

THE PUPPY PLACE

BONITA



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For Addison

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CHAPTER ONE

“Do you think Aunt Amanda and Uncle James will like my sign?” Lizzie asked her dad as they walked through the airport parking lot. Lizzie held a rolled-up WELCOME HOME banner in one hand and the back of the Bean’s jacket in the other. She knew that her little brother would have loved to race through the parking lot — but that wouldn’t be safe.

Dad laughed. “They’ll love it,” he said. He paused near an orange sign. “Section B-3,” he said. “Remember that. We’re parked in Section B-3.”

Amanda was Dad’s sister, which was always hard for Lizzie to get her head around. Grown-up



brothers and sisters acted very differently than kid brothers and sisters. Aunt Amanda did not have to grab Dad by the jacket to keep him from running into traffic, for example. And Dad did not tease Aunt Amanda the way Charles (Lizzie's other younger brother) teased her — though, according to Aunt Amanda, he used to, back when she and Dad were kids.

Aunt Amanda and Uncle James were coming home from a trip to Puerto Rico. They went on vacation at odd times, when nobody else did. Aunt Amanda owned a doggy day care and overnight boarding center called Bowser's Backyard. Her busiest times were school vacations and holidays, when lots of her regular clients went away and left their dogs to stay with her. There was a long weekend coming up, so naturally Aunt Amanda was on her way home.



During slow times, Aunt Amanda’s assistant, Josie, would take care of running Bowser’s Backyard — and also house-sit for Aunt Amanda and Uncle James and take care of their four dogs: three mischievous pugs and Bowser, the old golden retriever for whom the business was named. “The eponymous Bowser,” Uncle James, who liked big words, always said.

“Dad,” Lizzie asked now, as they approached the doors of the airport terminal, “remind me what, um, epa — epin — *eponymous* means.”

“You’re thinking of Bowser, aren’t you?” Dad grinned at her as he held the door for her and the Bean. He’d heard Uncle James say it, too. “It means a person — or a dog, in Bowser’s case — who gives their name to something.”

“Right,” said Lizzie. Of course, she firmly believed that dogs *were* people — or maybe they

were even better than people. Lizzie was dog-crazy, just like her aunt. When she grew up, she planned to be A) a vet, B) a dog trainer, C) a doggy day care owner like Aunt Amanda, D) all of the above, or E) anything else to do with dogs. Even now, Lizzie pretty much lived and breathed dogs. She loved to read about them, play with them, train them, and draw them. She and some friends had a dog-walking business. Lizzie had even convinced her parents that the Petersons should become a foster family for puppies, keeping each one just long enough to find it the perfect forever home.

Best of all, she had a dog of her own: Buddy, the sweetest little brown mutt in the world, with his funny half-perked ears and the adorable heart-shaped white spot in the middle of his chest. Buddy had come to the Petersons as a foster



puppy — and he had never left. Fostering meant giving up the dogs they took care of, and they all knew that, but Buddy was the exception to the rule. He was part of the family.

“I wish I could have fit Buddy into my drawing,” she said to Dad now, as they headed for the escalator. “He should be on the banner, too, but there wasn’t room.”

“Scator! Scator!” yelled the Bean, pulling her along. Lizzie rolled her eyes, but she and her dad smiled at each other. The escalator was the reason they had brought the Bean to the airport. He got very excited about moving stairs since there weren’t any escalators in Littleton, the town where the Petersons lived. The Bean loved to go along whenever anyone went to the airport, and he always wanted to ride the escalator as many times as he could. As they rode now, he grinned,

waving at all the people going the opposite way. Then he tugged on Lizzie's hand to ride down and back up again.

“No time! We'll do some more later,” Lizzie promised, tugging back. “Right now we have to go meet Aunt Amanda and Uncle James.” The Bean burst into tears. Lizzie let Dad pick him up so she could unroll her banner and get ready to hold it up by the window. She wanted Aunt Amanda and Uncle James to see it as soon as they got off the plane.

Lizzie was proud of the banner. Under the words WELCOME HOME she had drawn a huge picture, kind of like a giant cartoon. In it, all three pugs and Bowser were home alone and having the time of their lives, partying in the kitchen. Bowser was standing by the refrigerator — which he had obviously been able to open — handing out giant hams and whole turkeys. The pugs were

arranged at the table and on the counters, eating everything in sight. Lizzie knew her aunt would get a huge kick out of the sign.

“Look, look,” said Dad, trying to quiet the squalling Bean. “There’s the airplane. It’s coming along the runway, and it’s going to park right there, and everybody’s going to get out. Let’s watch. Maybe we’ll see the pilot!”

The Bean’s cries died down as he peered through the window, snuffling and rubbing his nose.

Lizzie handed one end of the banner to Dad. “Can you hold this?” she asked. She stepped away from him so the banner unfurled to its full length, and they held it up to the window.

“There they are,” shouted the Bean.

Lizzie peeked around the side of the banner, sure that the Bean was wrong. But he was right. There were Aunt Amanda and Uncle James, walking down the special rolling steps that had

been placed against the parked plane. “Why is she wearing her backpack on her front?” Lizzie asked. She waved and jumped up and down to catch her aunt’s attention.

“I don’t know,” said Dad. “But . . . it looks like there’s something *in* the backpack. Do you see what I’m seeing? That little black-and-white head? It looks like — no, it can’t be. It looks like —”

“It’s a puppy!” yelled Lizzie and the Bean together.

