

Christie

By Rachel Maddox

“Wow”, mused thirteen-year-old Christie Tripp, “Was she gorgeous.” For Christie, dreaming about the beautiful purebred Collie on Craigslist was perfectly ridiculous. Especially considering the fact the dog cost- two hundred dollars. Yes, the animal was spayed, had all of her shots, had been dewormed, was on heartworm preventative, and came with a leash and collar, so she was almost cheap, but two hundred dollars was two hundred dollars; and Christie was broke. The collie was absolutely beautiful and would probably be snatched up within a few days. A few days!

“Well, that gives me two weeks, tops,” she muttered in the darkness of her bedroom, “but there are other difficulties, too, like Dad said no more dogs when old Snickers died.” Snickers, her old German shepherd died three years ago, and since then her parents had decided that no more dogs were allowed into the household, and they had stuck by it. “But maybe, if they saw me working to *earn* a dog, then things would change.” With this in mind, she finally drifted off to sleep.

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“Do you need the milk?” Mr. James Tripp asked Christie.

“No, sir, I already had my breakfast.”

It was Saturday morning at the Tripp house, and Christie and her father were awake; Charlotte, Christie's mother was still in bed. Mr. Tripp was average in height and normal in weight, his eyes were a swirl of green and brown. Charlotte also was normal except for one thing: her hair was the most dazzling red that Christie could imagine on a person.

“Dad, can you think of anything that needs to be done around here, that you might pay me to do?”

“Well, you can wash your mother's car, but other than that, I can't think on anything in particular that needs to be done. Why?”

Christie shrugged, “I just need some money for... something,” she replied vaguely.

“In a little while your mom should be awake, then you can ask her if she needs anything done.”

“Thanks.” Sighing, the gloomy thirteen-year-old muttered, “Great, three bucks for Mom's car. Well, I guess that'll buy the bowls.”

When asked, her mother replied that her aunt and uncle might want her to baby-sit their five-year-old son, Jack, sometime when they went out. Christie could telephone them at about ten; they tended to get up late.

Meanwhile, she cleaned the interior and exterior of Mrs. Tripp's car and made eight dollars. When she received her cash, she dashed to her bedroom and made a list of expenses.

Canine Costs

1. dog, years worth heartworm med. shots-\$200
2. heartworm med. per year-\$70
3. bowls-\$2
4. food per month-\$10
5. brushes, combs-\$20 (for good ones)

Total = \$232, earn \$17 per month for food and heartworm at end of year

“Gosh, I hope Aunt Sarah and Uncle Robert pay well,” Christie whispered.

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“Mom, Uncle Robert said that I could take care of Jack when he and Aunt Sarah go out for their

anniversary Monday! I'll get paid by the hour.”

“Great! Did he say how long they would be out?”

“I said I would be there at about five; they intend to be home by about nine or so.”

“You know,” Mrs. Tripp said, “It's a good thing for your work that they live right next door to us.”

“I know, and Jack tends to be agreeable, too.”

By the time Monday evening came around, Christie had washed and vacuumed out her dad's car, making another eight dollars, and she had washed her aunt's car for three more.

“Nineteen dollars down, two hundred thirteen to go,” she smiled smugly.

At five 'o clock sharp, Christie arrived at her uncle's home, which was only about an eighth of a mile away from her own, a short way considering that they lived fifteen miles from the nearest town.

The small brick house looked washed out and pale on account of the fact that it needed a new roof and the shutters had not been repainted in almost twenty years. But other than that, the yard was well kept and neat, there was a flower bed of snapdragons and several other blooms that Christie could not name to the left of the front steps, and to the right was Aunt Sarah's herb garden. A massive weeping willow stood erect in the front yard, creating wonderfully cool shade in the summer. Dazzlingly bright watermelon crepe myrtles sat under the windows, facing the road. Her relatives loved plants.

Christie rang the doorbell, and patiently waited to be let in. Absorbing the fragrant aroma of flowers and summer, she imagined herself lying in her back yard with the gorgeous collie at her feet. The insane barking of Uncle Robert's English bulldog burst into her dreams like a thief at midnight; and before her stood the slight figure of her aunt, smiling at her.

“Hello! Come in, Jack's just getting out of the bathtub, so you won't have to worry about that, and Robert and I are almost ready to go. Could you help me with this necklace?”

“Hi, sure, what do you want me....”

“For dinner you can use anything in the refrigerator; there's always quite a variety, were you saying something?” For someone who just barely cleared five feet tall and couldn't weigh more than one hundred and twenty pounds, Aunt Sarah could talk awfully fast.

“No, I was just going to ask about dinner. What time do you want Jack in bed?” Christie had just finished with the necklace, and her aunt turned around to face her. Huge green eyes and a small face with light brown hair and large perfectly white teeth made Aunt Sarah unusual, but attractive nonetheless. You would never guess that she was almost forty.

“Bed? Definitely before eight thirty, if he is good he can stay up that late, if he isn't, well, I suppose you can't get too early.”

“Usually, he's in there with the lights out before eight,” boomed the voice of Uncle Robert from the hallway. From hearing his voice you would guess he was six feet tall, but he, too, was far under average as far as height goes; but he was still at least six inches taller than his wife. In a black suit, Uncle Robert was quite handsome with his light blond hair neatly combed. The couple matched with personality as well as looks.

“Sorry we have to rush out as soon as you get here,” Christie's uncle apologized, but things are like that sometimes.”

“Thanks so much for coming, sweetheart. Tell Jackie we said good by and I love him, I hate to leave him without saying it myself, but he'll be OK. Good by!” Aunt Sarah continued quickly as she walked out the door.

Before he closed the door, Uncle Robert finished his string of thought out loud, “And if he doesn't behave, tell us when we get back.”

“Good by!” was the only thing Christie managed to say before the door closed with a bang. I

Immediately, Jack trotted out from the bathroom, “Hi, did Mommy already leave?” His still

sopping wet black hair bounced up and down on his head and his small dark eyes were inquisitive. With bright blue shirt and lime green pants for pajamas, the small Japanese boy struck his cousin as comical. Being adopted when he was two, Christie had only known him for three of his five years of life, but nonetheless, she knew him pretty well.

A small smile planted itself on Christie's face as she replied, "Yeah, they left just before you came out; your mom said by. So, it's only five, what do you want to do before dinner?"

Immediately, Jack decided on playing the board game *Sorry*, and after he effortlessly won a five game championship, they decided it was time to get dinner ready. Unanimously, they decided to heat up the leftover spaghetti and meatballs, some peas, and finish off the two pieces of strawberry pie for dessert. Christie suggested watching a movie after dinner, and Jack decided on *Finding Nemo*. At about eight o' clock he went to bed, and Christie read a book until nine thirty, when her aunt and uncle arrived at their home.

Uncle Robert dropped her off at her house, and paid her when they got there, "How did Jack behave?"

"Oh, he was a little angel; he did everything I told him to."

"Tell your parents I said hello. Because I need to get back to the house, here's your pay."

"Alright, 'bye!" she called after her uncle.

After she stepped into the house, Christie counted the money in her hand. It was thirty-five dollars. Mr. Tripp greeted her; her mother was in bed. How was Jack and how did it pay? Thirty-five! That's eight dollars per hour, and three for the extra half. What was she saving up for anyway? Nothing really important was the response.

"Fine, don't tell me. But you need to get to bed now. By the time you get there, it'll be ten," her father patted her on the back and kissed her forehead.

"Let's see here, I've got one hundred and seventy-eight to go. Not as bad as it could be, but not as good, either. And I have eleven days. Oh boy."

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The next day, Christie got up at seven and had finished all of her chores and taken her shower by eight, the time her mother got up. Almost as soon as Mrs. Tripp stepped into the kitchen, the telephone rang and she picked it up. After a short conversation, she set down the phone.

"Well, it looks like word has gotten around town about you needing money, because that was Ms. Sally Goodman. She wants you to watch Delilah and the birds while she goes on vacation. She said that if you wanted the job to call her back. By the way, why do you want all of this money?"

"Ms. Sally wants me to take care of Delilah and the birds?"

"Yes, that's what I said. If you really do want that money, you need to call Ms. Sally back before lunch."

Reaching for the phone and telephone book, Christie prayed that Ms. Sally paid well, too. Ten minutes later, Christie set down the phone with a wide grin spread across her face and explained the situation to her mother. If she vacuumed around the bird cage every day, fed and watered the birds, handled the two cockatiels for a minimum of fifteen minutes daily, walked Delilah twice a day, fed her twice a day, and bathed her at least once during the Ms. Sally's ten day vacation, Christie would make a profit of *two hundred dollars*

"She leaves and I start tomorrow, on Wednesday; she'll be back Saturday evening, late. How's that for money?"

It sounded good, but Christie knew that she needed to be prepared for a bratty dog and mean birds. Ms. Tripp had heard that the dog was simply impossible, so maybe she needed to think hard before taking on the job.

“It's too late to think, Mom, I already signed up for it, bratty dog or not.”
 “I hope it works out for you then,” was the very sincere reply.

At seven o' clock on Wednesday morning, Christie was standing on the doorstep of Ms. Sally Goodman. She rang the doorbell. Immediately, a tiny ball of furious fur piled against the screen door, barking its little head off. That was Delilah. The only reason that she didn't bust the screen was that she was simply too small to do much damage to it; it had a dent, but that was it. Through the screen door, Christie could see (and hear) Ms. Sally cooing at the little animal to “ please pipe down a little.” She refrained. Ms. Sally welcomed Christie into the house as she rose from her chair. Presently, she shooed Delilah away and beckoned Christie to enter.

When she opened the door to let herself in, Ms. Sally greeted her warmly, “Oh, it's so nice to see you! I'm so glad that you didn't mind coming this early; I was afraid that you would.”

“No, not at all. I'm usually awake before seven, anyway.” Christie glanced around the room. It was tiny, just like the house and everything in it. The chairs, the dog, the birds in the corner, everything that she laid eyes on in the room and in the kitchen adjoining it was undersized; except for the owner of it all. No, Ms. Sally was most certainly not undersized. She was unusually tall, plump, and had salt and pepper hair down to her shoulders; the length surprised Christie a little.

“Now let me show you around the house before I leave so that you know where everything is. Here is the bird food, right here next to the cage. Let me introduce you to them. This one here, the White Face is named Gracie. She's sweeter than Susan, the Common Gray, and they are both much more friendly than poor old Delilah over there. For some reason, she just doesn't like strangers very much. I don't know why.”

For about half of an hour, she gave Christie instructions on how to care for the birds and her pomeranian. A little while later, a car drove up into the yard and a relatively young man stepped out of it.

“Oh here is Charles, he's my son, you know. He is taking me up to Atlanta to see my newest grandchild.” For the next fifteen minutes she talked with her son, then she said good by to everything: the birds, the dog and to Christie. Then she hopped into the car and left.

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As soon as Ms. Sally shut the door and left, Delilah began to growl and bare her teeth. When Christie dumped her food into the bowl, the dog didn't budge.

“Aw come on Delilah, she didn't feed you for a reason. I'm supposed to do that so that you'll like me a little more. Now go ahead and eat it.”

While Delilah was supposed to be eating her breakfast Christie took care of the birds. For the whole hour that she devoted to the birds, Delilah followed her every move. She didn't touch her breakfast. Delilah's harness was a royal purple that matched beautifully with her black fur. When Christie slipped it onto the tiny animal it didn't budge.

“Come on, Delilah,” she crooned in a sugary voice, “come on it's time for your walk. Fine then, don't move. I'll just haul you out the door.”

And she did just that. Surprisingly, the dog did not bite her when she picked it up; it simply snarled a little bit louder. It came across to Christie that Delilah was basically harmless, she just had puffed up pride. So, with that in mind, the young teenager 'walked' her for about a quarter mile. This walk consisted of Christie walking and Delilah being dragged along behind. Finally, they arrived back at Ms. Sally's house and Christie released her charge from the leash, keeping the harness attached in case she ran away next time. Luckily for her, there was a small dog door in the the back door that led to a chain link pen, so she didn't have to come several times a day to let the dog out. Muttering that Christie's dream dog on Craigslist better be as good as she looked, she trudged home.

For the next seven days, things at Ms. Sally's house proceeded in the same unprogressive dreary way. The dog would eat only after Christie had left the premises. Delilah continued to abhor the sight of Christie, and the sentiments were returned without question. But on the eighth day, two days before the scheduled return of Delilah's owner, things took a quick, definite turn for the worse.

Directly after taking care of the cockatiels, Christie went after Delilah to give her her bath. Christie was by no means looking forward to this event. Actually, she dreaded it. Out of the water Delilah was bad enough, but in a tub of water she would be a nightmare. Slowly, Christie prepared the lukewarm water in a large plastic bin outside in the chain link pen. She had been told that, traditionally, Delilah was bathed in the bathtub inside, but Christie was in no mood to scrub the bathroom after the washing ordeal. When the everything was ready, she fetched the Delilah, who was in no better spirits than herself. All of her worst fears were justified.

As soon as Delilah's paws touched the liquid, she howled so loudly that Christie was quite sure that everyone within a mile or two could hear the awful noise. That was only the beginning. The idea of putting a muzzle on Delilah had never occurred to her, but it would have been extremely helpful. For the first time since they had met, Delilah tried to bite Christie, but she never did quite make it. With her left hand, Christie held the dog's mouth shut, and with her right she scrubbed the wiggling body as well as she could. What should have been a ten minute job was stretched out into an everlasting half-hour ordeal, thanks to the fact that although she only weighed four pounds, somehow, Delilah managed to escape from Christie three times, and ran, gleefully wallowing in the dirt. The first two times, Christie managed to catch the dog fairly easily, but on the third go-around the thought of diving through the dog door hit Delilah, and in a flash she was running like mad inside the house, caking everything in mud. Fortunately for them both, she only managed to wreck the living room, where she was fed and the birds were kept. Eventually, they were successful in finishing the bath, and combing and drying the dog.

Then there was the house to clean. After two hours of backbreaking scrubbing, Christie was finally able to trudge home.

For the next two days, Delilah behaved in the exact manner as before, growling, and being dragged along on the leash. When, finally, on Saturday, Ms. Sally was dropped off at her house by her son, her dog flew into a berserk frenzy as soon as she opened the door.

"Hello, Delilah! How are you? Were you a good girl while I was gone? Were you? Were you? I'm sure that a wonderful dog like you was a perfect little angel." Ms. Sally looked at Christie and straightened up again, "How did she behave, dear?"

Implying that Delilah was slightly less than perfect Christie replied lightly, "Well, she was as good as you could expect her to be with you being gone and all."

"Oh yes, I'm sure," she whispered almost dreamily. Then she became almost businesslike, "Wait just a moment while I get your check. Now," Ms. Sally asked, "what is a girl like you going to do with this money? Are you going to put it straight into the bank?"

Deciding that it was going to have to get out somehow, Christie confided her secret in her neighbor.

Really? Did she know if the collie was still there on the Internet? Yes, she was still there, and hopefully, her parents would let her get it. No, she had not talked about it to them, but she would when she got home.

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Christie burst into her parents' living room with her check in hand. Because it was Saturday, Mr. Tripp was home, and both of her parents were relaxed on the couch, reading books.

Quickly, breathlessly, Christie spilled out the whole story of why she needed all of the money, and of the collie for sale on the Internet. After her surprisingly short explanation, she was peppered with questions. Where was the dog going to stay? What if she barked at night? Why did Christie have

her heart set on this one dog? When all of her parents' questions had been answered, Christie excused herself so they could discuss the possibilities.

In her bedroom again, she checked her list of needs. Yes, she had all of the cash necessary for the objects. Now all she had to do was wait for an answer, which was easier said than done. Slowly, the minutes ticked away. Almost an hour had passed by. Deciding that it would take a while for them to come to a conclusion, Christie passed the time with one of her favorite books: *Shiloh*. Before she knew it, it was time for lunch, and her mom called her to eat her sandwich. Tediously, the rest of the day dragged on as Mr. Tripp mowed the lawn and Christie's mom folded laundry.

Finally, at dinner the subject arose again. Her parents had seen the pictures on line, and sent an e-mail to the owner of the pet. On Monday, Ms. Tripp would take Christie shopping for supplies: bowls bones etc., then on Tuesday, she could pick up her new pet from the former owner's home. And for the first time, Christie heard the name of her dream dog: Lucy.

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One full year later, Christie was lying down under the pecan tree in her back yard with her beloved collie at her feet, "You know what would be cool, Lucy? I say that it would be neat to have a horse. We could keep him in the pasture right next to us..."