

1. Sam Has a Problem



Jennie Levinsky had an amazing secret. And nobody knew about it except her best friend, Beth Morrison.

It was a warm, summer evening in Woodford, and Jennie was sitting on her back steps. She hugged her knees and thought about her secret. It was the best thing in her life.

As she watched the shadows creep across the quiet backyards, Jennie felt so happy she giggled. Suddenly a voice interrupted her thoughts.

What are you so happy about? My life is wrecked!
Trudging around the corner of the house

came Sam.

Jennie laughed. "I was just thinking about you!"

With a thud, the huge sheepdog flopped on the ground. Her long white hair drooped over her eyes. *Disaster!* she groaned. *Joan and Bob hate me.*

Sam was Jennie's secret. Everybody knew Jennie had a job walking Sam. And everybody knew Jennie and Beth spent a lot of time with Sam. But no one knew that Jennie could hear what Sam was thinking. Sam's thoughts rang in Jennie's head like a hollow echo. It was just like talking, only it wasn't out loud.

Jennie would never forget the first day Sam talked to her. They were having a picnic when she heard Sam say that she wouldn't drink creek water. Staring at her Sam said, *I knew you'd be able to hear me. Most dogs are too stupid to notice when someone has the gift.* From that moment on, Sam talked to Jennie all the time. It was their secret.

Jennie leaned forward, her long brown hair

falling around her face. “What’s the matter, Sam?” Jennie’s voice was soft.

First I threw up on the couch. The hair over Sam’s eyes moved up and down. That was their fault. They made me eat a can of Liver Delight. Any normal person would throw up after a nice dinner of cat guts.

Sam heaved an enormous sigh. *Now they’re wrecking my life.*

“What are they doing?”

It’s all because of that stupid cake. Like a mountain of fur, Sam rolled onto her side and snuffled. It’s not fair.

Jennie eyed her friend suspiciously. “Did you steal some cake?”

Sam sniffed again. *I did not steal cake. I merely took a few small licks.*

“Aha!” cried Jennie. “You ruined their cake.”

Sam was offended. *They shouldn’t be so selfish. There was enough icing on that cake for everybody.*

Jennie’s gentle face broke into a huge grin. Sam was outraged. *Joan and Bob don’t deserve a*

beautiful dog like me.

“What happened next, Sam?” Jennie’s brown eyes twinkled.

They’re sending me to obedience school.

“What’s obedience school?”

Sam raised her big head sadly. *It’s a place where they torture dogs. You sleep in a doghouse. You eat dry dog food. They shout orders at you all day.*

“Sounds bad.”

Sam heaved another sigh. *It’s worse than bad. They yank your collar and drag you around. I don’t know why the police allow it.*

“Why are Joan and Bob sending you there?”

I told you. They hate me.

“They don’t hate you. They must have a reason for sending you.”

They’re going on a trip and they don’t want me. Sam settled her chin on her paws. *They’re over there yelling about discipline. They say I’m out of control.*

Jennie hid a smile behind her hand.

“Discipline, huh?”

Sam snorted. *They should know better. I don’t*

allow discipline.

“I don’t think you have a choice.”

Sam shot Jennie a nasty look. *Of course I do. I’m running away on August first.*

“I suppose obedience school starts on August second.”

Forget obedience school.

“What are you going to do?”

Sam stood up and shook herself. *I’ll do what cats do. They sit at somebody’s door until they get adopted.*

Jennie shook her head. “It won’t work. Joan and Bob would take you back.”

Sam slumped back to the ground. *You and Beth are always writing stuff. Write a letter to the Humane Society. This is cruelty to animals.*

“People think it’s good to train a dog.”

Maybe I’ll go live in the woods.

Jennie tried to look hopeful. “We’ll think of something. We’ve got two weeks before obedience school starts. All we need is a plan.”

Start planning then. I’m getting desperate.