

Chapter One: And So, It Begins



And so fate played it's "canine"
hand to bring together the last
pieces of the family jigsaw.
(After all, it wasn't complete without
a waggy tail, wet nose and muddy
paw prints!)

and to think that they had only come to
"Dingy Dave's" Garage for a new car exhaust.
♡ BECKY WAS HAVING NONE OF THAT! ~

I only went to the garage to get a new exhaust for my car as it sounded like a jet taking off and it was annoying the neighbours.

Becky and I were waiting in "Dingy Dave's Garage" reception room. (It was actually called "Diamond Dave's Super Garage", but it had lost its shine along the way).

I sat there bored, amongst the clutter; used coffee cups, ancient magazines and newspapers that shouted out headlines long gone. My (not so trusty) old banger was up on the ramps whilst I was down in the dumps at yet another bill to throw down the black hole money pit the car was digging in my pocket.

Meanwhile Becky was wandering about aimlessly as she apparently didn't want to park her shiny new dungarees on one of the dodgy and rather soiled chairs.

"Hey, Dad look!" she exclaimed.

I glanced up from looking at last week's football results to see her pointing at a poster that wasn't about spark plugs, oil, light bulbs, or air filters.

"It's dogs, rescue dogs! Mrs. Barker's home for hounds it says, dogs in search of their **Forever Homes**" she quoted excitedly in her "I want one of those" voice which I had heard many times before. Except this time, it wasn't a Barbie doll or a Cinderella pumpkin carriage she was afterthis might be a tough one!

"Really?" I replied, "Oops, the time is getting on, looks like the car is done," I replied hurriedly as I took a sneak peek through the window to the workshop floor.

But Becky was having none of that!

"Oh, GO ON Dad, it would be so nice; you had a dog when you were a kid and anyway, I would do all the stuff like feeding it, walking it, brushing it, and, well, anything really."

She didn't stop there but carried on, barely stopping for breath,

"Kate across the road has got a dog. I always feel silly when I'm walking with her and her lovely dog Scampi, not having a dog and everything. When her mum got her that nice bike before, you got me one too!"

"That was Christmas darling, and a bike doesn't need feeding or looking after in the same way, plus there's no slobber or poop to consider," I quickly shot back. That will do it I thought.

But it didn't, she just carried on and added an extra moany groany tone to her voice to increase my 'Ear Agony'.

I pretended not to listen whilst I figured out my next move.

"Blah de blah de blah de blah de blah de blah de blah de blah de blah blah blah" she continued.

"Not listening, not listening, not listening," I repeated silently to myself. I had to think of something quick.

It looked like I was going to have to bring out the BIG GUNS. Well, she asked for it!

You see, my buddy Gary shared with me his secret weapon "The get out of buying anything for your kids when they moan" card.

It works every time, he told me, and the best bit, they don't see it coming, not even when it hits them. It's an 'Invisible Weapon' he said. Parenting by stealth.

Yep, you've got it.....The junk food solution/bribe/tummy carrot, 100 percent guaranteed. When their mouths won't stop moving and the yapping and moans are driving you crazy just fill their gobs with a burger, fries, chicken nuggets, or similar, the greasier the better.

"Hey, how about we pop over the road for a bit of nosh and grab a nice juicy burger at Mc Ronald's." I said, in my most generous and jaunty Dad way.

Becky stopped talking immediately.

Brilliant! it worked.

Then she fixed me with a steely stare.

"Dad, there are some things in life bigger; better, and more important than a Mc Ronald's Double Decker, Cheesy Bacon, Extra Mayo, BBQ King Size Sizzler Super Meal, and a dog definitely tops that list!" She knows her fast foods.

That was a FAIL then.

So, I settled with allowing her to jot down Mrs. Barkers telephone number with the vague promise of sorting it out later and a vain hope she might just forget about it all.

Thinking back now, I knew I was cornered.

A week later and guess what, there we were, Becky and I, at Mrs. Barker's Home for Dogs. It was 'Choosing Day'.

I stood at the fence and peered down on the assembled dogs on the other side. There were all sorts, big; small, fluffy; waggy tailed; sombre; droopy eared, and slobbery



How would I know which dog to choose?

Mrs. Barker reassured me. My dog would choose me she said.

Meanwhile Billy was on the other side of fence, catching some rays on that balmy day with the pack.

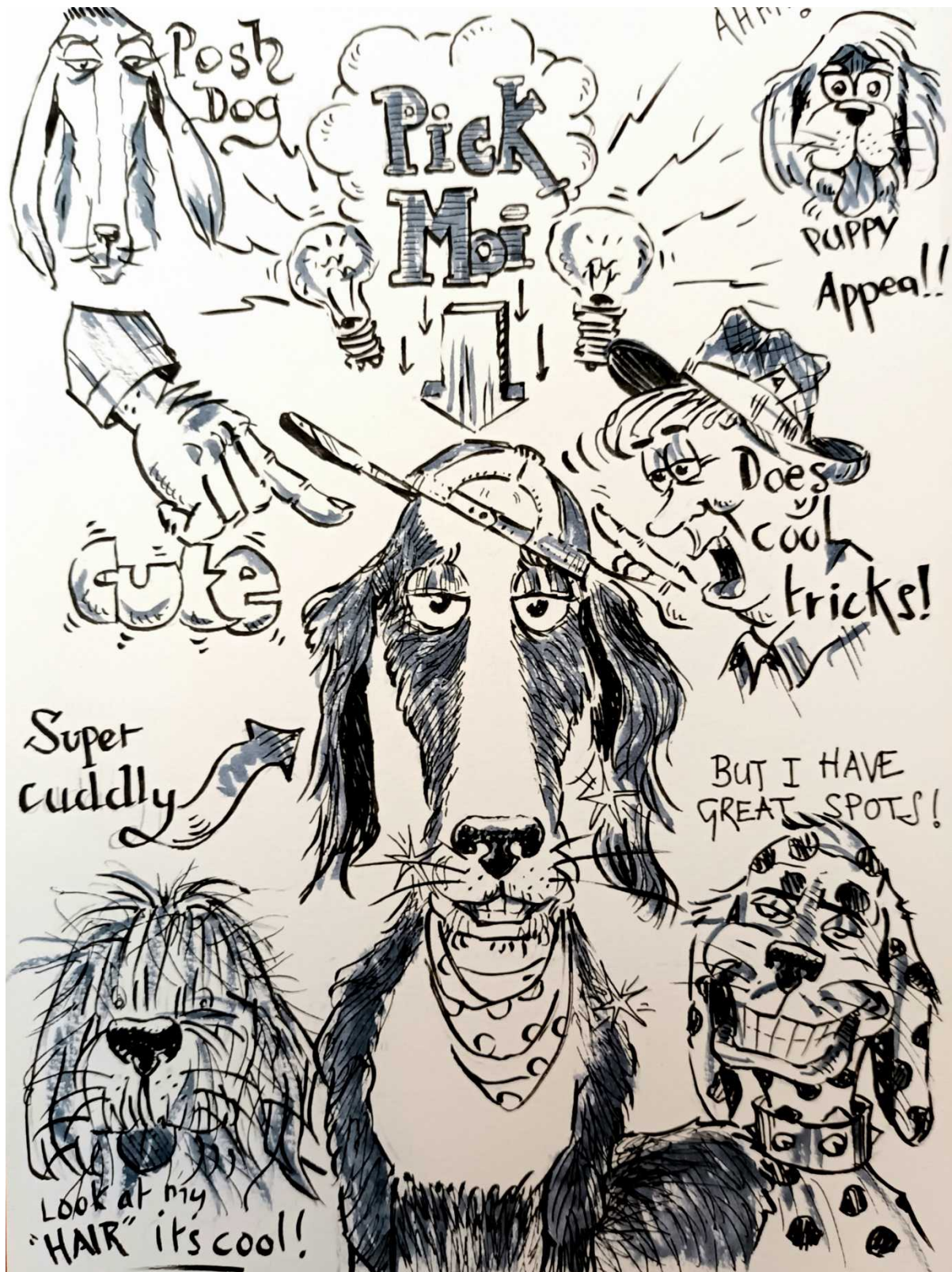
He looked up, as did the others and spotted Terry; Becky and Mrs. Barker having a chat. A rather grumpy Bulldog nearby pricked up his ears and said to his Dalmatian buddy, "Hey, look up Spot, we have a visitor."

Word spread quickly and very soon every dog was busy spit-washing; practising their best **Big Appealing Eyes Look** and **Cute Head Tilts** in preparation for "The Choosing."

"What chance have I got?" thought Billy. "Look at these guys! Cuter, bigger, and better looking.... I should have stayed at the farm." Tears began to well up in his eyes.

He lowered his head and slunk to the back of the surging crowd to hide his embarrassment. Then he remembered the boy and girl playing with their dog on the bench and how he had promised himself that day, a new life away from sheep dog duties. Was he foolish to leave that all behind? Maybe...

And all because he didn't have The Eye!



The Eye! That was it!

Was it there inside of him? But so deep down that he couldn't feel it; unrealized and unused. Could it be released, just this once. Please, just this once!

This was Billy's **Last Chance Saloon** moment; it would never happen again.

He quietly made his way to the centre of the pack, he passed unnoticed amongst the others, they were all too busy preening and simpering for attention.

Gathering every ounce of his internal strength he dug deep and deeper inside himself and willed the gift unopened to come to the surface and gather behind his eyes.

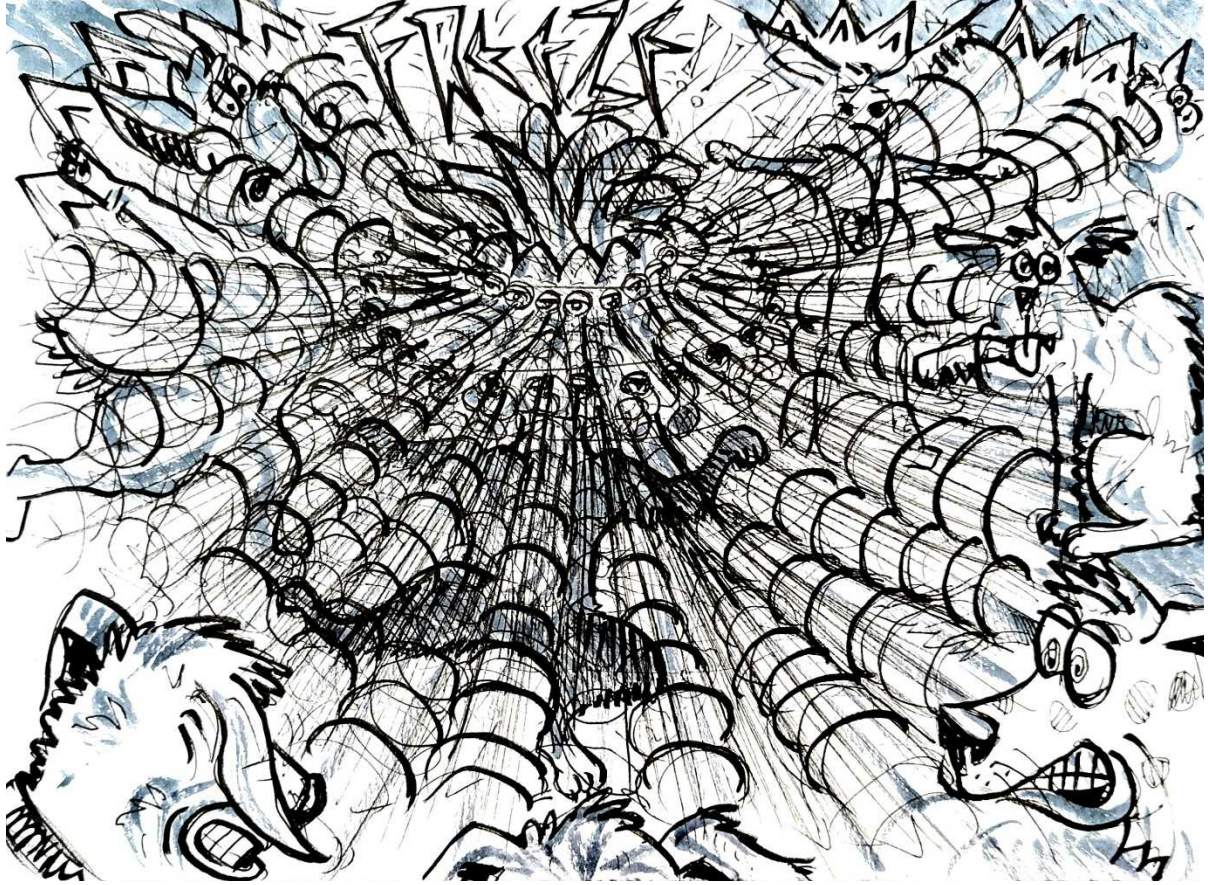
It started to whisper in his head, just a quiet murmur at first then it began to grow and grow and grow until it pushed against the back of his eyes, loud, insistent, hot and vibrant. It wanted out!

The others were all around him. This would require a 360-degree pivot to ensure full coverage. Inside his head the roar screamed to be let out until the burning burst through his eye balls!

"Here we go!!!!"

With those words he spun like a Whirling Dervish, his eyes piercing all those about him. Laser beams of intention flew in every direction.

The effect was instantaneous. Every dog stopped, like statues, motionless, as if frozen in time. Except Billy himself of course.



Now was his moment.

He strolled calmly forward towards his new "Pet Person" flicking his gorgeous curls in the gentle wind whilst adding a doughy eyed cute head tilt. This was his best Puppy Dog look ever. No competition. Literally!

Terry reached down and tussled his fur, Becky reached over the fence and tickled his throat.

That was it.

THE EYE was his.

Billy was coming home.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Chapter two: Who's A Good Boy Then

I thought that would be it, that it was all "Done 'n' dusted."

Billy had chosen us, in fact all the other dogs just sat motionless, and we were good with that. But no, there were conditions. Mrs. Barker had high standards and she wanted to make sure that any prospective owner was made of the right stuff.

First, she did a home visit. We spruced ourselves up, and made sure all was spick and span. Julie even got out our poshest tea set, opened the Goldish Label teabags and popped into M&Z Foodhall for Mc Whittie's Fancy Delight tea cakes to impress our V.I.P. Guest.

Billy came with her too and sniffed around. We all made a fuss of him and agreed with everything Mrs. Barker said. She inspected the garden too, and had firm words to young Becky and Meggie about the need for regular walks and even showed them how to use a pooper scooper after Billy decided it was a good time to mark his new territory. She looked me in the eye and said,

"It's very likely Billy will revert to puppy ways, so don't be surprised if he gets a little destructive, chewing and so on, it's just that as a working farm dog he has never had the time to be a puppy. If that is a problem for you then we can't go forward with this."

"No, no, no, not a problem at all Mrs. Barker, the girls aren't much better, messy pups they are, he, he!"

They both shot me deadly glances whilst still smiling at Mrs. Barker. Anyway, what a load of rubbish, Billy was fourteen dog years old and pretty much fully grown. Not going to happen I thought to myself.

Is there such a thing as Famous Last Thoughts?

"Well, family, next you must come to our dog owners meeting next Tuesday 7.30pm for the final part of the process, see you then." said Mrs. Barker firmly.

With that she left with Billy.

"I think that went very well, particularly the bit about you girls, you know, the poopy pick-up lesson." I just had to get that one in!

A week on we all rolled up at the **Meeting**. It was in the village hall just down the road from Mrs. Barkers house.

Mrs. Barker was presiding over the meeting.

"Welcome Forever Homers, and welcome to all you lucky doggies" she announced to a hushed audience who were seated with their obedient and immaculately groomed dogs at their sides.

"You have all been in the same position as our new prospective family The GRINWALDS, and you all passed with flying colours. Today we are gathered to decide

whether our new family are up to the standards required to adopt young Billy here into their lives. Please don't be shy and ask them anything you think is important."

She brought Billy over and asked me whether I had remembered to bring a new leash as was required. I proudly held up my gleaming brand-new leather and chain link leash with gusto and pride. A collective sharp intake of breath resounded around the hall like a sonic Mexican wave. My grin turned to a grimace as the leash seemed to have caused much alarm.

"I'm sorry, that just won't do! We NEVER allow chains of any kind in our leashes" exclaimed Mrs. Barker. "There's no give in them, a dog can choke to death on one of those"

With that she snatched the leash from my hand and dropped it into the nearest waste bin.

Oh dear, not a good start I thought. Murmurs and glances were exchanged round the room, all directed at me, it seemed. I shifted uncomfortably in my chair and looked at the girls, they were all looking at the floor, it appeared. "Here's one of mine for now," said Mrs. Barker as she led Billy to us.

What followed was a Q and A session. We were bombarded. Never in my life had I ever felt so much in the spotlight, It was as if we had to perform to earn our reward.



Some time later the last question was asked and then answered by our youngest, Meggie. A hush descended and

Mrs. Barker asked us wait to in the kitchen whilst the assembled Happy Homers came to a decision. We waited for what felt like a long time but actually was only fifteen minutes and then were ushered back into the main hall.

"I am very pleased to announce that Billy and the Grinwald's are now fully certified members of our Happy Homers! You may take Billy home! Oh, and don't forget to pop my leash back please." With that we left to a warm applause and good wishes all around.

Victory was ours.

We popped Billy on the rear pop-up seats in the car and made our way home. To be honest he looked a little anxious, everything considered, he had been through a great deal to get to this point. Quite honestly, we were all feeling a little dazed by everything too, after the last couple of weeks.

I will never forget that drive home, we arrived four but came home five!



Billy was feeling happy but also quite anxious. Now that the day he had planned for so long had finally arrived it felt very real. A brand-new chapter in his life was about to begin and he didn't know what surprises, worries and events awaited him. He would soon find out.

Chapter Three: Not A Leg To Stand On

As soon as we got through the front door Billy jumped up on the sofa and snuggled down for the night. By the time we were all in he seemed to be asleep so we tiptoed our way upstairs and let him settle for the night, the day was long enough as it was.

Next morning Billy jumped off the sofa leaving behind a decidedly dirty patch.

Terry looked down at Billy as he sidled up to his legs.

He then noticed that Billy wasn't really the classic black and white glossy-coated looking sheep dog. He was more your dirty coal black and yellow snow whitish. This hound needed a good scrubbing! It seemed that socializing with rats, ducks, pigs, and sheep had its downside.

It was time to wash that farm right out of his fur!

After a good soak, conditioner, blow dry, and set Billy Boy was transformed. Gone were the tangles, knots and dirt. We watched as the last of the mud brown water whirlpooled down the plug hole, it looked like Mums' Sunday roast lumpy gravy and probably tasted as bad.

Billy stood proud; a gleaming model of Sheep dog glam. His fur shone like spun silk and his eyes sparkled with new hope. He felt like a completely new dog ready for his new life.



It was time for Billy to meet his new friends.

We started with Aaky our black bunny who often came indoors to enjoy a warm up by the fireplace. (The girls had very cleverly trained him not to poop indoors). That went well, Billy was used to rabbits. Then it was Rattie's turn and that too went very well, Billy had always gotten along with the farm rats, he loved their sense of humour.

Next was Popsie, our lovely cat.

That did not go so well....

Billy and his brothers did not like the farm cat, neither did the rats, he was the enemy.

Billy immediately gave chase and cornered Popsie between the sofa and the lamp. He dared to bare his teeth and barked madly. Popsie was having none of that, she unsheathed her razor-sharp claws and took a lightening swipe. Billy's paw was in the way. Barking turned to whimpering, teeth withdrew, and Billy leapt back as if he had been electrocuted. Popsie strolled away slowly in her most aloof manner. Casting a glance over her shoulder she gave a quick hiss and sauntered off, tail wagging menacingly behind her. Billy was very sorry for himself and would not stop licking his battle wound, which made it bleed even more. His first full day and he was down the vet's already to throw more cash down Terry's money pit pocket.

The vet gave Billy an injection and head cone to prevent him worrying his wound. Billy hated it, the rest of our pets loved it.



Billy Boy was not the kingpin in this household for sure. Eventually everything settled down and a pecking order was established with Popsie firmly in top position and Billy near the bottom of the pile. At least all were friends. In fact, it became a common sight to find Billy and Popsie snuggled up on the sofa having a snooze.



There one or two (or maybe more) aspects of living in a family home that Billy had not quite got the hang of. The first we noticed was that Billy would not go upstairs. We tried to gently encourage him by pushing his haunches towards the bottom step but he just locked himself to the spot like he was super-glued in place. Meggie even dangled a yummy "Doggidelite" treat (his new fave num num), from the top step but he never even flinched. You see, he had never navigated stairs before as he had always slept in the barn. Stairs were really frightening to him for reasons only Billy knew.

"I am not going up there" said Billy to himself, "It's not a hill, I can't see over the top of it and anyway it looks so steep, I might fall and break a leg!"

"I don't even know what's up there, nah, it's too scary."

"Here Billy, look your fave treat, come on boy, you can sleep on my bed." Pleaded Meggie from the top step.

We tried this for several nights and then just left it as Billy looked very nervous and upset.

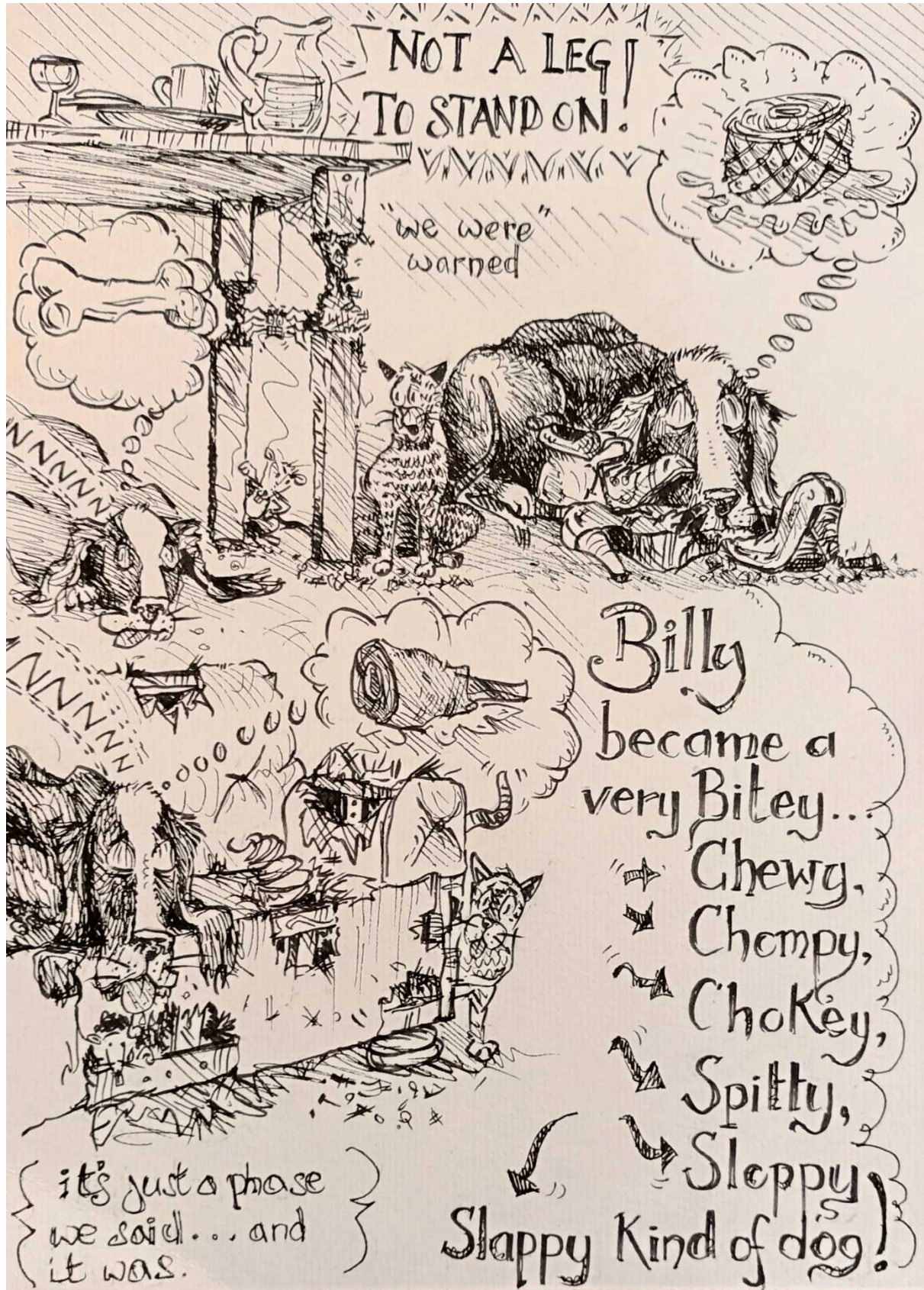
A couple of weeks later, Meggie awoke to find Billy snoozing at at the foot of her bed. What she didn't know was that Billy had spent five minutes on each ascending step as he made his way up, he was exhausted!



Do you remember Mrs. Barkers words of caution earlier, I do, she gave me a little warning about Billy regressing to puppy-like behaviours. I also remember thinking, - Nah, not gonna happen! Well she was right, I was wrong, and our furniture and other assorted items around the house were victims. Billy managed to chew his way through our sofas and arm chairs, the table and chair legs and Julies best stiletto court shoes were relieved of their heels just for fun. The list goes on but you get the idea.

We tried everything, toys designed to be chewed , chewy treats, tug ropes, but no, as soon as he was alone he chewed his way through anything handy and expensive. It just had to run its course.

In fact , Julie was secretly pleased as she got to shop for new shiny furniture and shoes!



Chapter Four: Out And About

Mrs. Barker also told me to keep Billy on the lead for two to three weeks so he didn't accidentally get lost. She said that after he has got used to us there will be an "invisible lead" between us and him meaning that he would always keep us within his view when on "walkies" once he felt safe and secure.

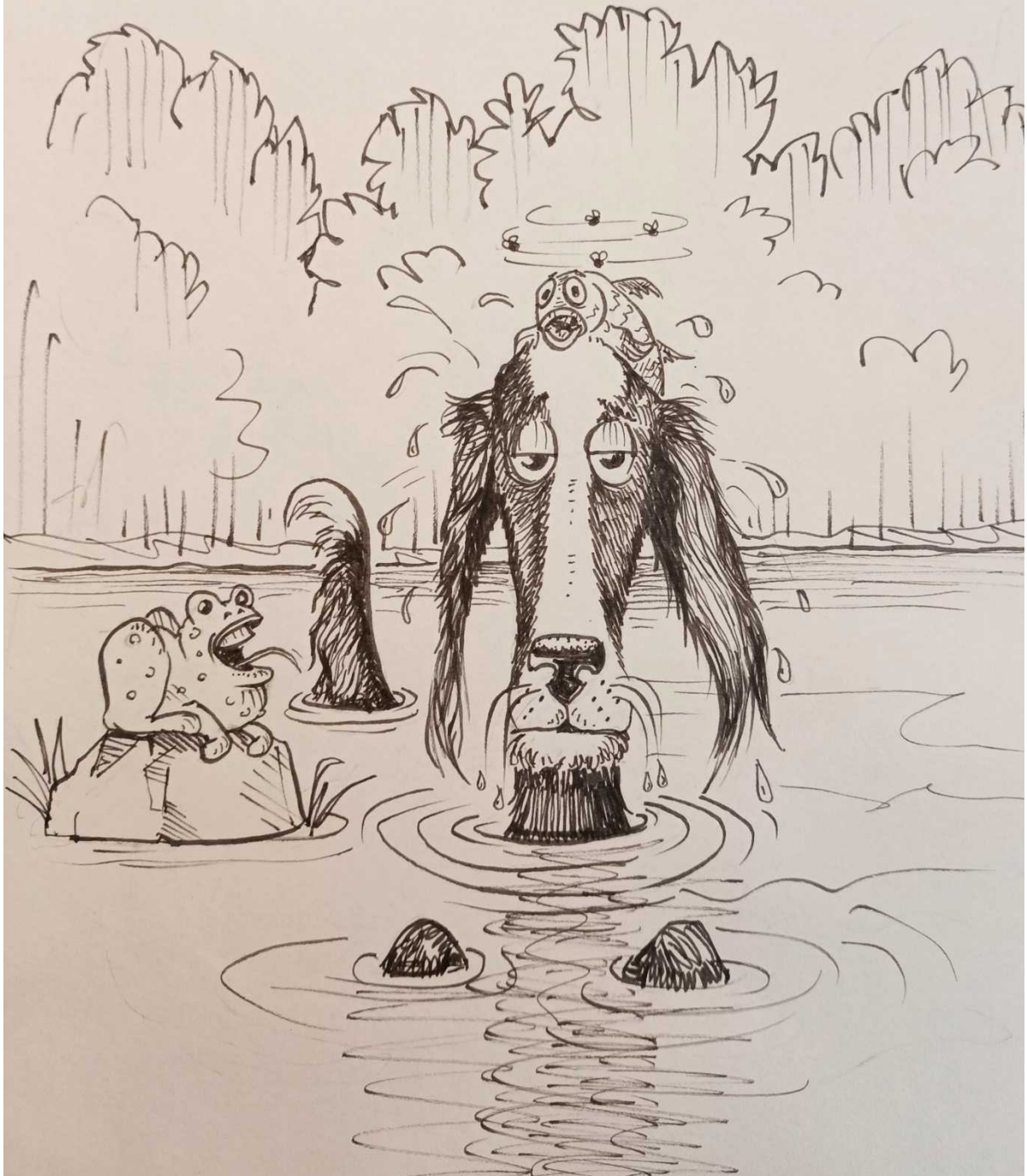
Unfortunately the two or three week grace period didn't take account of my left arm and shoulder, that's the arm grasping his leash. Billy pulled! I mean really pulled and I was convinced my leash arm was a good 10 centimetres longer than the other arm. So I took a chance and let him off his leash in the woods. He shot off like a high speed arrow from a bow.....Straight towards Diple Pond. Thing was, he didn't show any sign of slowing down as he rapidly approached the shore side. It occurred to me that maybe he wasn't familiar with ponds and rivers living up in the hills as he used to.

I shouted after him, warning him that he wasn't able to run on water. He wasn't listening and his last earth bound leap propelled him forward to the centre of the pond where he promptly dropped like a brick until he was sitting neck deep in muddy water with a puzzled expression on his face.

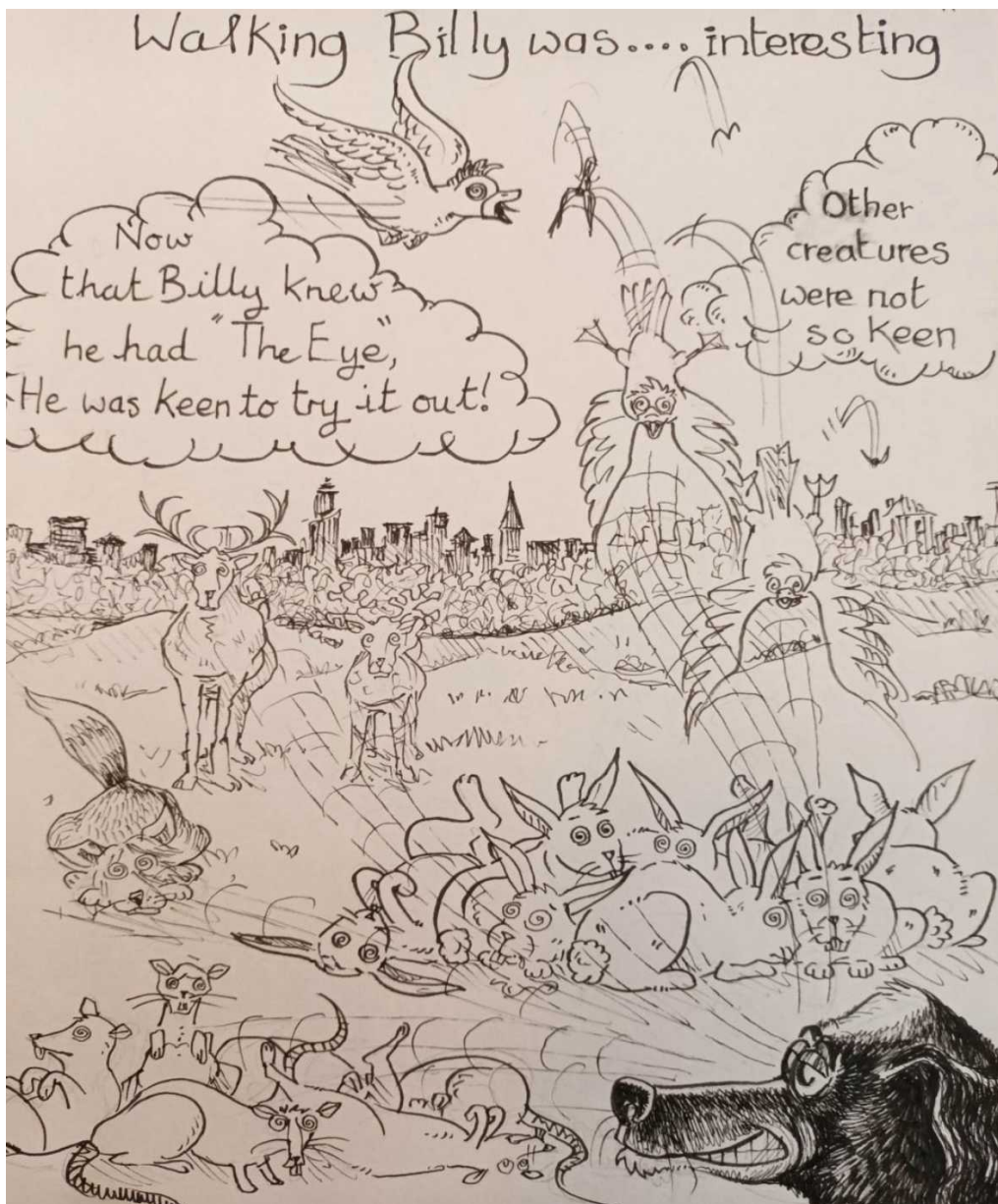
Well, he wont do that again, will he!?



Billy Boy discovered...
He couldn't walk on water!



As you know Billy Boy had found his hidden Sheep Dog gift. THE EYE! Unfortunately it was too late for sheep herding duties but there were plenty of other animals about that were fun to freeze, herd, and put under his Hypno Gaze; so he did. Other dogs, annoying cats, birds, rabbits, and rodents of all kinds were fair game. It took a couple of weeks for the novelty to wear off before Billy got fed up freezing and herding all creatures great and small.



All the other animals could now rest easily should they see Billy walking by, he had made his mark .The question now was.....Was Billy safe from them?

There was one particular little fellow, a frequent visitor to our back garden and those gardens either side, known as Hoggy. He was a hedgehog and our household and our neighbours left out dog food for him during the cooler autumn months.

We didn't factor in just what Billy might make of the situation when he came across Hoggy having a good old nosh of some "Dashing Dog" dog food in the back garden. He may have been playing with Hoggy or he may have been seeing Hoggy off, we were not sure which it was but we did see the result of that unfortunate meeting. Hoggy was fine, he just waddled off, Billy was not so fine. He looked like one of grannies pin cushions-on a bad day!

That was the one and only time Billy ever tried tackling a hedgehog we are pleased to say.



Those first few months were very eventful, full of surprises and challenging at times. However, as Billy settled in he stopped chewing, never attempted water walking again, and stopped using The Eye on anything that moved. Billy was becoming chilled. Everybody loved him and seemed to want to feed him. I was a little suspicious he was using a covert version of the eye to charm yummy treats out of just about anyone he met. His favourite person outside of the family was Pedro the Bin Man who never failed to stop by for a nice head pat and a treat for Billy. He was like jelly in Pedro's hands, they were Besties!

A new adventure was just around the corner and Billy was to move once again. This time however he was staying with his family as they travelled half way around the world.

But that is another story for another day.

Billy Boy Part 2 – Billy Boy Comes Home



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