I'd cry if I could.

That may sound funny to you, that I could really love my Mum like that. I know what people say about me and my kind: "They only understand fear"; "All they care about is their bellies"; "They'll love anybody who feeds them." They'd probably think Mum was a bit mad to care for me the way she does, but I'm flesh and blood like you. I've got feelings too. There are *lots* of times when I feel real love for Mum and she feels the same for me.

Well, like that Tree-time - I've forgotten what it's called. You know the time I mean. You have a tree in the living room and lots of little pictures round the fireplace. Then. A lot of people wouldn't bother about me at a time like that, would they? "Forget about him," they'd say. "He doesn't know what it's all about. We'll have a good time, don't bother about him."

Not my mum. She always buys me a present and puts it under the tree. She even buys a present for herself and pretends it's from me. And that makes me sad, because I'd really like to buy her a present. I'd like to do that more than anything else in the world - but I can't, can I?

Even if I was able to go into a shop and ask for what I want, the shop people would throw me out. They're always doing that, throwing me out of shops, even when I go in with Mum. "Sorry, madam," they say. "You can't bring him in here. It wouldn't be fair on the other customers; it wouldn't be hygienic." What do they think I am: a disease they could catch? It's times like that which make me think sometimes that Mum would be better off without me.

But if she didn't have me who would keep her company? Who would come round to stop her getting lonely. No one. I just wish that I could look after the way she looks after me. But she doesn't seem to mind. You'd think she'd want more, like - I don't know, a husband, children. Wouldn't you? But I've heard her telling people: "I don't need anybody but

my Toby. He's all the family I've got, and he's all the family I need. He's the best little dog in the whole world! He's faithful and gentle and he understands every word I say..." And I do, don't I? [Tape ends.]