

Lucy the
Poorly
Puppy

For William and Robin

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STRIPES PUBLISHING
An imprint of Little Tiger Press
1 The Coda Centre, 189 Munster Road,
London SW6 6AW

A paperback original
First published in Great Britain in 2011

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Illustrations copyright © Sophy Williams, 2011

ISBN: 978-1-84715-152-0

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3

Chapter One



“Bella’s looking so fat!” Lauren peered under the kitchen table at Bella, the family’s beagle. She was sitting in amongst everyone’s feet, panting and looking rather uncomfortable. Her tummy was huge, and the expression on her face was a bit grumpy.

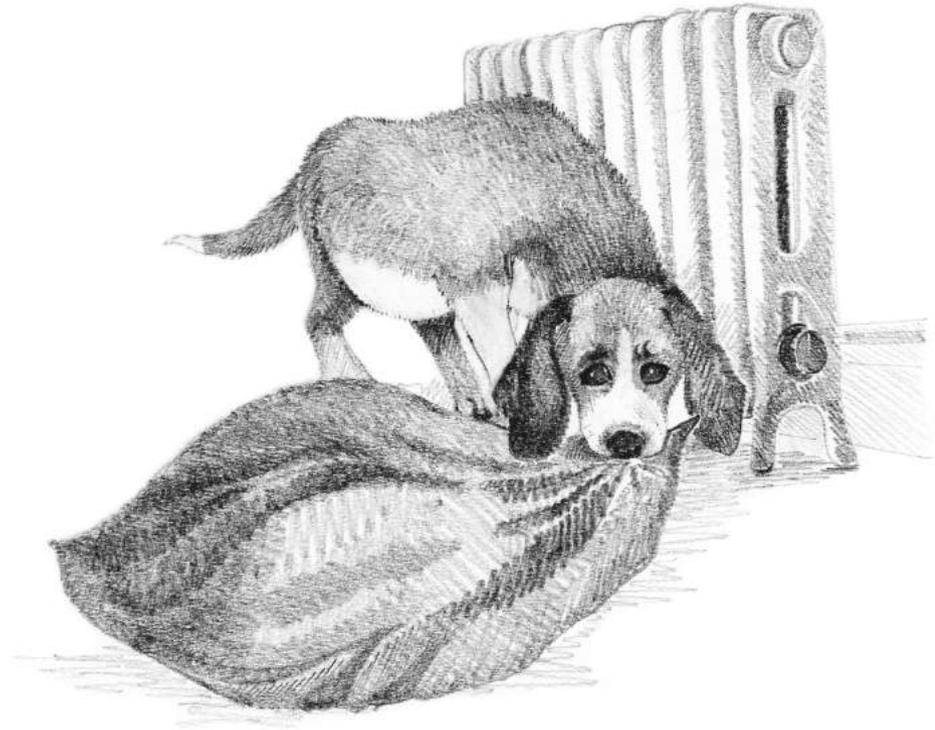
Dad checked under the table too. “Well, she is due to have the pups any

day now. I'll take her temperature later on, to check if it's gone down."

Lauren nodded. They had been taking Bella's temperature every day for the last couple of weeks, as their vet, Mark, had told them it was the best way to tell if the puppies were about to come.

Bella padded heavily out from under the table, and wandered over to her cushion. She took hold of the edge in her teeth – it was a big, soft cushion, made of red fabric – and tugged it closer to the radiator. Then she nudged it with her nose, this way and that, as though she couldn't get it quite how she wanted it.

Lauren watched her hopefully. "Does that look like nesting to you?" she asked.



"I don't know. It might be..." her mum said doubtfully. It was the first time Bella had had puppies, and they were having to learn as they went along, even though Lauren's mum had bought three different books on dog breeding.

"We need to set off for school," Dad pointed out, checking his watch.

Lauren sighed. “I bet Bella has the puppies while I’m at school, and I really, really want to be there. Couldn’t I just stay at home? It’s the last day of term, we’re not going to actually do anything, are we?”

Mum shook her head. “No. Besides, don’t you want to say goodbye to all your friends? You won’t see most of them for the next six weeks, remember.”

Lauren frowned. It was true. She loved living way out in the country. Their home had been a farmhouse originally, and it had a huge garden. The old cowsheds had been made into her parents’ office, and there was a barn across the yard that Lauren could play in. But there were bad things about it too. She lived twenty minutes’ drive

from the village where her school was, and her best friend Millie lived in a village that was about twenty minutes’ beyond the school! So arranging to see Millie in the holidays always meant lots of planning.

Lauren fetched her bag and the present she’d got for her teacher, Miss Ford, and took one last look at Bella on the way out of the kitchen door. The beautiful brown and white dog was squirming around on her cushion as though she couldn’t quite get comfy.

“Can you just hold on until I get home?” Lauren pleaded. But Bella looked up at her with big, mournful eyes. Lauren stroked her lovingly. “I see what you mean. You must really want to be back to your old self again. If it

happens today, good luck, Bella. It'll be worth it, you're going to have gorgeous puppies soon."

"She's going to be very tired," Dad pointed out. "We'll have to look after her. I remember doing all this with Rusty, my parents' dog, when I was just a bit older than you. Now come on, Lauren, we're going to be late."

As they were bumping down the lane in the car towards the main road, Lauren asked, "How many puppies do you think Bella will have?"

Dad shook his head. "Hard to tell – could be anything from one to fourteen, according to those books your mum bought. Rusty only had five."

Lauren frowned. "It can't just be one. Bella's enormous."

"I think you're probably right – she is very big. I'd say we're looking at quite a few," Dad agreed.

He sighed as he noted her sparkling eyes and excited smile. "Lauren..."

"What is it?" Lauren looked over at him worriedly.

"Sweetheart, just remember that we aren't keeping these puppies. They're all going to go to new homes."

Lauren hesitated for a moment. "I know," she said quietly. She was silent for a little while and then added, "But we'll have them for a couple of months, won't we? That's all the summer holidays to play with them, and more."

Dad nodded. "Exactly. Of course we'll miss them when they go, but it'll

be easier if we remember that they aren't ours to keep."

"I won't forget," Lauren promised. "Oh, there's Millie, Dad! Can you let me out here? I can walk up the road to school with her and her mum, can't I?"

Dad pulled up, and Lauren jumped out of the car, waving to her best friend.

"Hi! How's Bella? Have the puppies arrived yet?" Millie asked breathlessly.

Lauren shook her head, then smiled. "Bella was being really funny this morning. She kept messing around with her bed as if she was nesting. There might even be puppies when I get home!" she said, swinging her school bag excitedly.



"You're so lucky," said Millie. "Mum, can we have one of Bella's puppies? Pleecease?"

"Oh, Millie, you know I'd love one," said her mum, hitching Millie's baby sister Amy higher up on her hip. "But it just wouldn't be fair to have a dog – I'm busy with your sister, and your dad's at work during the day. A puppy would get lonely."