

CHAPTER ONE

Slanty Eyes

Mitsi Kashino packed her sketch pad, her binder, and her worry in her book bag. Dash sniffed the straps before flattening himself on top of it, muzzle resting on his front paws. He watched Mitsi with worried brown eyes. She ruffled the scruffy almond-colored fur on his head.

“I wish I could tuck you inside.” Dash had no idea that Christmas vacation was over, that it was time for Mitsi to go back to school. She lifted a blue headband from her dresser, and paused in front of the mirror before slipping it over her straight black hair. Things might be better, now that more time had passed. Maybe there’d be an end to the mean notes in her desk and funny looks in the hall. Maybe school could be back to normal, even if nothing else was.

Mitsi wrestled her book bag out from under Dash, whose tail wagged hopefully. She rubbed

those floppy ears that looked like they'd been dipped in Obaachan's tea. He whimpered so she picked him up, rubbing her cheek against his fur, soft as a baby blanket. "It'll be fine, won't it?"

Dash licked her chin. "Thanks, buddy." She squeezed him again, then put him on the floor. "You stay, now." She motioned with her hand. "I'll see you later."

Ted left for school before her, so Mitsi slipped out the front door by herself, blocking her ears to Dash's whimpers. With book bag and umbrella in hand, she raced down the front steps. She didn't want to be late meeting Mags and Judy. They always went away for the holidays — Mags to her grandma's, and Judy to her aunt and uncle's — so it had been two whole weeks since they'd seen one another. Usually, they were inseparable, like Betsy, Tacy, and Tib in those books. Mitsi didn't even know what her friends had gotten for Christmas! She couldn't wait to tell them what she'd found under her tree: a brand-new sketch pad and a box of chalk pastels. The kind real artists use. Mitsi had spent hours on the pictures tucked in her sketch pad. There were several of Dash — one of him curled up on her bed.