



Little Lost Hedgehog





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By Jill Hucklesby
Illustrated by Jon Davis

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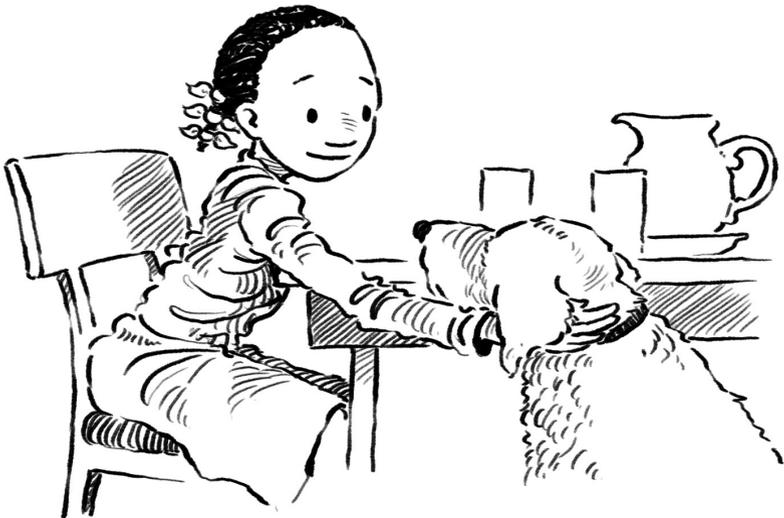
“Yummy!” said Grace Fallon, hurrying inside from the garden. It was Saturday evening, and that meant one thing. Soft flour wraps with spicy filling, crispy salad and then strawberries for dessert. It was her favourite meal. As soon as Grace entered the kitchen, she was met with the familiar, delicious smell. Her mouth watered and her tummy rumbled in anticipation.

“This will be *soooooo* good,” she said, licking her lips.

Grace’s mum and dad were putting the

wraps and filling on the table, together with small bowls of grated cheese and sour cream. When this was done, they sat down with Grace, ready for their end-of-the-week treat. Someone else was there to share in the event, too. Barney, the family's retriever, always sat himself by Grace's chair, just in case any tasty morsels fell on the floor.

Grace and Barney had been best friends for as long as she could remember.



Barney was ten years old. Dad said that made Barney seventy in human years, but, apart from some grey hairs around his muzzle, you would never guess he was an old dog. He was still very playful, and loved chasing after tennis balls.

“I’ll try to save you a bit, but I’m so hungry,” whispered Grace to Barney.

Barney wagged his tail hopefully, and then lay down next to her with his head resting on one paw.

Grace’s dad did some silly things with his wraps, rolling them up like a pair of binoculars and looking through them. It made Grace giggle and then get hiccups.

“Grace, don’t clown about at the table,” said her dad.

“Dad!” Grace protested. “You made me laugh!”

“Don’t worry, I can see his little game

Grace,” said her mum.

Dad looked sheepish, which made Grace giggle even more.

“You two. What are you like?” sighed her mum with a smile. “And you,” she added, looking at Barney, who rolled on to his back, his lips revealing a doggy smile. “I should just call you all The Naughty Club!”

Family dinners at the weekends were always full of fun. Her parents were relaxed and Grace enjoyed telling them about all the things that had happened at school. As her dad worked late on Fridays, she had not been able to tell him that she had been chosen as a helper at Pet Club, which meant she was allowed to care for the school’s rabbits, gerbils, mice and tropical fish. She and her best friend, Kate, had been asked to clean out hutches.

“The two gerbils escaped from a big box Miss Bennett had put them in while we were sorting out their hutch,” Grace explained. “They climbed through a small hole in the side and the whole class had to look under their desks and in their sports bags to make sure they weren’t hiding there!”

“What happened?” asked her dad.

“Well, Miss Bennett found them both in the waste-paper basket. And guess what? They were munching on an apple core. She put them back in their hutch.”

Grace added that escapes from Pet Club had happened more than once, but so far, none of the animals had gone missing for long.

“That’s good,” said Mum. “Does someone have to count them each morning, to make sure they are all there?”

“Yes,” replied Grace. “The Pet Club helpers take it in turns to do that. It’s quite hard to count the fish because they dart about so quickly.”

After finishing her story, Grace helped herself to a wrap, filling it with salad and salsa.

“You’ve got very rosy cheeks,” observed her mum.

“Barney and I were playing football just before we came in,” replied Grace. “He got a bit tired of running after the ball, so he picked it up in his mouth and disappeared behind the shed.”

When he heard his name, Barney gave a little whine and wagged his tail again. Grace rubbed his neck gently with her foot. He closed his eyes in happiness.

Grace’s mum and dad knew how much she loved being outside in the large

garden, spending time with Barney and taking care of Bramble and Clover, her rabbits that lived in a big run near the vegetable patch.

Grace popped the last mouthful of spicy wrap in her mouth. The hot sauce was making her nose itch. She wiggled it up and down.

“You look like Bramble,” said her mum.

“Be careful, Gracie. People say you end up looking like your pets.” Her dad smiled, peering at her closely.

“You *do* look like a bit like Barney, Dad,” agreed Grace, “especially with your hair in the morning!”

“Who does Mum look like, then?” asked Dad mischievously.

“The fox that comes to visit,” suggested Grace, “because she’s pretty.”

“Thank you! A fox isn’t a pet, though,”

said her mum. “I think I’m more like next door’s cat, Lulu. I like stretching out in the sun.”

“Luckily, you don’t have whiskers like Lulu,” added her dad.



“I think you’re very cheeky,” said Mum, pretending to wash her face with a paw, like a cat. Grace and Dad both laughed.

By the time they had finished their supper, eaten some strawberries and

ice cream, and cleared the table, it was starting to get dark outside. Grace offered to help her dad with watering the plants. She also had to put Bramble and Clover to bed.

“Can I take them some carrots?” asked Grace.

“Of course. There are some in the fridge,” said Mum.

Carrots were a special treat for Grace’s pets. She had read in her rabbit-care book that the sugar in carrots can be bad for the animals if they eat too much of them, so she chose two of the smallest carrots from the salad box.

“Are they to help Bramble and Clover see in the dark?” asked her dad, waiting for her in the doorway.

“Do carrots really do that?” Grace replied.

“They do if you tie them to one of these,” he said, waving a torch at her.

“Very funny,” said Grace. She pulled on her wellies, which were by the back door, and her warm fleece, which hung on a butterfly hook on the wall. A shiver ran up her spine. The garden was a mysterious place when night was falling. Things happened. Creatures that lay hidden in daytime would appear. It was as if a secret world opened up when curtains were closed and people were getting ready for bed.

Grace opened the door and peered out into the deepening darkness. The air was crisp and cold. Listening to the night wind whispering through the trees, she became excited suddenly, as if a tube of sherbet fizz had gone pop in her belly. Her body was tense with tiny tingles.

She felt like something wonderful could happen.

“Ready?” asked Dad, stepping outside in front of her.

Grace nodded. She glanced back at Barney, who was asleep on his back by the radiator in the hall. Should she call him? Grace decided she wouldn’t disturb him, as he looked so peaceful. With carrots in hand, she joined her dad and quietly closed the door behind her.

“Night patrol, reporting for duty,” she said as she linked her arm through his.