



CHAPTER ONE

Puppies were scampering across the grass. There must have been over twenty of them!

Some puppies were brown, some were black, some were brown with white spots. Some puppies had perky ears and some had floppy ears. Some had big, wide paws; some had little dainty paws. All the puppies had sparkling eyes and wagging tails.

Kat was in her classroom, sitting at her desk.

Her eyes were closed. She was having her favourite puppy daydream.

Her mother and father smile at her.

“Of course you can have a puppy, Kat,” her mother says.

Her father sweeps out his arm. “Have any one you want!”

Kat smiles, too. She looks at all the puppies, and she tries to choose. The little red Irish setter puppy gazing up at her with the dark brown eyes? The black and white Dalmatian puppy tumbling across the grass? The adorable wheaten terrier pup with the brown face and the black muzzle?

Suddenly the bell rang. School was over for the day, and the dream ended. But that was okay. Kat had puppy plans this afternoon.

“Let’s go!” Kat said to Grace, who was at the desk next to hers. The girls jumped out of their seats, grabbed their things and made a beeline for the classroom door. But before they reached

it, they heard their teacher's voice.

"Katherine, Grace, where are you off to in such a hurry?" Ms. Mitchell stood at the front of the classroom. She was smiling.

Kat liked her grade four teacher a lot. For one thing, Ms. Mitchell knew how much Kat loved puppies — and her teacher liked puppies, too.

"You won't believe it, Ms. Mitchell!" said Kat. "Remember how I told you my aunt opened up a dog-grooming salon? We get to help her with a puppy today!"

Ms. Mitchell smiled. "How wonderful!"

"Her business is doing really well," explained Kat. "She thought it would take some time to get going, but she was swamped with customers all last week. So she asked Maya and me to help out after school. Did you know that Grace loves puppies, just like me?"

"I had an idea that she might," Ms. Mitchell confessed, her brown eyes sparkling.



Grace chimed in, “When Kat found out, she asked me to help out at Tails Up, too!”

Grace was new to the town of Orchard Valley. She was slim, with brown eyes. Grace often wore her long red hair in braids. She reminded Kat of Anne of Green Gables.

It had taken a few days, but Kat and Grace had become friends. Not best friends, like Kat and Maya — they did almost everything together. Maya liked to tease Kat and make her laugh. She said, “You love puppies, but your name is Kat? That’s crazy!” In return, Kat helped Maya with school projects and told her silly jokes. They had been in the same class since kindergarten, but not this year.

But now Kat had a new friend: Grace. And Maya had agreed to try to be friends with Grace too, even though the girls didn’t know each other at all, even though they didn’t seem to have much in common. Grace was quiet. Maya wasn’t. Grace had trouble saying how she felt about things. Maya did not.

Kat was keeping her fingers crossed that her two friends — her best friend and her new friend — would get along. This was the first time they were going to hang out together. They were

going to Tails Up together, and Kat had invited both girls to come over for dinner after. Maya had been to Kat's house at least a million times, but it would be Grace's very first time.

"Well, how lovely!" Ms. Mitchell looked pleased. "Any puppy would be very lucky to have you three looking after him. Have fun, girls!"

Kat and Grace hurried out of the school and across the playground. They stopped to look for Maya. They were all walking to Tails Up together.

"Sorry I'm late." Maya ran up, trying to catch her breath. "Okay, let's go. But just tell me one thing: did I miss the answer to the joke?"

"Oh, right, the joke!" Grace said grinning. She rolled her eyes. Every morning, Kat told a joke. Today it was, "Why are Dalmatians not good at hide-and-seek?" As usual, she made her friends wait forever before she told them the answer.

“So tell us, Kat-nip,” Maya demanded. “Answer.”

“Are you sure?” Kat teased. “You don’t want to guess again?”

“Oh, please. Put us out of our misery,” Maya said. “Right, Grace?”

“Right!” Grace chimed in.

“Here goes: Dalmatians aren’t good at hide-and-seek because they’re always *spotted!*” Kat said.

“Agh!” moaned Grace and Maya.

“Worst joke ever!” Maya complained happily, as they all rushed toward Tails Up.