

MITZI



Chips, the policeman's son, had a Labrador pup called Mitzi. Mitzi's parents had been excellent police dogs so what more natural than that she, too, should be given a trial at Training School? She'd seemed healthy and strong, with sturdy legs and a proud, firm head.

It required less than a week, however, to discover that Mitzi wasn't going to make it. She just didn't have the right qualities. Obedience, for example: on the third day her handler tried teaching Mitzi to run and fetch a stuffed rabbit. Mitzi merely thought this was some kind of joke and instead of bringing it back and dropping it at the handler's feet; she tore it apart and hid it in somebody's allotment, knocking down several bean poles along the way. On the fourth day, Mitzi was taught to jump through an open window. Instead, she picked a closed one. You could hear the smashing of glass for miles. The inspector who lived in the house wasn't too pleased.

That was the end of Mitzi's career as police dog. With some hesitation, her handler, who was a neighbor of Chips, had

suggested that Mitzi might turn out to be a reasonable house dog and pet. Even more hesitantly, Chips' father had agreed to give her a try. Chips, who had never had a dog before, was delighted. He started his own course of training at once. Sometimes he wondered if his neighbor was all that good as a dog handler. Perhaps he simply had not understood Mitzi. Mitzi had a mind of her own, but she could be obedient in her own way.

Most evenings Chips took Mitzi for walks along the nearby canal, or the wide river beyond. This particular day, late in October, was misty, muddy and damp. And Mitzi's collar came out again, somehow. It couldn't have actually broken in two; and the lead could not have snapped because Chips' father had insisted on it being as stout and thick as a halter for breaking in a wild stallion. The reason for these not infrequent partings of company was that Mitzi was big for her age, just as Chips was small for his. When Mitzi got it into her mind to tug, Chips had either to let go or take off and fly like a kite on a string.

When Mitzi disappears, in her own time she would pick up Chips' footsteps and return to him, but not tonight, not yet. Seeing and hearing no evidence of Mitzi's whereabouts, Chips tried his familiar canal path with the iron bridge a couple of hundred yards along towards the faint lights of an estate. Mitzi would turn up eventually wagging her tail, showing her teeth, up to her thighs in thick, oozing black mud which smelt of garbage.

Too right ! There she was, at last, something remarkably like a grin on her doggy face. Chips didn't bother to refit Mitzi's slipped collar. She followed him closely for a while, perhaps thinking Chips could

somehow protect her from another spanner flung at her from one of the men in the workshops. He wandered back towards the walkway along the big river, crossing the access road bypassing the weir. Here were big cargo boats, sitting out on the shimmering water waiting high tide with tugs blinking in the mist like fireflies. Chips found half a bar of chocolate in his pocket. He sat in a shelter, put his feet on the slatted seats, and gave Mitzi a piece of chocolate and watched her sniff along the edge of the walk.

Suddenly a girl came whizzing by, traveling with incredible speed and skill on a skateboard. There were bulging shopping bags in each hand. She reached the shelter and caught sight of Chips. She saw Mitzi too, dashing out of nowhere. Mitzi liked little girls, especially if they were moving fast. She bounded after the girl who slithered in alarm to a standstill. She abandoned the skateboard and picked up one of the bags she had dropped. The contents had spilled: tea, a burst bag of sugar, a scatter of buns.

"Sorry," said Chips. "She doesn't mean any harm. That sugar ..."

"You'd better buzz off," she said.

"Only trying to help."

"Leave me alone."

Chips let her go. He had tried his best to help. He looked around and discovered he had lost Mitzi again.

Answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Why did it seem natural that Mitzi should be sent for training ?
2. In what ways did Mitzi appear physically fit to be a police dog ?
3. What did the short time of training establish about Mitzi ?
4. Who was Mitzi's handler at Training School ?
5. Give one excuse Chips made for Mitzi's failure.
6. Why did Chips let Mitzi go when she tugged ?
7. Describe the state Mitzi usually returns in after running off on her own.
8. What had the girl probably been doing before she met Chips and Mitzi ?
9. We are told Mitzi likes little girls. What does she like to do to them ?
10. Why do you think the girl asked to be left alone ?