

# THE PUPPY PLACE

BARKLEY



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## For Lauren and the herd

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# CHAPTER ONE

“Over here, Buddy!” Lizzie clapped her hands and watched, smiling, as her little brown puppy looked up, spotted her, and dashed toward her, leaving behind a cluster of other dogs in all different sizes and shapes.

“What a good boy,” Lizzie said as Buddy sat panting in front of her. She popped a liver treat into his mouth and he gobbled it down, wagging his tail. Then he grinned up at her and wagged his tail even harder. You didn’t have to be able to speak Dog to know what he was saying.

“You want more treats?” Lizzie asked. She laughed. “Maybe later. Go on and play.” She waved



him away, and Buddy zipped off to meet up with another bunch of dogs, over by the wading pool. Lizzie shook her head as she watched him go. Buddy really was such a good dog. Even here at the dog park, with so many wonderful distractions, he came to her when she called.

Lizzie loved the dog park almost as much as Buddy did. She loved watching all the different dogs play together. There were big ones and small ones, shy dogs and outgoing pups—and they all seemed to get along. Their owners were interesting, too. There were young couples, older people, and sometimes a mom or dad who was juggling kids and dogs, running from the playground to the dog park and back again.

Why didn't she come more often? Lizzie usually only went to the dog park when she had a foster puppy who needed some extra socialization—that



is, a puppy who needed to learn how to get along with other dogs and people.

Lizzie's family, the Petersons, were a foster family for puppies who needed homes. They took each one in just for a little while, until they could find the perfect home for that puppy. Every puppy was different, and Lizzie loved getting to know them and figuring out what type of home would be best.

With most puppies, it was enough to stay home and play with Buddy in the Petersons' fenced yard. Buddy had started out as a foster puppy, but he'd ended up being a permanent part of the family. Now, along with Lizzie's younger brothers, Charles and the Bean, Buddy helped each new foster puppy feel at home. He was always friendly and welcoming, always ready to share his toys, his treats, and his family.

But it had been a little while since their last foster puppy, and Lizzie had started to wonder if Buddy was feeling a bit bored and lonely. The dog park was the perfect solution. He could run and play and meet new dogs—without even having to share his toys!

Now Buddy was zooming around in circles, chasing and being chased—two of his favorite things to do. In front of Buddy was a tiny, fluffy, rust-colored Pomeranian, yapping his head off as he scampered along. Behind Buddy was a big, galumphing golden retriever who wagged her feathery tail as she ran, letting out deep woof-woofs, as if yelling “Wait for me, wait for me!”

Soon, some other dogs joined the fun: Lizzie spotted a sleek gray Weimaraner and a curly-haired Airedale mix. (Lizzie could identify the breed of pretty much any dog she saw, since she was always studying the Dog Breeds of the



World poster on her bedroom wall.) Then she saw a pair of brown-and-white spaniels that looked very familiar. “Zig! Zag!” Lizzie yelled when she saw them. They had been two of her favorite foster pups, even if they had been quite a handful. The hardest part had been telling them apart since they were practically twins. Their coloring was exactly the same, with each brown spot in the same place on each pup. Lizzie headed over to talk to their owner. She didn’t always get a chance to see her foster puppies once they were adopted. She couldn’t wait to hear how they were doing.

“Hey, Lizzie!”

Lizzie turned—and groaned. Her best friend, Maria, was running toward her across the dog park.

Lizzie loved Maria, she really did. But she knew why Maria was here.



“Your mom told me you were here. I thought we were going to get together after dog-walking, to talk about the sleepover!” Maria said breathlessly as she approached.

Lizzie, Maria, and two other friends had a dog-walking business. Every day after school, they walked dogs for people who needed a little help with their pets. Lizzie usually did some training as well, since she loved helping dogs learn how to be their best selves. She was always happy to help when a client begged her to teach a dog to stop barking, or come when called.

She and Maria had both done their dog-walking routes that day, but then Lizzie had “forgotten” that they’d made plans to meet. “Oh, right,” she said now. “Sure.” Maria was really excited about a sleepover party she was planning, and Lizzie—wasn’t. Why? Because it was going to be a Spooky Sleepover, where everyone told their scariest stories.



Scary stories were very popular lately in Lizzie's grade. Everyone talked about the horror movies they'd watched over the weekend, or the Goosebumps books they were reading.

Lizzie didn't watch horror movies.

She didn't read scary stories.

She did not see the point. Wasn't being scared a bad thing? It was for her. If she heard a scary story it stuck with her forever, keeping her awake at night. Why did people think it was fun to be scared? She just didn't get it—but so far, she had not shared these feelings with Maria. She didn't want her best friend to think she was a chicken, or a baby.

"Yeah, great!" Lizzie pasted on a big smile, pretending to be excited about the party. "I'm so glad you found me. So tell me what you're thinking."

Maria started to talk about skeleton decorations—"Like a family of skeletons, maybe

even a dog skeleton, maybe the kind that move!” she said—and about scary snacks, like hot dogs made to look like bloody fingers.

Lizzie nodded and smiled. She didn’t even want to think about bloody fingers, much less eat them. Ew. But she pretended to be into all of it. “Cool,” she said, and “Ooh, scary!” She felt as if the sleepover was a monster that was walking slowly toward her. She just wanted to run away—but how could she let Maria down?

“Whoa, watch out!” Maria said suddenly.

But it was too late. Out of nowhere, something huge banged hard into Lizzie. A monster? Lizzie turned as she tried to find her balance. She saw shaggy white fur and a wide-open mouth, all sharp teeth and pink tongue.

But it wasn’t a monster.

It was a dog.

