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LILY

TO THE rescue

THE
MISFIT DONKEY

Illustrations by

JAMES BERNARDIN

STARSCAPE



A TOM DOHERTY ASSOCIATES BOOK

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Maggie Rose is my girl. I am her dog.

In my opinion, this means we should be together every moment. Being together with Maggie Rose means playing with balls in the yard. Or getting belly rubs. (I get the belly rubs, not her.) Or stopping in the kitchen for treats as often as possible.

The kitchen is the best room in the house. It smells amazing. Sometimes I just like to lie on the floor in there and let the smells fill

up my nose and hope that soon food will fill up my mouth.

But I can't always be with Maggie Rose, because on some days she says "School" to me and then she goes away. That is very sad. I don't know why a girl would ever go away from her dog.

On those days of "School" I often go with Mom to Work, which is a building full of friends for me to visit. Brewster, one of my very best friends, is an old, tired dog who goes with me on those mornings. Brewster's person is Bryan, who is Maggie Rose's brother. Whatever "School" means, it seems to apply to Bryan as well, because whenever Maggie Rose says it, Bryan leaves, too.

But there are other days that Maggie Rose doesn't say "School," and those are the best days.

On those days, Maggie Rose lies in bed until I jump on her and paw at the blankets

and stick my nose under the covers to find her face and lick her ears or her cheek or her chin.



“Lily!” she moans. That’s what she did this morning. “Lily! It’s Saturday! I wanted to sleep late!”

I understood exactly what she was saying: it was time to wrestle! I grabbed a hank of her hair in my mouth and backed up, shak-

ing my jaws, while she shrieked and giggled.
“You are such a crazy dog!”

On this not-School day, Maggie Rose ate toast and other things for breakfast while I sat by her feet and drooled. She saved a crust for me. She always does, and I’m grateful. Maybe someday she will save an entire slice for me. I would be fine with that, too.

Brewster followed me into the kitchen, because Bryan was not home. In fact, Bryan hadn’t slept in his bed the night before. I could smell that just as easily as I could smell the fact that Brewster *had* slept in Bryan’s bed. Brewster is very good at sleeping on soft things.

Once Maggie Rose and I were done with breakfast, we headed out into the yard. Maggie Rose found one of my toys, one that squeaks in a satisfying way when I bite down hard. She sat down next to me in the grass, holding

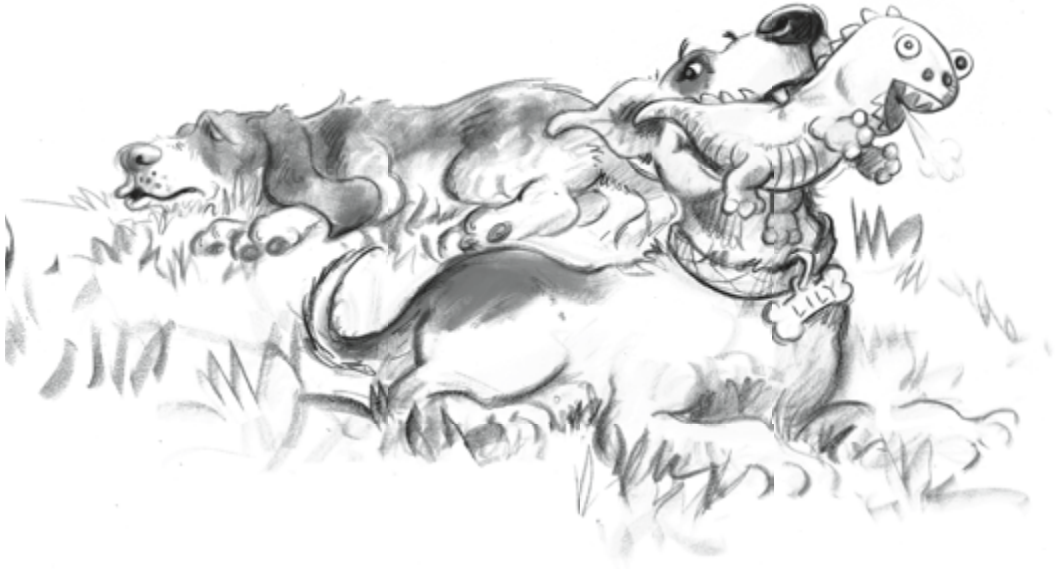
the toy in one hand. With the other hand, she covered up my eyes.

“Okay, Lily. This is going to be really hard!” she said, and I could feel her move as if she had thrown something. “Find the toy!” she told me. She took her hand away from my face.

I could smell exactly where the toy had landed, so I trotted over to it and jumped on it and chewed it hard, so it squeaked and squeaked and squeaked. I brought it back to Maggie Rose, and she seemed very excited and pleased. Not pleased enough to give me a treat, but still happy.

Brewster was not impressed at all. He just lay in the shade by the fence. I know that he can be lured into playing with a squeaky toy if I jump up and down and shake it right in his face, but it takes a lot of effort.

When Bryan came into the yard, I thought maybe now we’d have a game of two chil-



dren and two dogs and one squeaky toy, but it didn't happen. Instead, Bryan scuffed his way across the grass to Brewster, who raised his head and wagged. You can tell that Bryan is Brewster's person, because Brewster doesn't raise his head for anyone else.

"Hi, Bryan!" Maggie Rose called out. "Did you have a good sleepover?"

Bryan flopped down on the grass and put his arms around Brewster. I can tell a sad boy when I see one, and so can Brewster, who

immediately put his head against Bryan's side to give comfort.

Maggie Rose went over to Bryan, so I did, too. Bryan smelled like himself, and Brewster, and peanut butter.

"What's wrong, Bryan?" Maggie Rose asked softly. "Did you and Carter get into a fight?"

Bryan shook his head. Brewster and I looked at each other, wondering what was going on with our people.

"Then what happened?" Maggie Rose asked.

"Carter's moving. To *South Carolina*."

"Oh," Maggie Rose replied.

"He's been my best friend since first grade," Bryan went on. "Then we moved here to this stupid new house, and I didn't get to go to school with him anymore. Mom and Dad said they'd drive me anytime I wanted to see him, but they're always too busy. And

now he's the one who's moving, and I'm never going to see him again."

Maggie Rose sat cross-legged in the grass, so I plopped down next to her. Whatever was going on, it seemed like nobody needed a squeaky toy right now.

"I'm sorry, Bryan."

"Now my only friend in the whole world is Brewster."

Brewster perked up his ears. I was sure he could feel the waves of anger and sadness coming off Bryan.

"Well," Maggie Rose began, "you and Carter will still be able to write each other. And FaceTime and stuff. And maybe he could come visit in the summers! I read a book where friends stayed together until they were really, really old, like thirty."

Bryan looked away. "Not the same thing," he replied bitterly.

“So, what about new friends? You could make new friends,” Maggie Rose suggested.

Bryan snorted. “Like that’s easy. By the time you’re in fifth grade, all the kids have best friends already. Nobody needs a new one.” He got up. “Come on, Brewster.”

I lay next to Maggie Rose as we watched Bryan walk toward the house. They went in the kitchen door. I was worried that he’d get some peanut butter in there and share it with Brewster but not with me. Maggie Rose was worried, too. I could tell.

“We have to come up with some way to help Bryan make friends, Lily,” Maggie Rose whispered.

I didn’t know what she was saying, so I wagged. Maybe there’d be peanut butter soon.