



CHAPTER TWO

As soon as Kat got to class, Grace told her that she could go to Tails Up after school, too.

“Oh, good!” said Kat. “I’m excited to meet the new puppy, aren’t you?”

“So excited!” said Grace. She sat at the desk next to Kat. Grace had soft brown eyes. Her red hair was in two long braids. They reminded Kat of Anne from *Anne of Green Gables*. “Did your aunt tell you what breed the puppy is?” she asked.

Kat shook her head. “Aunt Jenn just said that she was really sweet and we would love her.” She grinned. “It doesn’t seem possible that anyone could love puppies as much as you and I and Maya do . . .”

“But I think your aunt does,” said Grace, finishing Kat’s thought.

The afternoon flew by. When school was over for the day, Kat and Grace grabbed their backpacks and their jackets. They raced outside to meet Maya. She was waiting for them at the school entrance.

“The new little puppy awaits us,” Maya said dramatically. “Let us depart henceforth to Tails Up!”

The girls chatted as they hurried down the street. After a few blocks, they cut through the park toward Grace’s house. It was on the street that ran down the far side of the park. Grace and her family had moved to Orchard Valley

just after school started. Before that, Grace had lived on a farm.

When they reached Grace's house, Grace ran in to drop off her backpack. In a few minutes she was back, and the three girls continued on their way.

Maya suddenly frowned. "You. Joke girl." She pointed at Kat.

Grace couldn't help grinning. She knew what was coming.

"We need the answer. And we need it now," Maya demanded.

"What breed of dog will laugh at any joke?" Grace chimed in, reminding Kat. "You never told us the answer!"

"And it better be hilarious," warned Maya. "It is just not fair to torture us by asking the joke in the morning and then making us wait all day for an answer that is . . ." She looked at Grace. "Tell her, Grace," she said.

“Horrible,” said Grace.

“Terrible,” added Maya.

“Unbelievably bad,” said Grace.

“So,” continued Maya, as they turned the corner. “Spill. What breed of dog will laugh at any joke?”

Kat looked at Grace and then at Maya. “You can’t guess?”

The two girls rolled their eyes at Kat.

“I think it’s pretty obvious,” said Kat, trying not to laugh. “The breed of dog that will laugh at any joke is a . . . chi-ha-ha.”

“So bad!” Grace cried.

“All-time worst!” Maya gasped.

Kat’s two friends began to chase her while they giggled. She ran ahead of them, grinning.

After a while, the girls reached the main street. They sprinted past a restaurant, the barber shop, the bank and several stores. When they reached Tails Up! Grooming and Boarding they

stopped and caught their breath. The bell on the front door jingled as they went inside. Tony, the receptionist, waved to them from behind the front desk. He was speaking to a client who held a newly groomed black-and-white teacup poodle in her hands.

Kat waved back. Then she glanced around the waiting room. Two clients were waiting for Aunt Jenn. A young man sat with a black standard schnauzer at his feet. A woman in a woolly white jacket and hat sat with a fluffy black-and-white Lhasa Apso on her knee.

Kat nudged Maya when she saw the woman. Some people made Kat and Maya think of certain dog breeds. Sometimes dog owners and their dogs looked like one another.

Maya giggled. “Twins,” she said to Kat.

Grace was also giggling, but for a different reason. The client at the front desk was holding her tiny teacup poodle so that she was eye level



with Tony's cat, Marmalade, who sat on the counter. Tony's fifteen-year-old tabby cat went everywhere with him. She came in to work with him each day and sat on the counter glaring down at the dogs. Now Marmalade rose to her feet. With her back arched, she stalked down the counter. She curled up in a disgruntled ball with her back to the friendly teacup poodle.

"Poor Marmalade," Grace joked. "She has to put up with so much!"

Kat and Maya grinned. They all knew that Marmalade was snobby on the outside, but she was a marshmallow on the inside.

“Girls,” called Tony. “Jenn just finished grooming Ms. Tinkerbelle and she has slipped into the doggy-daycare room to check on the new boarder. Do you want to join her there?”

“You bet,” said Kat. “Thanks, Tony!”

The three girls hurried down the hallway and into the doggy-daycare room. It had a large fenced-in area where dogs could play. A staircase led to Aunt Jenn’s apartment and a big room for puppy training. There was a door that led outside to a fenced-in yard. There were four large dog kennels along one wall.

“We’re here, Aunt Jenn!” cried Kat, as they entered the room.

“Oh, this is such good timing!” Aunt Jenn wore her pink grooming coat. As usual her brown hair was pulled back into a ponytail. In her arms, she cuddled a little white-and-chestnut puppy. “I am just checking on our newest little guest. Girls, let me introduce you to Nutmeg.”

The girls hurried over.

“Oh, what a pretty face!” cooed Grace.

The puppy had chestnut ears and chestnut markings around her eyes. She had a wide white blaze that ran down the centre of her face. Her tail was long and had a white tip.

Kat gently stroked Nutmeg. Her fur was smooth as silk. Her ears felt like velvet.

“Nutmeg is ten weeks old,” said Aunt Jenn. “She is a Cavalier King Charles spaniel.”

“A Cavalier King Charles spaniel,” Maya repeated slowly. “What a name!”

“It is certainly a mouthful.” Aunt Jenn smiled.

“What does *Cavalier* mean?” asked Grace.

“A Cavalier was a knight who supported King Charles the First,” said Kat. “He was the king of England, back in the 1600s. The next king, King Charles the Second, really liked this breed of spaniel. He always had two or three with him.”



“So the breed was named after King Charles the Second?” said Grace.

Kat nodded. “Yup.”

Maya and Grace grinned at each other. Kat knew so much about dogs that Maya called her Einstein. Kat read lots about dogs on the Internet and in her favourite book, *Dog Breeds of the World*. Kat hoped one day she would know as much about dogs as her aunt did.

“Would one of you like to hold little Nutmeg?”

Aunt Jenn asked. “How about you, Kitty-Kat?” That was her special nickname for Kat.

Kat’s heart fluttered. *Of course* she wanted to hold the adorable puppy, but she knew her friends did, too.

“Let Maya go first,” said Kat.

Maya smiled gratefully at Kat and held her arms out for Nutmeg.

“Oh, look at you,” Maya murmured, as she cuddled the puppy. But the puppy didn’t even look up. She just stared ahead of her with sad brown eyes.

“So, here’s the scoop.” Aunt Jenn popped her bubble gum. “Nutmeg’s owner, Tracy Gulian, had to leave this morning to visit her sick mother. She arranged for her neighbour to go over and feed her two cats, Oliver and Buddy. But she couldn’t find anyone to look after her new puppy. So Nutmeg is staying here for four nights, until Sunday.”

Aunt Jenn smiled. “Girls, would you be able to come by and play with Nutmeg after school for the next two days and on Saturday? It would be wonderful if you could.”

“I can,” said Kat.

Maya and Grace said they would check.

“Righty-roo,” said Aunt Jenn. “Thank you so much, girls.”

Then Aunt Jenn showed the girls which kennel Nutmeg was using. She pointed out Nutmeg’s leash, and she explained what treats the puppy could have.

Kat listened to her aunt, but she also watched Nutmeg. The puppy didn’t wiggle with excitement. Her eyes didn’t sparkle. She didn’t struggle to be set down so she could run around. She didn’t act like any of the other puppies Kat had helped look after at Tails Up.

“Aunt Jenn, is Nutmeg all right?” Kat said. “She seems so quiet.”

“Many puppies take time to settle when they are away from home,” said Aunt Jenn. “Nutmeg hasn’t been here very long. I’m certain she’ll cheer up after you three spend some time with her.”

Aunt Jenn gave a gentle tug on Nutmeg’s ears and then hurried back to the grooming studio.

“I hope you’re okay, puppy,” said Maya.