

CHAPTER ONE

“What are you talking about?” Lizzie glared at Daphne. “Why would we need a different president?”

Daphne shrugged. “Maybe it’s just time for a change.”

Lizzie did not agree. Why did they need to change anything? Everything was working just fine. She looked around the table at Maria and Brianna. Maria, her best friend, did not look back at her. Brianna was looking at Daphne — *her* best friend. Lizzie threw up her hands. “This wasn’t even on our agenda for today,” she said.



It was Friday afternoon, time for the weekly meeting of the AAA Dynamic Dog Walkers. As always, they were at the home of Lizzie Peterson, president. She was president for a lot of good reasons. Number one: she had invented the whole idea of a dog-walking business and had lined up the very first clients. Number two: she knew the most about dogs. She had a library full of books about dogs, and an aunt who ran a doggy day care. She volunteered every week at the local animal shelter, Caring Paws. On top of all that, her family fostered puppies. They took care of puppies who needed help until they found them fantastic forever homes. Number three: she had a lot of good ideas. Number four — well, Lizzie couldn't think of number four just then, but only because Daphne had started talking again.

“It's, like, I just think maybe we need a breath of fresh air, some new ideas.” Daphne looked at



Brianna while she spoke, and Brianna nodded eagerly.

“Fresh air is great,” said Lizzie, crossing her arms. “So are new ideas. But do we really need a different president to have those?” She looked at Maria, waiting for her to nod the way Brianna had nodded at Daphne.

Maria was still looking down at the kitchen table.

“Anyway, we already got some fresh air when we invited you two to join the business,” Lizzie went on, looking back at Brianna and Daphne. “Remember?” The business had originally been just Lizzie and Maria, and they’d been doing just fine. They’d had all the clients they could handle. Then Brianna and Daphne started a competing business, Premium Pet Dog Walkers. Lizzie was furious when she found one of their flyers — offering a lower price per walk — in her very own neighborhood!

“Sure, I remember,” said Daphne. “But I also remember that you only invited us to join when you started a price war and ended up with more clients than you could handle.”

Lizzie sighed. “What’s your point?” she asked. She should have known that having Brianna and Daphne join their business was asking for trouble. Daphne was just so bossy, a total know-it-all.

“My point is that Brianna and I have been part of the business for a while now, and I think it’s time that somebody else had a chance to be president,” Daphne said slowly, as if she were talking to a kindergartner. “What part of that don’t you understand?”

Lizzie slid down in her seat and dangled her hand toward the floor to pet Buddy’s head. Buddy licked her hand. *Buddy*, Lizzie thought. *My true best friend. The only loyal one in the room.* Buddy had been one of her family’s foster dogs — until

the Petersons had decided they were his perfect forever family.

Lizzie frowned at her friend. Why wasn't Maria speaking up? Didn't she see that this was just Daphne trying to grab all the power? Daphne always had to have things her way.

Maria cleared her throat. "Maybe . . ." she started off in a very small voice, "maybe it's not such a bad idea to shake things up a little bit."

Lizzie could not believe her ears. Even her best friend was turning against her. "Are you kidding?" she asked.

Maria shrugged. "What if we just agreed to have an election?" she asked. "We could even make it a secret vote."

"Yes!" said Daphne. "That's all I'm asking for. Like, the democratic process."

"That seems fair," Brianna agreed.

Lizzie shook her head slowly. This was ridiculous.

“Fine,” she said. She put both hands down on the table and pushed back her chair. “If that’s the way you all want it, that’s how it will be. We’ll take a vote at our next meeting. Now, if you don’t mind, we have some dogs to walk.” She stood up and stalked out of the room without waiting for the others to follow.

“Lizzie,” Maria called after her as they left the house. “Come on, Lizzie, don’t be mad.”

Lizzie let her friend catch up. It would be silly not to, since they were both headed to the same neighborhood to walk dogs. “I’m not mad,” Lizzie said, even though she sort of was. “I’m just . . . surprised, I guess. I thought I was doing a pretty good job as president.”

“You were!” said Maria. “You are.”

“Then why do we have to change?” Lizzie kicked at a pebble that lay on the sidewalk.



Maria was quiet. “Change isn’t always a bad thing,” she said finally.

Lizzie rolled her eyes. “Whatever.” They had arrived at the house where Tank the German shepherd lived. “I’ll walk Tank and Dottie today if you do Pixie and Pogo.”

Maria agreed, and the girls split up to fetch the dogs who were waiting patiently for their walks. Lizzie grumbled to herself as she opened the door and clipped on Tank’s leash. Why did Daphne have to stir things up? But as she walked Tank over to Dottie’s house, she began to cheer up. It was hard to be too grumbly when you were around dogs, especially dogs as well-behaved as Tank and as sweet as Dottie.

By the time they finished up and said good-bye for the day, Lizzie had forgiven Maria. So they would have an election. No big deal. She knew

she could count on getting two votes: hers and Maria's. All she had to do was convince Brianna to vote for her, and Daphne's plan to take over would be history.

Lizzie walked home, feeling like herself again. As she neared her house, she saw a woman coming toward her with a bouncy black dog prancing at her side. Was it a Lab? A poodle? A Labradoodle? Lizzie squinted, trying to make out whether his coat was curly or straight. As she got closer, Lizzie realized that both the woman and the dog looked familiar. "Mom!" she said. "What are you doing with Gus?"

Her mother grinned. "Meet our new foster puppy," she said.

