

## A Boy's Best Friend



It was Saturday morning and I was bored. I had no one to play with and nothing to do.

“If we had a dog, I could take it for a walk,” I said.

Mum gave a big sigh. “You know why we can’t have a dog Max. When you’re at school and I’m at work who would look after it?”

I sighed too and went off to the park where I saw some boys from my class.

“Here comes Ticky,” one of them said. It was Jack.

“Clear off,” he shouted. “We don’t play with weirdos.”

I walked away.

I saw the black man from the shop in my street. He was throwing a ball for his big golden dog. I stopped to watch.

“You throw it for him,” the man said. “He’s tired me out.”

I picked up the ball and threw it hard; a long, angry throw. I don’t think I cared if it was too far for the dog but he streaked after it, fast as the wind. He soon came running back with the ball in his mouth. He dropped it at my feet. He looked up at me. His eyes were bright and he seemed to be smiling. He looked cute.

I was ticcig badly but I threw the ball again - not so far this time. In fact I threw the ball for ages. The dog loved the game and I enjoyed it so much that while we were playing my tics went away.

“We’ve got to go now”, the man said at last.

I began to walk back home. The man let me hold the dog’s lead until we reached his shop.

“I’m Mr Stuart,” he told me. “And your new friend there is Goldie.”

"I'm Max," I said.

"Well Max," said Mr Stuart. "If kids call you names, that's down to them. Don't blame yourself."

Mr Stuart must have seen Jack being mean. I looked down feeling embarrassed.

"It's because of my tics," I mumbled.

"Well tics aren't mean," said Mr Stuart. "Any more than my black skin is mean. But if people call you names or call me names - well that sure is mean!"

Mr Stuart handed me a bar of chocolate.

"Payment for playing with Goldie."

"Thanks."

Goldie licked my hand.

"He's not mean," I said.

Back home I didn't tell Mum about Jack. It would only make her sad. Quickly I told her about Goldie instead.

The next day Mum and me called into Mr Stuart's shop. Mum wanted to say thank you for the chocolate and I was pleased. I might see Goldie.

"Thank you for yesterday," Mum said.

"Woof," I heard from behind the counter.

"Goldie knows it's you Max," laughed Mr Stuart.

Goldie's head appeared above the counter. I leaned forward and stroked him.

"He's awesome," I said.

The smile left Mr Stuart's face. He looked sad.

"Yeah, he is isn't he? But I can't keep him much longer. My landlord won't allow pets. Says I can't have him back at my flat at night. He's got to leave by the end of the week."

This gave me such a great idea I jumped up and down with excitement.

"Let's share him," I said to Mr Stuart. "He could be with you in the daytime and with us at night."

I turned to Mum. "Please," I pleaded.

Mr Stuart and I looked at Mum and waited.

After a long pause she said, "It sounds like a good idea," and there and then Mum and Mr Stuart discussed the arrangements for a shared dog.

It works really well. On my way to school I leave Goldie at the shop. I pick him up on my way home and he wags his tail like fury and his whole body wags. At home I play with him and give him his tea. At night he sleeps on my bed.

On Saturdays Mr Stuart and I take Goldie to the park and on Sundays Mr Stuart lets me help in his shop. I love helping in the shop and when I serve them, the other kids in my class are a bit jealous. Most of them are friendly, and even Jack has stopped being mean. But my best friend, who always will be, is my great, good-as-gold dog.

### **Points for Discussion**

Now you've read Max's story, what do you think about these:

- (1) Why do you think that Jack says Max is weird?
- (2) How can you tell that Mr Stuart is kind, generous and fair?
- (3) Why did Max's tics go away during the game with Goldie?
- (4) Why didn't Max care if his first throw was too far for Goldie?
- (5) What does Mr Stuart say is mean and not mean?
- (6) Why do you think he says all this to Max?
- (7) Why do you think Jack has stopped being mean?
- (8) What makes Goldie so special to Max?