

Chapter One



Denby was cold and very hungry. In his two years of life, he'd never been so hungry – or so cold. Even his thick golden retriever fur wasn't able to keep the cold out. Denby also felt confused. He didn't understand why he'd been left alone in the back yard.

His master had cleared out a bunch of stuff from the garage and the house, thrown them in the old white station wagon, and driven away with the boy who had been Denby's best pal. The man left behind furniture, appliances and memories.

And Denby.

After three long days waiting for his master and the boy to return, Denby knew. They would not be coming back. He had always been a good dog, and they had seemed to like him. He tried to understand why his people would do this, but he couldn't. He hadn't jumped on them, bitten them, or chewed their things. He didn't bark much either. Why had they left him behind? The

empty feeling in his heart echoed the empty feeling in his stomach. Driven by the hunger pains in his belly, he jumped over the garden fence and began searching for food. He loped along, not used to going down streets without a leash, and he passed For Sale signs posted on the yellowed grass in front of some of the homes. They looked sad and empty, just like his own house.

Denby had never gone further than the ten blocks of Dolores Park in San Francisco's bustling Mission District. Now, unleashed, he roamed freely, going wherever his nose took him. He found out that the merchants on Castro Street were happy to give him treats. They told him how handsome he was and petted his head, but they didn't let him stay. It didn't matter how well behaved he was, they always sent him on his way. They were gentle, but firm, and Denby knew that they would never take him in.

Denby kept wandering. Soon, he found himself in downtown San Francisco, in an area of tall buildings, men in stiff dark suits, women in tall shoes, and very few dogs. There were no treats here, no one to stroke his fur and call him "good boy."

After a time, Denby noticed that a large white van was following him. The station wagon that his master and boy had left in had been white. Maybe the man driving this van knew where they'd gone. Denby stopped and looked at the van, hope filling his chest with its warmth. He wagged his tail cautiously.

The driver of the van approached Denby, making clicking sounds with his tongue and said, "C'mere, dog." Then someone else grabbed Denby. This someone had big rough hands and he pulled Denby's fur hard enough that it hurt. Denby yelped as the man yelled, "Got him!" The man quickly slipped a loop of plastic around Denby's neck, pulled it tight and shoved him into a cage in the back of the van. It all happened so fast that Denby didn't have time to react. One minute he was on the sidewalk, and the next he was in the dark interior of the van in a cage. The van smelled of dog. Frightened dog. Denby tried to understand why he had been put into the van, but it made no sense to him. He tried to control his own fear, but it refused to be controlled and he began to shake.

Denby was taken to a large, smelly building where there were lots of dogs of all shapes and sizes huddled in cages. He learned the word "abandoned" and that he was not the only dog who had been left behind. He learned that other animals had also been abandoned by their families. There were dogs, cats, rabbits and even guinea pigs at the shelter, all of whom were homeless. Sometimes a family of smiling and excited people would come and take one of the homeless pets

to a new home, and sometimes the homeless animals that had been there for a long time just disappeared. When this happened Denby always got a nasty, cold feeling that made him shiver from nose to tail.

Every time someone came into the dog room, all the dogs started barking or whining. They ran to the front of their cages, hoping that the person who came past their cage would be their person, the one who would save them. It wasn't long before Denby was behaving just like all the others. Time and time again the visitors walked past Denby's cage without even looking at him. Time and again, his tail and head would droop with disappointment and he would go back to his blanket.

Then one day a man with a bald head and a critical eye came to the kennel. After carefully looking at many other dogs, he came over to Denby's cage. Denby pressed himself against the wire front of his cage. He whined softly and gazed up into the man's face.

The man who fed all the dogs pulled Denby from his cage. The visitor inspected Denby's coat, teeth and eyes, pulling his fur, pushing his lips up and tilting his head this way and that. Denby wanted to growl and maybe even snap at the man, but he was trying to be a good boy, he was hoping that this man would take him to a new home. Denby very much wanted to live with a family again.

"Yes" said the man. "This one will do."

After the man filled out some paperwork, he and Denby left the kennel and got into a car. Denby's heart soared. Was he getting a new family? What would the new family be like? Would there be a little boy to love and play with? Maybe there would be a little girl like the one who used to live next door. She was always so kind to Denby and shared her snacks with him. Denby would be happy to have a little girl of his own.

The man drove east for more than four hours. He didn't say a word, which made Denby feel strange and a little afraid. Was the man angry with him? The man finally stopped the car, not at a house but at an office building. Denby was led into a white room filled with medical equipment. He looked this way and that hoping that a boy or girl would appear, but none did.

The bald man and another smaller man strapped Denby down on a flat rolling bed. He struggled to get away, but the men were too strong. Denby was a good boy. He didn't bite. He kicked and cried and barked, but he didn't bite. He wanted to bite so much, but he knew biting was "bad" and he wanted the men to think that he was a good dog. Denby clamped his mouth

shut and was good, even when the smaller man used a long needle to inject a fluid into Denby's side.

Everything went black...

