

Buttons^{the}
Runaway
Puppy

For Phoebe

www.hollywebbanimalstories.com

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Chapter One



“Wait for me!” Sophie called after her twin brothers. She was pedalling as fast as she could, but they were so much bigger than she was, and they’d had enormous new mountain bikes for their birthday last month. There was no way she could catch them up if they didn’t slow down a bit. “Tom! Michael! Wait for me! Please!”

Tom and Michael circled round and hurtled back towards her, braking and pulling up in a cloud of dust.

“Come on, Sophie! You must be able to pedal a *bit* faster,” Michael told her, laughing.

“Aw, now that’s not fair, Mikey, she’s only got little legs.” Tom grinned at Sophie, and she scowled back.

“Can’t we have a rest for a minute anyway?” she begged. “I want to watch the dogs, and this is the best bit of the common for that. I want to see if any of the ones I know are out for walks today.”

“Yeah, I don’t mind,” Tom agreed.

Michael rolled his eyes. “Just for a minute. You’re dog-mad, Sophie Martin!” he told her, grinning.

They wheeled their bikes out of the way of the path, and then slumped on a bench. All three of them stared out across the common, which was packed with dogs and their owners. This was definitely the best place for dog-watching: raised up on a little hill, they could see all the way around.

“Look, Sophie, there’s that mad Red Setter you like.” Michael pointed at a dog frisking about on one of the paths, its dark reddish coat gleaming in the sunlight.

Sophie giggled as she watched him running round and round in circles, and worrying at sticks. His owner was trying to get him to fetch a ball, but the big dog was having none of it.

Tom sighed. “If I had a dog, I’d train

it an awful lot better than that one. Poor thing doesn't know whether it's coming or going."

"I don't think it's very easy to train a dog," Sophie said.

"Of course it isn't," Tom agreed. "That's why there's so many badly behaved dogs around. People can't be bothered to train their dogs properly, and they just let them do whatever they want because it's easier than getting them to behave."

"OK then, if you could have any dog you want, what would you have?" Michael asked. "Mum and Dad keep saying that one day we can. Dad didn't say 'no' straight away last time I asked."

Tom whistled through his teeth. "Nothing small and yappy. A dog you

could take on proper walks. Maybe a Dalmatian."

"Mmm, I could go for a Dalmatian. Or a Golden Retriever," Michael mused. "Wouldn't it be great to get a dog now, just before the summer holidays? We'd have all summer to go for really long walks."

Tom nodded. "Don't get your hopes up. What would you have, Sophie?"

Sophie was staring back down the path that they'd come up. "I'd have a Labrador. But a chocolate one, like Buttons. I *think* that's her coming up the path now. Oh dear..."

"What's she done this time?" Tom asked.

Sophie put her hand over her mouth to stifle her giggles, as the chocolate-

brown Labrador puppy danced around her owner, tangling him in her lead.

“Whoops,” Tom muttered, and Michael bobbed up from the bench to see what was going on.

“Ow, that must’ve hurt. Do you think we should go and help?”

Buttons was standing on the path, looking down at her owner in confusion.

What on earth are you doing down there? she seemed to be saying. Her owner unwrapped her lead from his ankles grimly, and started to heave himself up out of the bramble bush.

Sophie looked at Tom and Michael. “We probably should, but Buttons’s owner is so grumpy, he might shout at us.”



“He’s called Mr Jenkins,” Tom told her. “I heard one of his neighbours talking to him when we walked past his house the other day.”

Michael nodded. “I think Sophie’s right, he’s probably hoping no one saw. We’d better be looking the other way when he comes past.”

All three children stared innocently over the common towards the lake, pretending not to have seen Buttons trip up Mr Jenkins.

“Good morning!” Michael called politely, as the old man walked by, trying to hold Buttons back to heel. Mr Jenkins lived on the next road across from the Martins, with his garden backing on to theirs, so they saw him quite often. Their

mum always said hello when she passed him.

“Hmmpf,” Mr Jenkins grunted, and stomped on past.

“You see! So grumpy!” Sophie whispered, as he disappeared down the path.

“Yes, but I’d be grumpy too, if I’d just fallen in a bramble bush,” Tom pointed out.

Buttons appreciated them saying hello, anyway. She looked back and barked in a friendly way as Mr Jenkins hurried her along. She liked those children. They always smiled when they saw her, and the girl had once asked politely to stroke her. Mr Jenkins had let her, and she’d said how beautiful Buttons was and scratched behind her ears as well.

“Come on, Buttons,” Mr Jenkins grumbled, and Buttons sighed. He was cross with her again. She hadn’t *meant* to trip him up. There were so many good smells on the common, and she couldn’t help it if they were on different sides of the path. She’d had to go and investigate them all, and the silly lead had got itself tangled in his legs. It just showed that leads were not a good idea. She much preferred to run along without one. Especially if there were squirrels.

They were coming to the part of the common with the trees now, and there was bound to be a squirrel. Buttons looked up and barked hopefully.

“No, I’m not letting you off your

lead, silly dog,” Mr Jenkins told her, but he patted her lovingly on the head at the same time, and she knew he wasn’t cross any more. “No, because you’ll be in the next county before I catch up with you. I’m sorry, Buttons girl, we need to head home. My legs aren’t what they used to be, especially when I’ve been dragged through a bramble bush. Come on, home now.”

Buttons whined sadly. She understood some words, and *home* was one of them. Not home already? It felt like it hadn’t been a very long walk at all. She wanted lots of walks – in fact a whole day of walks, with a few quick sleeps and a couple of big meals in between, would be perfect.