

THE DOG'S MEOW

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Chapter One

Mina

A cool breeze rippled the white tents, and Mina shivered. Not just from the almost-fall chill in the air, but from excitement. Sure, she'd been coming to the farmers' market in downtown Fairbanks every weekend since before she could walk. Her dad's tourism business, Golden Heart Dogsledding Excursions, attracted lots of travelers looking for a real Alaskan adventure. And the farmers' market was just as popular with locals—everyone came out, especially when the weather was nice.

But today was exciting for another reason.

“Ready, Mina?” Dad asked. He was standing behind a table covered in pamphlets and photos of huskies. Mina's mom was a professional dog breeder,



and the picture of their newest litter of fuzzy gray pups with curious blue eyes and lolling pink tongues was featured in the center of the table. Kodiak and Suka, two of Dad's current sled dog team members, flanked him on either side, ready to greet anyone who stopped by the tent.

"I'm ready," Mina said eagerly. Niko, the team's lead dog, nuzzled her hand encouragingly. For what felt like the hundredth time, Mina checked her setup: a rack with six T-shirts, each displaying a different design, a box with another twenty-four folded shirts, and a sign that read:

CLOCKWORK T-SHIRTS BY
MINA'S ORIGINAL DESIGNS
ONLY \$10 EACH!

ClockWork was Mina's favorite band. Actually, that was a huge understatement. ClockWork was Mina's reason for *living*. (Well, maybe that was a little overdramatic.) There were six members, each one with their own distinct look and vocal style,

and Mina could sing along with any of their harmonies on every single track of their debut album, *Borrowed*. She also knew each of their favorite foods, animals, colors, and inspirational quotes, thanks to the interviews she'd managed to find online. The personalities and unique characteristics of the members had been the inspiration for her T-shirt designs.

Mina had spent most of her summer break working on her business plan, with lots of help from Dad. She'd bought the art and silk-screening supplies with her allowance money and hand printed all thirty shirts. At ten dollars each, she only needed to sell eight shirts to break even. And if she sold out completely, she'd make \$220 in profit!

“Logan! Mina!”

Niko's ears perked up, and her tail began to wag. Mina and Dad both turned to see Hope Wakefield ducking under the tent next to theirs, carrying a giant cooler with the words HOPE'S FIREWEED HONEY stenciled on the front.

“Hi, Ms. Wakefield!” Mina called back. “Need any help setting up?”

“Nah, but thanks, sweetie.” Ms. Wakefield blew a stray strand of graying blond hair out of her eyes as she set the cooler on the ground. Straightening up, she winked at Mina. “Although I may need help finishing off these samples by the end of the day. I’m debuting a new flavor—star thistle!”

“Ooh, *yum*,” Mina said emphatically. “Did you bring any wildflower honey truffles?”

“Of course!” Ms. Wakefield glanced at Niko, who gazed back at her eagerly, and she laughed. “Yes, Niko, I brought peanut butter honey treats, too.”

Niko yipped appreciatively as Ms. Wakefield began unpacking bottles of honey from the cooler. Ms. Wakefield’s eyes flicked over to the rack of T-shirts, and she shot Dad a questioning look. “New merch, Logan?”

“Actually, you’re looking at the debut of Mina’s Original Designs,” Dad replied, and Mina felt herself flush with pride—and a fresh wave of anxiety.

Ms. Wakefield’s eyes widened. “Is that so?”

An entrepreneur at age twelve, eh?” Smiling, she walked over, still holding a few bottles of buckwheat honey.

“I made them all by hand,” Mina said, stepping to the side and gesturing to her display. Every time she looked at her fun, colorful designs, she felt like she might burst with pride.

“My goodness,” Ms. Wakefield said. “These are impressive! And what is ClockWork, exactly?”

“A band,” Mina said immediately. “There are six members, so I designed a shirt for each member, based on their personalities and stuff. See how the clock hands on this one are actually tiny chili peppers? That’s because Lyric loves spicy food. Oh, and this one, see how the numbers run counterclockwise? That’s because River is the only member who’s left-handed! And Gentry is obsessed with scary movies, so this one has—”

“Mina, hon,” Dad interrupted gently. “I’m sure Ms. Wakefield wants to finish getting her booth set up.”

Mina looked up at Ms. Wakefield, whose smile

had become rather fixed. “Oh! Yeah, of course,” Mina said sheepishly.

Niko gave her hand a quick lick, and Mina scratched her behind the ears. Sometimes she thought the husky was the only other person—er, dog—who really *got* ClockWork. When Mina played “Time to Make You Mine” in her room, turning her computer speakers to top volume, Niko would roll over on her back and squirm happily on the carpet. And when “Every Second Counts” reached the chorus, Niko would tilt her head back and howl, her mouth a perfectly round O.

Earlier that summer, ClockWork had announced that they were going on their first international tour. Of course, Fairbanks wasn’t one of the stops. The closest one was Seattle, and that was a four-hour flight away! Mina knew she didn’t have a chance of seeing ClockWork live. But suddenly, just listening to their songs didn’t feel like enough anymore. That was when inspiration had struck, and Mina’s Original Designs was born.

As Ms. Wakefield went back to unpacking her

cooler, Dad turned to Mina with a smile. “Do you have that receipt book?”

Mina patted the purple fanny pack around her waist. “Receipts, two pens, and change in tens, fives, and ones,” she recited.

“Let me know if you need any help,” Dad said, planting a kiss on the top of her head. “Good luck, hon!”

“Thanks!”

Mina took a deep breath and faced the front of the tent. A few early birds were already at Mr. Waska’s Wildlife Photography tent, admiring the massive framed image of a moose bull staring right at the camera, delicately holding a pine cone between its teeth. On the other side of Dad’s tent, Jeannie and Lisa Wilson-Gray chatted amiably with a small group of tourists, who ended up buying several of their hand-carved birch bark bowls to ship back home to Boston.

Mina watched them, one hand mindlessly toying with Niko’s soft, pointy ears. She hadn’t even thought about shipping! Then again, it was probably

a lot easier to pack a souvenir T-shirt in your suitcase than a souvenir wooden punch bowl.

As usual, Dad's tent was popular with the tourists. Of course, that was mostly due to Niko, Kodiak, and Suka, who had a little routine that always did the trick when things slowed down. First, Suka would wander away from their booth and trot up and down the path between the tents. An almost purely snow-white husky, Suka never had a problem getting people's attention. When someone stopped to greet her, she'd give their hand a quick sniff, allow them to pat her head once or twice, then trot back into Dad's tent. The tourists would usually follow, then burst out laughing at the sight of Kodiak, a seventy-five-pound ball of black-and-tan fur, lying flat on his back and waiting for his belly rub. As the tourists indulged Kodiak, Niko would emerge from behind the table carrying a Golden Heart Dogsledding Excursions pamphlet between her teeth, which she would present to the tourists. They always found the whole thing utterly charming, and everyone left with a pamphlet and a smile on their face.