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Opening extract from

Puppy Academy: Star on a Stormy Mountain

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GILL LEWIS

PUPPY ACADEMY

ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH HORNE

STAR ON STORMY MOUNTAIN

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The collie pups, Star, Gwen, Nevis, and Shep, pushed their way to the front of the crowd gathered at the bottom of the hill. A hushed silence fell across the dogs and humans. It was the final of the National Sheepdog Trials, and it looked like Bleak Tarn, the old gnarled collie and five times winner, was set to win again.

But there was one dog remaining. One dog who still had to run her turn.

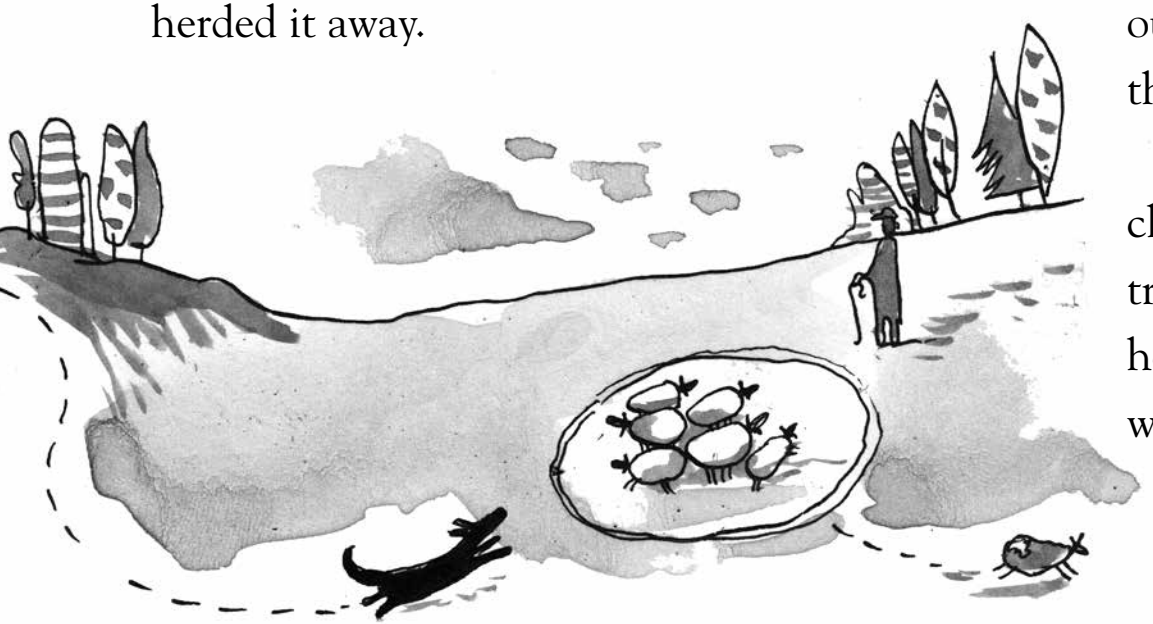
Gwen nudged Star with her paw. 'Look, here comes your mum.'

The pups watched Star's mum, Lillabelle of Langdale Pike, trot alongside her shepherd. The black-and-white collie waited for the signal, and then she was off. She raced up the hillside in a long curve towards the small flock of sheep grazing in the far field. She leapt the low wall and came behind the sheep, slowing down as she did so. She knew that if she ran in too fast she would scare them and they would scatter. The sheep saw her and tightened together. Lillabelle kept her head low and crept towards them, and the small flock set off steadily down the hillside towards the crowds.

'That's a perfect lift,' said Nevis.

'If the rest of the trial goes this well, your mum might win,' said Shep.

Lillabelle guided the sheep through narrow gates, and then drove them away into a circle marked on the ground. She had to single out the ewe with the green spot painted on her back. She circled the sheep, keeping them in a tight group, and when she saw the ewe on the outside of the flock, she swiftly trotted in and herded it away.



The crowd held its breath.

Maybe this was good enough to beat Bleak Tarn, but there was one last part of the trial to do. It was the most difficult part of all. Lillabelle had to herd the sheep into the square pen and shut the gate. It wouldn't be easy. The sheep were getting bored and restless. They wanted to be back out on the hillside with the rest of the flock.

Lillabelle kept them calm. If she charged in now, all would be lost. She tried to forget the crowds watching her. She tried to forget Bleak Tarn, who would be willing her to fail.

Keeping her belly low to the ground, she crept forward. The sheep bunched together more tightly, looking for an escape route to the hillside. But Lillabelle kept them moving and, before they knew it, the sheep had followed each other into the pen. The shepherd swung the gate shut and the crowd exploded with applause.

She had done it. Bleak Tarn had been beaten at last.

There was a new winner now.

A new champion.

Lillabelle of Langdale Pike had won the National Sheepdog Trials.

Gwen turned to Star. 'Your mum is awesome,' she said.

'The best,' said Shep.

'My dad said she would win,' said Nevis.

Star puffed out her chest in pride. Her mum was a champion sheepdog. Everyone said Star would be a champion too. Star hoped so. She hoped one day she would win the National Sheepdog Trials and make her mum proud.

Star was looking forward to tomorrow. Tomorrow was the beginning of the pups' sheepdog training and Star couldn't wait to start.

The next morning, Star, Gwen, Nevis, and Shep gathered in the classroom.

'Right,' said Major Bones. 'It's time to get started on your basic sheep-herding skills. We'll go out to the field and see if Hilda and Mabel are ready for us.'

The four collie pups followed Major Bones outside. Major Bones

was a teacher at the Sausage Dreams Puppy Academy for Working Dogs. There were all sorts of puppies at the puppy academy. There were pups that were training to be guide dogs, pups that wanted to be hearing dogs, and pups that wanted to be water rescue dogs. But Star wanted to be a sheepdog like her mum. She was

a Border collie, after all, and Border collies had sheep herding in their blood.

Hilda and Mabel, the academy sheep, weren't in the field. They were in the barn, sitting on a hay bale, nattering and knitting woollen blankets for dogs in rescue shelters.

'Ooh, hello, my dears,' Hilda bleated, seeing the collie pups.

'Hello,' baa-ed Mabel.

Hilda put her knitting down. 'Well, if it isn't little Gwen, Shep, Nevis, and Star,' she bleated. She gave Star a little wink. 'We're expecting great things from you.'

'Great things,' baa-ed Mabel in agreement.

Star smiled to herself. She imagined winning the National Sheepdog Trials: Star of Langdale Pike, the new champion.

'No need for idle chit-chat,' barked Major Bones. 'Let's get started.'

'Right-ho, right-ho,' bleated Hilda. 'Just give me time. My legs don't move so fast as they used to.'

'Not so fast,' baa-ed Mabel.

They climbed down from the hay bale and hobbled outside into the field.

Hilda and Mabel had lived at the puppy academy longer than anyone could remember and had taught many young collies the basics of herding sheep. They were gentle, kind, and patient sheep, although they could only manage a slow shuffle around the field.

'Now then, young 'uns,' said

Hilda. 'Mabel and I will stand over there.' She pointed to the far end of the field. 'And you have to run around us and drive us through that gate and into that pen there.'

'That pen there,' baa-ed Mabel.

'Remember,' said Hilda. 'Run a wide curve and keep it nice and steady.'

'Nice and steady,' baa-ed Mabel.

Star watched Hilda and Mabel hobble away across the field. She could feel excitement fizz right through her. She was about to herd sheep for the first time, ever. Her paws twitched. Her nose twitched.

Her muscles felt like coiled springs just waiting to bounce.

Star was the last to take her turn. She watched Gwen, and Nevis, and Shep herd Hilda and Mabel across the field and into the pen. Once or twice Hilda pretended to hobble away, but let the pups herd her back again.

All the time Star was watching them, she felt her muscles tighten even more. She wanted it to be her turn. She wanted to be herding Hilda and Mabel. Her heart thumped inside her chest. The tip of her tail tingled with excitement. She couldn't keep her feet still. She bounced up and down on the spot.

Major Bones waited for Hilda and Mabel to shuffle back to the far end of the field, and then he turned to Star. But before he could say GO, Star was off, streaking across the field in a blur of black-and-white fur. She leapt the fence, did a mid-air half spin, and flew like a bullet towards Hilda and Mabel.

'Oooh, heavens!' bleated Hilda, breaking into a trot.

'Oh lordy!' baa-ed Mabel, running off in a different direction.

Star ran around them to herd them up again.

'Ooh, me knees,' bleated Hilda, stumbling on a rock.

'Slow down, young 'un,' baa-ed Mabel. 'We're not spring lambs any more.'

But Star couldn't slow down. She was a sheepdog, and she had to herd these sheep. She ran round them in circles to keep them together. Round and round. Faster and faster. Round and round and round and round and round and round and round and round and round.

'Oooh! I'm quite dizzy,' bleated Hilda.

'My head's spinning,' baa-ed Mabel. 'I think I need a lie down.'

'Me too, dear,' agreed Hilda.

'STAR!' bellowed Major Bones. 'Come back at once.'

Star stopped running. She looked back at Major Bones, and then at Hilda and Mabel. What had she done? She hadn't even managed to herd them through the gates. She watched the two old ewes hobble back to the barn in giddy circles.

Gwen, Shep, and Nevis were just staring at her with their mouths wide open.

Star was supposed to be a sheepdog, the daughter of a champion, but her very first attempt at herding had gone horribly, horribly wrong.