

## Finders Keepers

When my daughters reached the third and fourth grades, I occasionally allowed them to walk to and from school alone, if the weather permitted. It was a short distance, so I knew they were safe and no trouble would befall them.

One warm spring day, a small friend followed them home after school. This friend was different from any other friend they had brought home. She had short stumpy<sup>1)</sup> legs and long floppy<sup>2)</sup> ears, with a fawn-colored coat and tiny freckles<sup>3)</sup> sprinkled across her muzzle. She was the cutest puppy I had ever seen.

When my husband got home that evening, he recognized the breed—a beagle puppy, not more than twelve weeks old, he guessed. She took to him right away and after dinner climbed into his lap to watch TV. By now the girls were both begging me to keep her.

She had no collar or identifying marks of any sort. I didn't know what to do. I thought about running an ad in the lost—and—found but I really didn't want to. It would break the kids' hearts if someone should show up. Besides, her owners should have watched her more closely, I rationalized.

By the end of the week she was part of our family. She was very intelligent and good with the girls. This was a good idea, I thought. It was time the girls took responsibility for another life, so they would learn the nurturing skills they'd need if they decided to become mommies when they grew up.

The following week something told me to check the lost—and—found section in the local paper. One particular ad jumped out at me and my heart pounded with fear at what I read. Someone was pleading for<sup>4)</sup> the return of a lost beagle puppy in the vicinity<sup>5)</sup> of our grade school. They sounded desperate. My hand shook. I couldn't bring myself to pick up the phone.

Instead, I pretended I hadn't seen the ad. I quickly tucked the paper away in the closet and continued with my dusting. I never said a word about it to the kids or my husband.

By now we had named the puppy. She looked like a Molly, so that was what we called her. She followed the girls everywhere they went. When they went outside, she was one step behind them. When they did chores, she was there to lend a hand (or should I say, paw).

Homework proved a challenge with her around. More than once the teacher was given a homework page that the dog had chewed on. Each teacher was understanding and the girls were allowed to make it up. Life was definitely not the same at the Campbell household.

There was only one problem with this otherwise perfect picture: my conscience was bothering me. I knew in my heart I had to call that number and see if our Molly was the puppy they were desperately seeking.

It was the most difficult thing I've ever done. Finally, with sweaty palms, I lifted the receiver and dialed. Secretly I was praying no one would answer, but someone did. The voice on the other end was that of a young woman. After describing the dog to her in detail, she wanted to come right over.

Within minutes she was at my door. I had been sitting at the kitchen table, head cradled in my hands, asking God for a miracle. Molly sat at my feet the whole time, looking up at me with those big puppy—dog eyes—eyes the color of milk chocolate. She seemed to sense something was wrong.

A thousand thoughts crossed my mind before the woman rang the bell. I could pretend I wasn't home or tell her, "I'm sorry, you have the wrong address." But it was too late; the bell rang and Molly was barking. I opened the door, forcing myself to face my fear.

One look at Molly and the woman's face lit up like a Christmas tree. "Here, Lucy," she called. "Come to Mamma, girls." Molly (Lucy) instantly obeyed, wagging her tail in delight at the sound of the woman's voice. Obviously she belonged to the woman.

Tears stung at the back of my eyelids and threatened to spill over at any moment. I felt like my heart was being ripped from my chest. I wanted to grab Molly and run. Instead I smiled faintly and asked her to please come in.

The woman had already bent over and scooped Molly up into her arms. She awkwardly<sup>6</sup> opened her purse and stretched out a twenty-dollar bill toward me. "For your trouble," she offered.

"Oh, I couldn't." I shook my head in protest. "She's been such a joy to have around, I should be paying you." With that she laughed and hugged Molly tighter to her bosom as if she were a lost child and not a dog.

Molly licked her face and squirmed with delight. I knew it was time for them to go home. Opening the door to let them out, I noticed a little girl sitting in the front seat of the van. When the child saw the puppy, a smile as bright as a firecracker on the Fourth of July exploded across her face.

My glance turned to a small wheelchair strapped to the back of the van. The woman saw me look at the chair and offered an explanation without my asking. Molly (Lucy) was given to the child to promote emotional healing<sup>7</sup> after a car accident had left her crippled for life.

When the puppy disappeared from the yard, the little girl had gone into a deep depression, refusing to come out of the shell she was in. Molly (Lucy) was their only hope their daughter would recover emotionally and mentally.

"She formed a special bond with the puppy and Lucy gave her a reason to live," her mother explained.

Suddenly I felt very guilty and selfish. God has blessed me with so much, I thought. My heart went out to this family that had been through such a terrible time. As they pulled out of the drive, the smile on my face was genuine. I knew I had done the right thing—that puppy was exactly where she belonged.

□by Leona Campbell

## 狗 归 原 主

我的女儿们上三四年级的时候，如果天气好的话，我偶尔允许她们自己走着上下学。路不远，所以我想他们不会出事。

一个温暖的春日，放学后，有个小朋友跟着她们回了家。这位朋友跟她们带回家的任何其他朋友不一样，她有粗短的腿，松软下垂的长耳朵，长着浅黄褐色的毛，嘴上有小斑点。我从来没见过这么可爱的小狗。

那天晚上我丈夫回到家，辨认出它是条长耳短腿小猎犬，猜想它不超过3个月大。那狗对我丈夫“一见钟情”，晚饭后就爬上他的大腿，待在那儿看电视。这个时候两个女儿都哀求我把它留下。

那狗没有脖圈，也没有任何有关狗主的标志。我不知道该怎么办。我想到在失物招领栏上登个广告，可我又实在不愿那么做。如果有人来认领，会伤透孩子们的心。我还自我辩解地想，狗主本应该照管好它。

到了周末，那狗已成了我们家的一员了。它很有灵性，跟两个女孩子关系融洽。我自忖，这倒是个好主意。她们已到了为别人的生命承担责任的年龄了；如果她们长大了决定要有自己的孩子，现在倒可以学学抚育幼婴的技巧。

第二个星期，不知怎么地我想到应该看看当地报纸上失物招领栏的广告。一条独特的广告跃入我的眼帘，提心吊胆地读着广告的内容，我的心怦怦直跳。有人央求归还还在学校附近走失的一条长耳短腿小猎犬。广告词表达了原主急切的心情。我的手直发颤。我没有勇气拿起电话。

电话非但没打，我还假装没读到过这条广告。我赶紧把报纸塞在壁橱里，接着掸灰收拾屋子。我对丈夫和两个孩子只字未提这件事。

我们已经给小狗起了名字，它长得像一个叫莫利的人，于是我们就管它叫莫利。它和两个女孩子形影不离。她们出去，莫利就跟在后面差一步远。她们干家务活，它就助“一爪”之力。

有它在旁边，做作业就得随时防着点。不止一次，交给老师的作业纸给小狗啃过。老师们都能理解，允许孩子们补交。我们家的生活明显发生了很大变化。

一切都很美好，就是有一个问题：我的良心在谴责着我。我明明知道我应该拨打那个电话，查明我们的莫利是不是他们拼命在找寻的小狗。

打这个电话是我有生以来所做的最困难的事。终于我用发汗的手拿起话筒拨了那个号。我暗暗祈祷没有人接，但是电话还是通了。对方是个年轻妇女的声音。我详细描述了狗的情况，她表示想立刻来我家。

几分钟后，她就出现在我家门口。我一直坐在厨房桌子旁边，双手抱着头，祈求上帝创造奇迹。莫利始终在我脚旁待着，奶白巧克力色的大眼睛瞧着我，像是感觉到事情有些不对劲。

那女士按响门铃前，千思万绪掠过我脑海。我可以假装不在家，或者是告诉她说，“抱歉，你找错门了。”但为时已晚，门铃响了，莫利汪汪叫出声来。我打开门，强迫自己面对我害怕的现实。

看了莫利一眼，那女士的脸就像圣诞树一样灿然光亮。“露西，”她叫道。“乖孩子，到妈妈这儿来。”小狗立时有了反应，听到那女士的声音高兴得连连晃动尾巴。毫无疑问，莫利的主人是她。

我双眸充满眼泪，随时都会夺眶而出。我觉得我的心像是从胸中被撕扯出来。我想一把抓住莫利就跑掉。可是我还是淡淡微笑，请她进屋。

那女士早已弯身把莫利抱在了怀里。她不好意思地打开钱包，然后拿出一张20块钱的钞票递给我。

“给你添麻烦了，”她解释说。

“啊，我不能要。”我摇头表示不能接受。“这狗给我们这么多的欢乐，应该我给你钱。”听到这话，她笑出声来，把莫利在怀里抱得更紧，就好像它是个失而复得的孩子，而不是一只狗。

莫利舔着她的脸，欣喜得扭动身子。我知道她们该一起回家了。开门让她们出去的时候，我看见一个小女孩坐在小货车的前座。那孩子见到小狗，脸上立时绽放笑容，明亮得就像国庆节夜晚的烟火。

我的目光转向车后用带子束住的一辆小轮椅。那位女士看见我在瞧那轮椅，没等我问就解释说，车祸使这孩子终身残疾，这条小狗是用来帮助治疗她感情上的创伤的。自从小狗从院子里跑丢之后，那小女孩陷入极度精神抑郁，对生活失去一切兴趣。那狗是恢复他们女儿的感情和精神创伤的惟一希望。

“她和小狗之间形成了一种特殊的联结，露西给了她要活下去的动力。”那女孩的妈妈解释说。

霎时间，我感到非常内疚，责备自己如此自私。上帝已经给了我那么多恩赐，我自忖。我非常同情这个经历了这么大磨难的家庭。小货车开出车道时，我脸上的微笑是真摯的。我意识到我做得对，那狗正该归原主所有。

### NOTE 注释：

stumpy ['stʌmpɪ] adj. 粗短的

floppy ['flɒpi] adj. 松软的

freckle ['frekl] n. 雀斑，斑点

plead for 为...辩护

vicinity [vi'sɪnɪti] n. 邻近，附近，接近

awkwardly ['ɔ:kwədli] adv. 笨拙地，无技巧地

healing ['hi:lɪŋ] n. 康复，复原