

Sarah Crawford

Lolly

“You want me to do *what?!?*” I asked Abby over the phone in disbelief.

“Could you please take care of Lolly this weekend?” Abby asked me again. She was almost begging me now.

“Abby,” I began. “I hate to tell you this, but I’m not in any position to take care of Lolly.”

“Please, Mary?” Abby pleaded.

“Why?” I moaned into the phone.

“I’m going out of town for the weekend,” she replied. “The place where I’ll be staying doesn’t allow dogs.”

“Can’t someone else do it?” I asked desperately.

“No, they can’t,” Abby replied. “I’ve called everyone—my neighbors, my coworkers, my best friend—they just can’t take care of her right now.”

I couldn’t say anything. All I could do was sigh out of exasperation.

“I know this is short notice, Mary,” Abby said. “I wouldn’t have asked you if I knew other people could do it. Could you please take her this weekend?”

I sighed again. “Maybe. How old is she?”

“She’s 16 weeks old.”

“Is she housebroken?”

“Well, um, no.”

“What?!”

“She almost is!” Abby cried in an attempt to rescue her puppy’s reputation. “She goes to the bathroom outside, but you have to take her outside as soon as she starts pawing at the door. She also likes to chew. She still doesn’t know the difference between her toys and whatever objects may be lying around the house.”

“You’re kidding, right?”

“And she has lots of energy. She likes to run,” Abby continued, as if she hadn’t heard my last question. “One of her favorite things to do is run outside and play fetch with a stick. But sometimes when she runs, she crashes

into stuff. Just yesterday she ran head-on into a bush while she was chasing her frisbee.” Abby tried to conceal her laughter. “The poor thing; she was just so excited that she forgot to look where she was going. Anyway, I wouldn’t leave anything breakable in your living room while she’s there.”

I couldn’t imagine what kind of situation I was getting myself into. Me, take care of a dog? It’s laughable!

I’ve never owned a dog, mainly because I’ve never been very fond of them. Besides the fact that I didn’t like dogs, I had just moved into a new loft downtown. It wasn’t very big, but it was very comfortable. The day before my kid sister called, I had just finished the two-month long process of decorating the loft to make it feel like home. All of the walls were painted in pale pastel colors of lavender, blue, and green. Every room had a wallpaper border featuring a floral design. A carpet cleaner came in the week before to deep-clean the white carpet that covered every square inch of floor space except the closets, the kitchen, and the bathroom. In the living room I hung up several framed paintings of nature scenes. I had placed a new brass candelabrum with mauve-colored candles on one of the end tables near the new sofa. The other table held a porcelain vase full of freshly picked lisianthus flowers. I displayed my glass figurine collection on the open-ended bookshelf across the room next to my small aquarium, which was sitting on a low shelf against the far wall near the ottoman footstool.

Abby wanted me to babysit her four-month-old hyperactive puppy in this place?

I sighed again. “Okay, Abby. I’ll take care of Lolly. When do you leave?”

“Tomorrow morning,” Abby replied. “My neighbor is driving me to the airport. Can I drop Lolly off at your place right before I leave?”

“That’s fine,” I said.

“Sweet!” Abby squealed into the phone. “You’ll love Lolly; I just know it.”

At that moment, I heard a faint yet audible crash in the background. “Oh, dear,” Abby sighed.

“What was that?” I asked her.

“Nothing too serious,” she replied after a slight pause. “Lolly just ran into the living room, and she accidentally tripped over the electric cord of my

reading lamp and pulled it off the table. She's fine, though. And it doesn't look like she broke the lamp." Abby began to laugh. "Talk to ya later, Mary. Love you. And thanks again."

Abby hung up. I kept holding my phone, wondering what I was getting myself into this weekend.

I didn't waste any time getting ready for Lolly's arrival. As soon as I came to terms with the fact that my sister's four-legged home wrecker was coming to *my* home, I began to make the necessary accommodations. I packed my glass figurines safely away in a box to keep under my bed. I removed the lisianthus flowers from my porcelain vase and placed them in a tall, plastic glass on the kitchen counter; they would be safer there than on the end table near the sofa.

I had just finished watering my large potted fern in the living room on that Saturday morning when Abby knocked on my door.

"Hey, Mary! It's me," I heard a voice say.

I opened my door to see Abby wearing black sweatpants and a neon, multi-colored tie-dyed T-shirt. She had a large, blue denim tote bag slung over her shoulder, a nylon leash wrapped around her right hand, and a 30-pound (or so) black lab puppy cradled in her arms. The puppy's tail was wagging so rapidly that it looked like it would fly off of her little body at any second.

"Hi, Mary!" Abby beamed as she stepped through the doorway. "I'd like you to meet Lolly." Abby set her on the floor.

I looked down at Lolly. She was already balancing on her two back feet, trying to jump up on me.

"Down, Lolly," Abby commanded gently. To my surprise, Lolly obeyed immediately. She sat down at Abby's feet and panted heavily as Abby dropped the leash onto the floor.

This was the first time I had seen Lolly in person. Upon first glance, I have to admit, she was a beautiful dog. Her pale pink tongue sharply contrasted with her shiny black coat. Her eyes were a little hard to see at first, but I could tell they were brown. They seemed to reveal the wild, energetic side of her that she had to restrain while sitting politely for me. Her tail wagged with eager anticipation of what would happen next.

"She bounces off the walls sometimes," Abby told me. "But she's very obedient. If you tell her to sit, stay, lie down, come, whatever you want, she'll

do it.”

“That’s good,” I said, trying not to sound worried.

“She’s a good girl,” Abby said. She turned her gaze towards her dog and stooped down to pet her. “Aren’t you, Lolly?” Ohhhhh, what a good little girl you are!” she cooed. I thought the pitch of her voice would break the windows.

“This bag has everything Lolly will need this weekend,” Abby said to me as she stood up. “It has her food and water bowls, three days’ supply of dog food, and a brush. She gets fed twice a day, once at breakfast and once at dinner. There’s a line drawn on the dog food scoop that shows how much she needs for each feeding. I already fed her this morning. She has a few toys in her bag: a giant rope, a Frisbee, and a squeaky ball.”

“A giant rope?” I asked her.

“It’s a chew rope,” Abby explained. “She likes to play tug-of-war with it. Let her win.”

“Okay,” I said indifferently.

“She enjoys running,” Abby continued. “I let her run in my back yard every day. It lets her release her pent-up energy that she’s had after being stuck in the house for nine hours while I’m at work. She also likes to play fetch. She’ll chase and retrieve almost anything. And if she needs to go outside to do her business, she’ll let you know. She’ll whine and paw at the door.”

“Okay,” I said again.

“And if she rolls over on her back and stretches one of her front legs toward you, it means she wants you to rub her tummy,” explained Abby. “She doesn’t let everybody do that, so consider yourself privileged if she lets you.”

“Alright,” I responded.

Abby looked at her watch. “I need to go soon,” she said. “Lolly’s kennel is in my neighbor’s car. I don’t know if you’ll need it or not, but you’ll have it anyway. I’ll bring it in here, but after that I need to head to the airport. I’ll be right back.” She left and shut the door behind her.

I looked down at Lolly. She looked up at me and wagged her tail.

“Hi, Lolly,” I meekly said. I timidly stooped down to pet the top of her head, but before I could reach her, she began to lick my hand.

“Ew!” I shrieked as I jerked my hand away and stood up. I couldn’t

remember feeling anything so slobbery in my life.

Lolly stared hard at me and tilted her head to one side. Her tail stopped wagging. I felt tension and awkward silence between the two of us. I thought that this only happened when I met new people and didn't know what to say to them. Apparently, it happened to me when I met dogs, too.

After a few minutes, I heard a loud thud outside my door, followed by a knock. I opened it to find Abby scooting a dog kennel across the floor through my doorway. Lolly immediately sprang to her feet and jumped toward Abby, her tail wagging furiously at the sight of her owner.

"Down, Lolly," commanded Abby. Lolly immediately sat down but continued to wag her tail. "This is Lolly's kennel," she said to me. "I put her in here if I have visitors at my place that aren't used to dogs. She loves people, but people aren't always comfortable with her because she's high-strung sometimes."

"I can see that," I said as I stole another glance at Lolly. Even though she was still sitting down, her whole body was shaking wildly as she continued to wag her tail. She was still panting with her mouth wide open, her pink tongue hanging loosely out of her mouth.

"She had a bath last night, so unless she gets really dirty playing outside or something, you won't need to bathe her," Abby continued. "But there's shampoo in her bag, just in case."

"Any questions?" Abby asked me.

"No, I don't think so," I replied.

"Okay," said Abby. "I've gotta head to the airport now. Thanks again for doing this, Mary." She hugged me. Then she squatted down on the floor again. Lolly lunged for her.

"Down, Lolly," said Abby gently, and Lolly obediently sat down right in front of her.

"Good girl," cooed Abby as she squeezed her puppy good-bye. "Be a good girl for Mary, okay? She's gonna take good care of you while I'm gone."

Abby stood up again.

"Thanks again, Mary. See ya!" Abby said cheerfully. She left and closed the door behind her once again.

I didn't have any questions before Abby left, but a tidal wave of them rushed into my head as soon as she was gone. I didn't know how well I was

going to take care of Lolly. I mean, she wasn't going to starve, and I had no objection to letting her go outside when she needed to, but at that moment I desperately wanted Abby back so she could relieve my mind of its current barrage of questions: How do I play with a puppy? How do I make a homesick puppy go to sleep? How do I make her obey me?

All of a sudden, Lolly leapt from her seated position and jumped on me. I knew that she wasn't strong enough to knock me down, but it still took me by surprise.

"Down, Lolly!" I cried, hoping she would listen to me.

To my surprise, Lolly obeyed my command. She immediately sat back down.

"Good girl," I said. "Let's take your leash off." I had just noticed that it was still attached to her collar. I knelt down, unhooked the leash, and placed it in her bag.

As soon as I had taken the leash off of Lolly, she rolled over on her back and squirmed all over the floor, kicking her legs up in the air. She must have done it for a good minute or so before she got up off the floor, shook, and took off running with her nose to the carpet. As soon as she got up from the floor, I noticed that she left a patch of her black fur on my white carpet. It wasn't a huge mess, but there was so much fur in that little spot that vacuuming it a few times would be the only way to clean it.

I looked up from examining the fur to see that Lolly had finished exploring the various scents in the carpet that only her nose could detect. She had jumped up on my couch and placed her two front paws on one of the end tables. She hoisted the rest of her body onto the table and began to sniff the candelabrum with my new candles in it.

"No, Lolly!" I cried.

It was too late. She had yanked one of the candles out with her mouth, knocking the entire candelabrum on its side with a reverberating clang. Lolly half jumped, half fell down from the table toward the floor and landed on top of the giant potted fern I had just finished watering. She climbed out of the pot and started running across the floor toward the hallway with the candle clenched tightly between her teeth, leaving a trail of muddy paw prints behind her.

This can't be happening, I thought to myself. "Lolly! Come back here!" I yelled as I stood up to follow her. On my first step, I tripped over the

denim tote bag, fell to my knees, and did a face plant in the patch of fur she had just left on the carpet.

“Lolly, SIT!” I yelled as I raised my head up. I hoped she would obey.

To my surprise, Lolly stopped running and sat down in the middle of my bedroom doorway. She began to chew on the candle as I stomped toward her.

The candle obviously wasn’t fit for display anymore. I picked it up and walked toward the kitchen to throw it away, but before I made it there I heard Lolly canter into the living room. She stopped in front of her bag and stuck her head inside. I could hear her sniffing and could see the outline of her head under the bag.

What’s she looking for? I wondered. I was still holding the candle. Even though Lolly looked occupied, I still felt uneasy letting her out of my sight. I set the candle down on the end table and sat on the couch.

Lolly finally emerged from the bag with the squeaky ball in her mouth. She ran toward me and dropped the ball at my feet. It was obvious what she wanted me to do.

I picked up the ball and almost shrieked with disgust. It was drenched in her saliva.

Lolly watched my every move and wagged her tail. She was waiting for me to throw the ball. I knew that throwing the ball inside was a very bad idea, so I just tossed it straight up in the air a few inches, thinking she would catch it.

She didn’t. She reached for it, but the ball bounced off her nose, soared across the room, and landed with a splash in the aquarium.

Lolly didn’t hesitate one second. She sprinted toward the ottoman and jumped onto the empty bookshelf. She stood on the edge of the shelf, batting her paw in the water to try to reach her ball. She shifted her weight forward slightly, swung at the ball again, and lost her balance.

“Lolly! NO!” I cried.

KASPLOOSH!

Lolly had leaned too far forward and fell into the aquarium as she tried to retrieve her ball. Water splashed over the sides as she tried to jump out. I instantly imagined her tipping the aquarium over as she struggled. I dashed to aquarium, lifted Lolly out of the water and set her on the ottoman. She shook

the excess water out of her fur and sprayed it all over me.

I glanced around the living room. From where I was standing, I could see everything Lolly did: the patch of black fur on the carpet, the fallen candelabrum, the chewed candle laying beside it, the small pile of dirt near the potted fern, the muddy paw prints that tracked across the floor from one end to the other, my half-full aquarium, the puddles on the floor, my soaked ottoman.

Raging anger boiled inside me and threatened to explode all over this dog. This terror hadn't been in my home for 10 minutes, and she was already wrecking it.

I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, letting the air hiss between my teeth.

"LOLLY, SIT!" I commanded.

To my amazement, she immediately sat down on the ottoman. She dropped her squeaky ball onto the floor. She didn't wag her tail. She didn't cock her head. She didn't move at all.

She sat perfectly still.

Neither of us did anything for a minute. Lolly continued to sit on the ottoman without moving a muscle. I stood next to her as I wrung aquarium water out of my sleeves.

This is too much, I thought to myself. Can it get any worse?

I sank to the floor, propped myself up against the ottoman, and tried to pull myself together. Lolly didn't move. We just sat there.

After a few minutes, Lolly finally hopped down from the ottoman to the floor. I ignored her until she tried to lick my face.

"Go away, Lolly," I said.

Lolly sat down next to me and nudged my hand with her cold, wet nose. I ignored her again. She slowly walked away with her tail between her legs. She didn't run or skip across the floor like before. She knew she was in trouble.

"I'd better clean up this mess," I said out loud to myself. I walked toward the closet to find the carpet spray but stopped when I heard Lolly whine.

"Now what?!" I moaned.

Lolly was whining and scratching at the door. She needed to go outside.

"Fine," I said. I grabbed a plastic shopping bag from the closet and picked up her leash from the floor. Lolly scratched the door again, scraping

the paint with her toenails.

“Alright! I’m coming!” I said. I hooked the leash to Lolly’s collar to take her outside.

Lolly did her business on a patch of grass near the sidewalk. Thankfully, it was the kind I didn’t have to clean up. She came back to me and tried to jump on me again.

“Down, Lolly,” I said. Lolly stopped jumping and stood next to me, tail wagging.

She obviously had some energy that she needed to burn off. The city park was only a few blocks away. I wasn’t enthusiastic about walking to the park, but the weather was perfect for spending time outside, and I decided that I’d rather have Lolly run outside at the park than inside my living room again.

“Why don’t I take you to the park?” I asked Lolly, knowing perfectly well that she didn’t understand what I had just said to her. We made a quick trip back inside so I could put on my running shoes. We returned to the sidewalk, and I gently tugged on her leash to tell her the direction in which she needed to walk. Lolly ran ahead of me. Surprisingly, she didn’t jerk my arm out of its socket like I thought she would, but I did have to jog to keep up with her. I was surprised by how good the exercise felt, but I was relieved when we finally arrived at the park and slowed down to a walking pace.

A few minutes later, I found a stick on the ground that was about the same size as the candle Lolly had tried to chew earlier. I picked it up and jogged with her again to an open field.

“Lolly, sit,” I said. “Stay.”

She obeyed. I unhooked her leash and raised the stick in the air. Lolly gazed at it the entire time, not even blinking.

“Go get it!” I said as I threw the stick as far as I could. She sprinted away from me to fetch it.

As soon as Lolly took off running, I panicked. Did I make a mistake? Will Lolly come back to me? Can I catch her if I need to chase her down?

To my intense relief, she sprinted back to me with the stick in her mouth and dropped it at my feet.

“Good girl,” I said. I picked up the stick and launched it across the field again. “Go get it!”

Again, Lolly came back to me, stick in mouth, and dropped it at my

feet. This little game continued for the next half hour or so. I kept wondering when Lolly would collapse from exhaustion, but she didn't. She just kept running back and forth between me and the stick.

I was getting hungry. I checked my pockets for some money. I had enough to buy a hotdog from a stand nearby, but I didn't want to leave Lolly unattended, even for those few minutes it would take for me to buy a hotdog.

"Lolly, come here," I called.

She trotted back towards me so I could hook her leash onto her collar. We left the field and walked down a narrow sidewalk past a hedge of forsythia bushes to the hot dog stand.

"Two –fifty," the hotdog vendor said to me. I reached into my pocket for three dollars but only found two.

"Here are two dollars," I said as I handed him the money. "Hang on; I've got another dollar in here somewhere."

I finally found another dollar and pulled it out to give to the vendor. "Here it is," I said. But as I was about to give it to him, a breeze snatched it out of my hand.

"Oh, great!" I moaned. What else could happen today?

With no warning, Lolly's retriever skills kicked in. She took off running to chase the dollar as the wind carried it down the sidewalk. Her leash ran out of slack and I had to follow her about 30 feet from the hotdog stand. At last, she managed to pin the dollar down on the sidewalk with her paw.

I was impressed.

"Good girl, Lolly," I said as I picked up the dollar. We walked back to the hotdog stand together.

After I paid the vendor, we walked a little further down the sidewalk. I sat down on a bench, and Lolly sat at my feet, clearly hoping that a morsel of the hotdog would fall within her reach.

I didn't want to give Lolly part of my hotdog at all. Why should I? After making such a huge mess at home earlier that morning? Did she really deserve to have this kind of treat?

Then again, she did retrieve the dollar that allowed me to pay for the hotdog.

"Oh, here," I said as I tore off a little piece to feed her. I set it in the palm of my hand and lowered it to her nose. Lolly scarfed it down, but she

was very careful to avoid accidentally biting my hand. She rested her chin on my knee and pleaded for another piece with her eyes. I have to admit that it was hard to tell her no.

“That’s enough hotdog for you,” I said. “Abby doesn’t want you to have too much human food.”

I finished the hotdog and brushed the crumbs off my lap. I was about to stand up to leave, but before I could Lolly stood up first and started to wag her tail.

“What is it, girl?” I asked her.

I looked down the sidewalk and saw an older gentleman walking toward us. He stopped when he reached our bench.

“That’s a beautiful dog,” he beamed. “May I pet her?”

“Yes,” I replied. “She would like that.”

He stroked her head for a minute. Lolly’s tail wagged faster.

“What’s your dog’s name?” he asked me.

“Lolly,” I replied. “She’s not my dog, though. She belongs to my sister. I’m just watching her for the weekend.”

“Well, I can tell that this dog adores you,” the gentleman said.

How could this dog adore me? I wondered to myself. After yelling at her this morning? After verbally complaining about giving her what she needed? After almost not taking care of her for only two days?

“Well, to be perfectly honest, I’m still trying to get used to her,” I confessed. “I’ve never owned or taken care of a young puppy before. This is a whole new experience for me.”

Lolly licked my hand. This time, to my surprise, I didn’t pull away or shriek.

“Well, she seems very happy to spend an afternoon in the park with you,” the gentleman said. “Have fun with her this weekend.” He turned and walked away.

Lolly looked at me for a second, rolled over onto her back, and stretched one of her front legs toward me. I reached down to rub her tummy. She closed her eyes and breathed a sigh of contentment.

“I will,” I said to myself.