

Boots by DayVaughn McKnight

Henry came home late today. His eyes were redder than usual, and his shoulders were droopy. He didn't have his usual smile. I ran up and tried to give him the biggest hug.

"Not now," said Henry. He brushed me off as he removed his coat. Once he was free from his restraints, I went in for hug attempt number two.

"Luka, later," said Henry as he threw his coat onto the couch. I didn't get the hug. He almost stepped on my feet as he went into the kitchen. My feet were always in the way, but I've gotten better.

Henry turned a knob on the stove. He still wasn't smiling. I went into the kitchen and sat next to my food bowl. He grabbed a pot from the pantry then filled it up with water from the sink. Maria cried. Henry put the pot on the stove then went upstairs. He still had his work boots on.

Maria continued to cry as Henry brought her into the kitchen and sat her down in a highchair. I went over to the chair, stood up, and gave her a big hug and some kisses. She smiled, but her eyes were still wet. I licked some of the water away.

"Down," said Henry. I went back to my bowl, but it was still empty. Henry was pouring a box of macaroni into the pot of water. I walked over to him and tapped his leg with my nose. I didn't move fast enough this time, and he accidentally stepped on my foot. The box slipped out of his grasp, and some of the water splashed on his hands. It made him jump. I went for hug attempt number three and tried to lick some of the water off. He pushed me off and accidentally stepped on my shoulder and back. Maria cried again.

Henry grabbed me by my collar and took me out to the patio. He went back inside and closed the screen door. *He'll come out for his hug later*, I thought. I sat in front of the glass and waited for him to see me. There were a lot of clouds in the sky, so it was pretty cool out.

He ate some of his food, then he fed Maria some of hers. He drank from his bottle with one hand then Maria drank from her cup with two. I barked a couple of times to get his attention. Maria looked over and waved, but Henry kept eating.

After a while, he took the dishes to the sink. He picked Maria up and carried her out of the kitchen. He came back and got another bottle from the fridge. I barked again. He glanced at me then took a sip of his drink with a smile. He turned off the lights and walked out of the kitchen.

I stared into the dark kitchen until I got sleepy. I didn't like the clouds anymore. I laid down and tried to make myself comfortable for the night. I didn't think Henry was coming back out anymore. It was getting colder. I needed a hug.

DayVaughn McKnight is a writer from the D.C. metropolitan area. He primarily focuses on urban fantasy dramas. DayVaughn is earning his BFA in creative writing from Full Sail University. He has been published in *The Cabinet of Heed* and was an editor for *Ursa Major Literary Magazine*. You can find him on Twitter: @DayVaughnTweets