

13 Looking after Lady

Many of Billy's friends have pets. Mickey has a dog called Mitsey, David has a rabbit called Digger, and others have hamsters, or cats, or guinea pigs. As you may know, Mr. Brown who lives next door to Billy has a dog called Lady. Sometimes Lady squeezes through the hole in the fence and gets into Billy's garden. Then Billy and Lady have a great time running and tumbling round on the grass together.

"Can we get a pet Mum?" asked Billy one evening.

"No Billy," replied Mum, "I don't think so. They are very hard work you know."

"I'd look after it," he said. "I'd feed it every day, and keep it clean, and clean out its cage, or whatever else needs doing. Come on Mum it'd be great fun!"

"You'd do it for three days at the outside," replied Mum, "and then who would have to do it when you got bored? Eh?"

"But I wouldn't get bored!" he whined, "I wouldn't Mum, honest!"

Billy kept whining, and Mum kept saying no, and so it went on for the next two weeks. Then, one Friday afternoon when Billy was at home on his own, there was a knock at the door. He looked out of the window to see who it was, just like Mum had told him to. To his surprise it was Mr. Brown from next door. Billy opened the door.

"Oh Billy, I'm so glad you're in," spluttered Mr. Brown in quite a state of excitement. "Billy, I wonder if you and your Mum could help me. You see my daughter was due to have a baby next month but its decided to come early. So me and Mrs. Brown have to rush off to be there, but I need someone to look after Lady. I tried all the local kennels but they're all full. I was wondering if you could have her for a week or so? She likes you and I know she'd be happy here."

Billy's eyes lit up. "This is my chance to show Mum I can look after a pet," he thought, so without hesitation he said: "Oh yes, of course we can Mr. Brown." Mr. Brown rushed back next door and in five minutes was back with Lady on a lead and a large bag of dog food.

"One meal a day," he said, "two scoop fulls at 4 o'clock. Thanks Billy!" and with that Mr. Brown jumped in his car and sped off up the road.

Billy took Lady into the living room and they sat and stared at each other for a while. Then suddenly, quick as a flash, Lady grabbed Mum's half finished knitting and started tearing round and round the room.

"No! No!" shouted Billy, "Put it down!" But the more he shouted the more of a game Lady thought it was and the faster she ran. Eventually she dropped the knitting and began chewing Billy sister's slipper instead. Billy tried to rescue it. But the more he tugged, the harder Lady tugged, until the slipper was very torn indeed.

Suddenly there was a noise in the hall way, Mum was home. Lady shot out of the living room and down the hall at full speed. She ran into Mum who dropped all of her bags and went crashing to the floor. "Help!" yelled Mum. Billy came rushing after Lady, tripped over Mum's shoe that had fallen off, and fell on top of a bag that had a dozen eggs and three packets of biscuits in it. There was an awful crunching and scrunching sound.

By now Mum had come to her senses. "What's Lady doing in here!" she yelled, "Take her back next door Billy before she does any more damage. Now do you see why I don't let you have a pet?"

Billy swallowed hard. "Err, Mum, err, I can't take her back next door," and he explained everything to Mum.

"I'll look after her," he said. "I'll do everything. I'll take her for walks, and run her in the park, and feed her. I'll do it all!" he said.

"Well," said Mum, in her 'Lets see what a fine mess you make of this then' sort of voice, "I'll be watching you Billy!"

It was nearly 4 o'clock so Billy got Lady's bowl. Unfortunately she got so excited and jumped up and down so much that she dug her claws deep into his foot and he didn't have his shoes on! "Ouch!" he shouted. But all Lady did was dribble all over his sock. He filled the bowl and before he could even put it on the floor Lady was frantically munching its contents.

At ten past four Billy always watched his favourite television programme. But just as he sat down to watch Lady came bounding into the room with her lead in her mouth.

"You'll have to take her for a walk now," said Mum.

Billy was about to say: "But Mum, what about my T V programme?" Then he remembered Mum's words, "Three days at the outside." So he grabbed Lady's lead, clipped it to her collar, and off they set. He thought he would go for a little stroll around the block and drop in on Mickey on the way. He was looking forward to showing Lady off to his friends. The trouble was that Lady had other ideas. They got to the gate and off she set like a rocket. Billy's arm felt like it was going to be pulled off and he had to sprint along behind her. He took her round the block once, but when he tried to take her back home Lady dragged him off again. So they went round the block again, and again, and again. Then they went all round the centre of Driptown and back again. Then all the way to Grandpa's and back again. Eventually, Billy got home at 8 o'clock, he'd been walking for four hours and it didn't seem as if Lady was tired at all.

That night Lady slept in Billy's room. Well 'slept' might not be the right word. At midnight he had to take her out to the garden. Then later, he was woken up by a cold, wet nose and a big, wet tongue licking him in the face. He dragged himself out of bed, put on his clothes, clipped on Lady's lead and opened the front door ready to take her for her morning walk. But to his surprise it was still dark. He looked at his watch; it was only half past three in the morning. He grunted at

Lady and took her back upstairs. But from then on every twenty minutes a big wet nose would wake him up!

At breakfast the next day Billy nearly fell asleep in his Cornflakes. But of course Lady was raring to go and it was another marathon. He eventually got home with an aching arm and very aching legs. After lunch, Mickey called for Billy. There was a group of them playing football at the park.

"I hope you're going to clear up the garden before you go," said Mum. "

Billy looked out of the window and he could hardly believe his eyes. There were little piles dotted all over the lawn.

"Err, I think I'll be going!" said Mickey quickly.

Billy groaned, but seized his courage, put a peg on his nose, and went outside and started clearing up. The trouble was that Lady thought this was a great game and started jumping all over him. Well yes, you've guessed it, he fell over backwards and landed in a... I think I'll leave that to your imagination! By the time he was cleaned up it was too late to join the football match.

All this carried on for the whole week. On school days, Billy had to walk Lady in the morning, come home at lunchtime to walk her again. Then he had to walk her in the evening but still Lady kept waking him up in the middle of the night. Secretly Mum was watching Billy very carefully. She was certain that he would get fed up. She was certain that he would give up looking after Lady. Then she, of course, would have to take over. But I have to say that Billy didn't give up. In fact, he soldiered on and on and on. He was determined not to give up at all costs. When Billy took Lady for her last walk before Mr. Brown came home, he felt very sad. He was really beginning to enjoy having her around, even though she was very very hard work. Billy was even a little bit jealous when Mr. Brown did get home and Lady made such a fuss of him.

That night Mum said, "I've been very impressed with the way you looked after Lady, Billy. You know I think you could look after a pet. So I think I'll let you have one. What would you like? A rabbit, a dog, or may be a cat?"

Billy thought for a while. Looking after Lady had been fun, but then he remembered all those miles of walking, all the mess in the garden to clear up, all the interrupted sleep, and all the T V and football he had missed.

"Err, thanks Mum," he said, "I, I, I think I'd like, I think I'd like a goldfish please!"

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