

Life and adventures of a rescued puppy and its owner.

Crazy Bones! The Tale of a Waggy Tail

by Lynne Wissink-Tressler

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Crazy Bones!



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About This Tale
(explained by the Waggy Tail)

Everyone has a story, and ours is a simple one. It's about an ordinary woman in northern New England who takes in a feisty, extraordinary dog (*that would be me*), rescued from the streets of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. Our two personalities and how we see the world around us are very different. She thinks she rescued me, but I know better. Our tale is about our adventures, how we figured each other out, what I taught her about life, and of course, my very expressive waggy tail.

Dedication

This story is dedicated to three special groups of people:

First, there are those who take in animals and give them a second chance. The Cocheco Valley Humane Society in Dover, NH is one such organization. This book is dedicated to them.

Second, following Hurricane Katrina, many airlines, crews, and flight attendants donated time and money to deliver abandoned animals to safer locations around the country. To them, as well, this book is dedicated.

Finally, there were dozens of nameless volunteers who drove hundreds of miles and spent countless hours working as part of a huge relay network to deliver rescued animals from emergency shelters in the south to new homes across the country. Without

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their generous and loving efforts, many animals would not have had the good fortune of having a second start in life. They are heroes, and this book is dedicated to them, as well.

Thank you to all of you for your humanitarian efforts in saving as many lives as you could.

Lynne Wissink-Tressler, Ph.D.

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NH, the staff at Old Dominion Animal Hospital in McLean, VA; and the staff at Tails-A-Waggin' in Fort Myers, FL.

Other thanks go to Jennifer McLean and Cathy Carroll, both of whom read early versions of the manuscript and offered ideas and constructive feedback; Dr. Robin Buckley, my dear friend, who pushed me across the finish line; and finally, to all my students, past and present, who have taught me so much and who continue to inspire me.

Thank you for the fun and CRAZY journey we've had!

Part I.

It's NOT all about me, and I'm uncomfortable when anything is about me. I was a surly, sixty-year old, reticent and taciturn New Englander with a broken-heart, but I was scrappy enough to push past the “poor me” stage quickly and restart life on my own. We northerners are like that. There's no time for emotional nonsense when more important things need to be done, things like splitting, stacking, and bringing in firewood for the stove and filling Mason jars with the summer's harvest for sustenance during the long winters. The rhythm of life in northern New England is largely dictated by the weather.

My belongings and furniture were unpacked, and I felt settled in *my* new home on a short, dead-end street in a quiet, rural seacoast community on the Maine-New Hampshire border. I was delighted that I had found nearly everything I'd wanted in a home – a garage, tons of sunlight, a nice deck, privacy, and a few kind neighbors. It was good to be starting my life over. Life throws us choices, and I chose to move forward and forget about my broken heart. Besides, the whole concept of love had become a mystery to me and seemed to be an unnecessary distraction from the business of life.

Rebuilding my life exactly the way I wanted it was a dream come true, and not having to answer to anyone

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made it that much better. I could do everything my way, so I treated myself to a new TV, a work-out machine, and brand new appliances. I liked being in charge of me.

But there was one thing missing: a dog. My own dog. I wanted a faithful companion who would cuddle up next to me when I read the paper. It had to be able to run as far as I could. It had to be smart and easy to train, affectionate, independent, clean, and easy to care for. Finally, it had to be a Hurricane Katrina refugee whose owner(s) could not be located. I wanted to do my part in giving an abandoned dog a second chance. I was so ready. I even had a name for it.

Now I needed the dog.

I'd read about all the animals abandoned by their owners after Katrina. Dogs, cats, ferrets, gerbils, horses, birds...all kinds of animals. Some could not be rescued when their owners were plucked by helicopters from rooftops. Some animals had become so malnourished or sick they had to be put down. I saw photos of many animals and knew I could help in some small way. Unfortunately, I would be limited to one dog due to the size of my new home and my work schedule.

Adopted dogs make great pets perhaps because they know they're chosen. I didn't need a dog to dress up for Halloween and show off as a novelty to my friends. I didn't want a purebred or a high maintenance dog that needed to

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be groomed every four weeks. I was fully capable and experienced at giving dogs baths.

It was a rainy September afternoon in 2005, just a couple of weeks after Hurricane Katrina, when I made the call that changed my life.

“What kind of dog are you looking for?” asked Sandy, a volunteer who answered the phone at the humane society. It was the first of many questions that helped determine if I qualified as an adoptive parent.

I couldn’t imagine not qualifying, but I suppose there are some people who think puppies are little and cute and will always be little and cute, but who forget (or ignore) the fact they require attention, training, proper exercise and nutrition, vaccinations, and physical exams. And that they get bigger.

“Have you ever owned a dog before? How many dogs? Where are they now? Who provided medical treatment for your previous dogs? What kind of home do you have? Who lives there? Do you smoke? Who will feed and exercise the dog? Are there other pets currently in your home? Why do you want a dog? What kind of dog or size dog did you have in mind?”

We had a pleasant conversation. Her questions were fair and reasonable, and I answered them honestly, but at one point I came dangerously close to disclosing that I was recovering from a broken heart and feeling lonely. I’d

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managed to stuff those feelings into a distant part of me, and I didn't want to be told that I might qualify after five years of psychotherapy.

"I want a young dog that is smart, loveable, and very athletic. It must be a dog that can run miles and miles with me. Oh, and it must be a refugee from Hurricane Katrina." I couldn't leave out that part!

"We always do our best to match dogs and owners, but we can't guarantee anything," Sandy said. We talked at length about dogs and the dogs I'd had. Maybe that was my therapeutic moment. I guess folks who work with animals have a good understanding of people, too.

Sandy told me many dogs were taken from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina by volunteers who drove in a sort of relay team to transport dogs to parts of the country where they could be given new homes. Others were flown by major airlines that offered the use of their planes and were operated by pilots and attendants who volunteered their time to transport dogs.

"Your timing is good, actually. We have a staff meeting Monday because there are new dogs scheduled to come in. I can share your request with the team and get back to you soon."

"Are these dogs usually healthy?" I asked. "I have a big heart, but I don't want to adopt a dog with major health

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issues. I wouldn't be able to afford high medical bills." It sounded selfish, but I needed to be honest.

"All the animals we take in are not necessarily fit for adoption, but we have excellent veterinary resources, and we do our best to take care of all our creatures. The adoption papers come with a statement that the animals have been cleared by one of the vets. I promise I will call you Monday or Tuesday."

"Wow, that's great. Thanks!" I was already getting excited.

I hung up. *Yikes! I'd better get busy.* There was so much to do. I had to buy food, water bowls, and a doggie bed. I decided not to tell anyone right away about the possibility of an upcoming animal adoption. I wanted to be sure it would work out before I made a big announcement. I credit (or blame) my German heritage with the need to plan everything. So Teutonic. So me.

When the phone rang a few days later, I looked at the caller ID and felt my heart beat faster.

"Hello."

"Hi Lydia, it's Kim, the manager at the shelter. We had a staff meeting, and the team thinks we've got a good match for you. The dog's name is Jersey. She's a Katrina dog, and she has been cleared by the vet for adoption."

This was becoming real.

"Lydia, are you there?"

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I couldn't believe my ears. They had a match. They had my dog!

"Yes, I'm sorry, I'm here. That's great news! May I come up tomorrow afternoon?"

"That would be fine," Kim answered.

"Thank you so much!"

The next day, it was raining so hard I could barely see my backyard. What had been a grassy knoll was now an island in a pond that hadn't existed until now. The entire fall had been miserable, cold, and wet, but the forecasters on WMUR said the nasty weather would be ending soon. Thank goodness, because a rainy fall in New England made all the beautifully colored leaves come down quickly. They covered sidewalks and roads and stuck to the car's windshield making it hard to see, let alone drive.

But foul weather would not stop me from my mission. The time had come, and I was going to get my new doggie, the missing piece in my life.

I had left work early to go home and change so I could get to the shelter before dusk. It gets dark early in northern New England.

Jittery with anticipation, I put on my yellow raincoat and L.L. Bean muck boots.

As I eased out of the garage, I flinched as the rain noisily beat against my car. Slowly, I drove up the partially flooded main avenue through town toward the county

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buildings where the animal shelter was located. Many roads were now closed due to flooding, so I felt relieved that I could still use the most direct route.

I turned onto a dirt road that led back and forth up a hill, past the nursing home, the court house and jail, and eventually to the animal shelter. I should say it *had* been a dirt road, for the stones and rocks had washed away leaving a path of muddy, deep pot-holes. There were huge puddles everywhere disguising the enormous ruts beneath them. I tried to stay on what I thought was the road. *Maybe I should have waited a day or two before making this trip. I don't want to get stuck in this mud.*

But here I was, here to meet my dog.

I parked as close to the building as possible, zipped up my rain gear, took a deep breath, and pushed open the car door against the wind. I ran as quickly as I could, dodging puddles and trying not to slip in the mud.

I wasn't at all prepared for what happened next.

I pulled open the door to the old, clapboard building, unzipping my raincoat as I made my way through the feline section to the canine side. I looked from side to side at the rows of dogs in kennels. A dozen or so watched me. It was heartbreaking. They watched me so closely, pleas in their eyes, "Take me! Take me!"

I wanted to shout, "Okay, everybody in the Volvo. Let's go!" I wanted to rescue all of them.

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I had become so distracted looking in the cages that I'd forgotten why I was there. I was brought back to reality by a voice asking, "Can I help you?"

I jumped. "Oh, my goodness. You startled me. I'm sorry. Yes, my name is Lydia. You called to tell me you have a Katrina refugee for me, and I'm here to meet her."

"Oh yes! Hi, I'm Sandy! We spoke on the phone. We matched you with Jersey, a real cutie. Lots of energy and personality. We just got her. Let me bring her out." With that, she turned and went into a back room.

I started to smile in anticipation. My life would soon be complete. I couldn't wait to meet Jersey. I already had another name for her, but for now, she was Jersey.

When Sandy returned from the back room, she carried a small dog in her arms.

My heart sank. *No!* I thought. I wanted a *real* dog, not some little dog that couldn't possibly weigh more than 15 pounds and couldn't keep up with me. How on earth could she run more than 20 feet? And she had these spindly, little legs.

"I'm not sure she can run with me," I said, trying to hide my disappointment and decide if I should just say, *No, this won't work*. This jet-black doggie was compact and unique looking, but since I'd had only larger dogs, I didn't know what to think and just stood there staring at her.

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Sandy must have been reading my mind. These folks must be good at that. She smiled and assured me, “Yes, she is only 16 pounds, but she was bred to chase rodents. She’s a SCHIPPERKE.”

“A what?”

“A Schipperke. Believe me, she is a runner! We’ve seen her run in the kennel outside, and she has endless energy. Why don’t you take her home for a night or two? Get to know her. I think you’ll see what I mean.”

By now, Jersey was staring at me, as if sizing me up to see if I met *her* criteria as a prospective owner. I knew that dogs were smart and could sense things about people. Was I that transparent? Probably.

Um, people. Hello? I’m right here, and I hear every word you are saying. How about a little attention?

I felt a little reluctant, but here I was, so I agreed to take her for a few days and “test drive” her in the morning when, hopefully, it wasn’t raining. She was different looking, and that appealed to me.

Sandy gave me a crate to set up in my car (why hadn’t I thought of that?) and a small bag of dog food.

I was amazed by these people at the shelter. They were dedicated to the animals they took in, and they operated on donations, volunteers, and only a sliver of money from the county budget.

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Just then Jersey barked.

Okay, let's not just stand around. I see the leash. I see the door. Listen to me. I want OUT!

Will she bark all the time? I was still not convinced.

Sandy knelt and clipped Jersey to a new leash.

That's an awfully small dog. She looked even smaller standing on the floor near my feet.

"We'll wait here for you," Sandy said, looking up at me while she gently stroked Jersey's head.

I zipped up my raincoat and headed for the door carrying the bag of food and the crate. It was awkward, and I felt clumsy. Sandy said the crate would be easy to pop open and lock in place. With my back against the door, I tried pushing it open. *Wow, this door is heavy!* Then I realized the resistance was from the wind blowing against it from the other side. *The storm is getting worse.* After creating enough of an opening, I squeezed through, scraping my knuckles on the door jamb. *Damn this thing.* I was already breathing heavily from the struggle and not enjoying one minute of this. Was this an omen?

I opened the back door of the car and wrestled with the metal contraption while the rain blew into the car. I was getting frustrated, and my rubber raincoat certainly didn't "breathe." I was soaked from sweat and rain. This sure was a lot of work, and I hadn't even gotten the dog, yet.

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With a sigh of relief, I got the crate opened and positioned on the back seat. I put towels under it to keep it from sliding around on the trip home and more inside to make it comfortable.

Now back to the shelter for Cray-Kur.

I hope this works out, especially after all this. It felt like that time when I was young, standing at the edge of a high diving board for the first time, not knowing what it would be like until I did it. *Here goes nothing!*

Sandy was smiling as I returned to the front desk. Did she ever NOT smile? This time I had ignored the other dogs who wouldn't be going home with us.

Us. I liked the sound of that.

Sandy laughed, "It's a mess out there, but Schipperkes don't mind the water. They are excellent swimmers!"

I forced a smile. I didn't really care right then, but it might be handy to know later.

"The puddles are deep, and it's muddy, so I think I'll just carry her or else she'll be up to her belly in mud. Then I'll have one filthy dog inside one filthy car."

Cray-Kur was ready to go. She hadn't taken her eyes off me. I bent down, scooped her up, and cradled her in my arms. I thought about putting her inside my raincoat, but getting her out of it and into the crate without dropping her would be too tricky, especially in the wind and rain, so I decided to just hold her close to me.

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Cray-Kur had just been given her rabies shot, so I tried to hold her as gently as possible. I didn't want to hurt her.

Sandy walked with us to the door and gave me one last piece of advice. "She just got a heartworm shot, and she'll have to poop soon. Here's her leash. Be careful out there!"

I leaned against the door and called, "Thanks. See you in a few days."

I had to bring Cray-Kur back to the shelter in a couple of days regardless of whether I'd adopt her. She had to be spayed. It was part of the deal.

"Okay. Try to stay dry."

Once again, I forced the door open against the wind and looked down at this little black doggie in my arms. "Okay, Cray-Kur, you're going to get wet, but I'll do my best to protect you." I kissed her nose, and out we went.

This rain feels good, and I like being carried. Where are we going?

She smiled at me!

I walked as quickly as I could toward the car while trying to protect Cray-Kur. I looked down at her. She was looking up at me. She didn't flinch.

Was it even possible for the rain to be coming down harder than before? Sheets of wind-driven rain whipped across the muddy parking lot. I tried to protect Cray-Kur, but she got soaked; yet, she seemed oblivious to everything except me. The hood of my raincoat blew off my head.

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Strands of wet hair blew across my face and stuck there while rain water coursed down the inside of my raincoat.

“I’m sorry about this, little doggie. It’ll be much nicer once we are home where we’ll be warm and dry, I promise.”

I love this fresh air!

She kissed my face. Okay, maybe she was really licking the rain off me, but I let myself think it was kisses.

This water tastes different. Kind of salty. Not bad.

She looked very silly, almost like a different animal with her black hair all matted down to her small frame. She must have gotten soaked during Hurricane Katrina. Maybe she was used to this.

It was the first of many times I wished she could talk.

I opened the car door and set her gently inside the crate. I wanted to dry her off but knew it would be impossible. We’d only get wetter.

“Okay Cray-Kur, we are going for a ride so I can get you home.” Cray-Kur seemed to know her new name. I smiled. I couldn’t help it. I was intrigued by this little black doggie. Every time I talked to her, she looked at me. I was so eager to get her home, dry her off, and get acquainted.

A crate? You’re joking. What’s up with this? I never thought I’d have to be in another crate ever again. After the hurricane,

it seemed that was how I went everywhere. But, whatever. Let's just get out of here.

I waited a minute to see if the rain would let up to make driving easier or at least provide better visibility, but nothing changed. It was getting dark. I started the car, and off we went, back to my new home...and possibly hers.

I slowly pulled away from the building while keeping an eye on the crate as much as I could to be sure it didn't tip over. What was left of the road was getting harder to see, so I invented my own way to the main road. I'd often heard about roads washing out and had wondered where they went. Now I knew. They literally just washed away. My windshield wipers were in hyper-mode and could barely keep up with the rain.

I angled the rearview mirror so I could see Cray-Kur. She hadn't made a sound. Not one bark. Nothing. She seemed to be taking this all in. We slowly bounced along as the car dipped into deep pot-holes that I thought were just puddles. *Please don't let it be like this tomorrow.*

What was normally a ten-minute drive between my home and the shelter became a thirty-minute adventure, but it gave Cray-Kur and me a chance to check each other out. Cray-Kur was sitting up, looking all around.

Are we there, yet?

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She was panting just a little. Was she was smiling, too? I explained where we were and where we were going. She listened.

“We’re almost there, sweetie.” I usually didn’t use terms of endearment, but this was different. I felt a great deal of responsibility for this little doggie.

Once my street came into view, I loosened the grip on the steering wheel. Up went the garage door and I pulled inside, thankful to be out of that miserable wind and rain. Once my saturated raincoat and boots were peeled off, I opened the back door to lift my doggie out of the crate.

My doggie. I liked the sound of that.

It was so easy to lift Cray-Kur. At the shelter, I hadn’t noticed how light she was, and she hadn’t resisted being lifted. I set her on the garage floor, and she shook her coat. I grabbed a towel and dried her thoroughly. She really enjoyed this pampering! *Gee, having a small dog that I could lift easily sure is convenient.*

“Welcome home, Cray-Kur!” She looked at me and cocked her head. Her ears pointed straight up.

I opened the door that led into the house from the garage and led Cray-Kur to the bottom of a short flight of stairs. She shook her coat again and looked up at me.

What are these things? I’ve never seen a kennel like this.

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“Haven’t you ever seen stairs before?” She stood there. She didn’t budge. Uh oh. *Will this be a problem?* I carried her up a few steps and set her down on the landing. There were seven more steps to the main level.

Oh, I get it. It’s a playground! Cool!

Cray-Kur paused a moment and then tentatively jumped up to the next step, then up to the next, and then she ran all way to the top.

“Good girl!” My excitement was real. “Cray-Kur, come here. This is your bed!” I had bought a large, fleece doggie bed, and it looked so inviting that I plopped down on it, relieved to be home where it was warm and dry. I tried to coax her to join me. It was plush and cozy, but she wanted nothing to do with it. She was intrigued by yet another flight of stairs. This time, she ran all the way to the top and then back down.

She calls me all these names. Sweetie. Jersey. Now Cray-Kur. What’s up with that? But I like the way she holds me and talks to me. She’s very gentle, so I guess I’m okay with all the names, including that odd one, Cray-Kur.

I stayed on the doggie bed studying her. She loved the stairs, and it certainly brought out the little athlete in her! I smiled.

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Suddenly I remembered what Sandy had said...that the medication would make Cray-Kur have to do her business. No sooner had I recalled her words when Cray-Kur ran into the living room and started sniffing around.

Too late.

I think you forgot Sandy told you I'd have to do some business. A dog can only hold it so long, even one as well-behaved as me.

She immediately squatted and pooped on my living room carpet! Two steps from that, she relieved herself by peeing on the hardwood floor.

I'd been warned. I'd forgotten.

Quickly, I scooped her up and ran outside into the rain without a raincoat or shoes. She pooped and peed AGAIN! Then I praised her and said, "Good business, Cray-Kur! This is where you'll do your business!"

I feel better now!

Once we were back inside, Cray-Kur ran up to the main level, and I followed her. She wagged her tail, happy that she had pleased me. What a tail! It was a sure gauge for her happiness. *Thump-thump-thump-thump* went the tail against a chair leg. From that day forward, Cray-Kur knew where to do her business when we went outside, and she always waited until she was outside.

A dog that was smart. Check.

**Somebody who understands my needs!
Check.**

I peeled off my wet socks and headed for the white vinegar to clean up the mess and neutralize the odor. I didn't want a repeat performance. As I finished cleaning, I saw Cray-Kur watching me. "What is it, Cray-Kur?" She was staring at me.

I promise I won't do that again, but you have GOT to check in with me to see if I need to go out. I'll let you know when I do.

She was relieved of her need, and I smelled like salad dressing. She must have been laughing at all this silliness.

It was dinner time, so I poured food into her bowl. Wow! Did she gobble that down! She didn't even look up. She kept her nose right in that dish. She must have gone long periods of time without food during Katrina. Again, I wished she could talk to me.

Food, and lots of it! Yum! I know I'm being watched, but I can't get enough of this delicious food. And I don't have to share it with anyone!

We went through that first evening with me doing a lot of talking and Cray-Kur doing a lot of listening. I ended by telling her, "I'm your Mom!"

She sure talks a lot.

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She really liked my king-sized bed, and I discovered she was quite the jumper when she leapt on it that first time. It was twice as high as she was tall.

It had been quite a day, and now it was time to turn in for the night. I had intended to bring her doggie bed up to the bedroom where she would sleep. But, I was too late. She was already on my neatly made bed, pushing and pulling the covers with her paws as if making a nest. She fascinated me. Obviously, the sheets and blanket had to be just right for her.

My new house is cool. It's a great big kennel with lots of stairs. Took me a minute to figure out what the heck I was supposed to do with them. In New Orleans, I didn't have stairs. But I figured these out. This place is a great big, indoor playground just for me! Wow, thanks! I can run the way I was meant to run. I could do this all day! I think I'll call you Mom.

My Mom was so easy to please! When I did things she liked, she rewarded me with sliced carrots. I showed her how smart I was. I showed her I could sit, lay down, stay, stand, and come...all on command. Of course, I was always rewarded, but the rewards

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weren't just treats. The smiles I brought to her face made it worth it. You see, the moment I met her, I could tell she was sort of sad. I'd make her happy. I'd play by her rules and make her laugh. We'd all be happy.

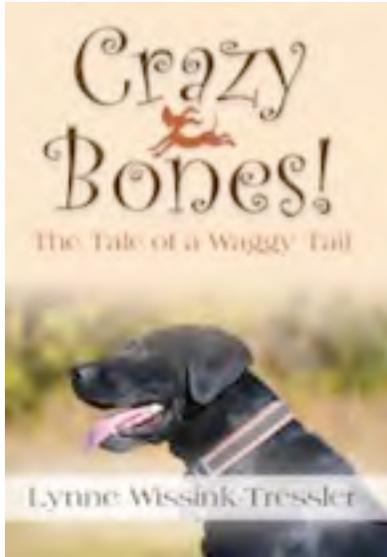
I know Mom got me this doggie bed, but she has a HUGE bed that's much more comfortable. She can use the other bed since she likes it so much.

Once the sheets were exactly the way she wanted them, she curled up, and I climbed in next to her. We bonded. She must have been exhausted, and I was tired myself.

What a day! I am out of that other place and in a great home with my own king-sized bed. I think I'll sleep just fine. Today is my lucky day.

It had been quite a day. Cray-Kur fell asleep almost immediately, and boy, did that little doggie snore!

Loveable? Check. I smiled. So far, so good. I didn't believe in luck, but I now understood what feeling lucky must be like. Maybe there is such a thing.



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