

Jess^{the}
Lonely
Puppy

**For Robin
and William**

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Chapter One



Chloe laughed delightedly as the ducklings squabbled over the bread. It was probably a special treat for them, she decided, as it wasn't just any old bread, but the crusts of her cheese-and-ketchup sandwiches. Ducks probably didn't get ketchup very often. She crouched down by the edge of the lake to watch them. The ducklings polished

off the last few crumbs, and then circled hopefully nearer, in case she had any more. They were so sweet – mostly brown, with yellow streaks and patches, and really fluffy. Their mother was paddling watchfully around them, eyeing Chloe carefully.

A couple of the little ducks were getting braver now, swimming closer and closer. Chloe held her breath as the pair of them clambered on to the muddy edge of the lake with awkward little hops. They were coming to see her! She just wished she had some more sandwich for them. The bravest of the ducklings pecked thoughtfully at the toe of her trainer, but didn't seem very impressed.

“Sorry,” she whispered, trying not to

laugh out loud and scare them away. “I haven't got anything else!”

Suddenly there was a scuffling noise and an ear-splitting bark. A little black-and-white dog burst through a clump of reeds and nearly knocked Chloe into the lake.

The ducklings squeaked in alarm and leaped back into the water, swimming away as fast they could, little feet paddling furiously.

“Oops!” The boy chasing the dog grinned. “Sorry, Chlo, did Jess knock you over?”

“No, I'm just sitting in the mud because I feel like it!” she snapped. She looked out across the lake, watching the mother duck and her babies speeding off into the deeper water,

away from badly behaved dogs. She wished she could swim away too.

Jess watched the ducklings and barked after them happily. She'd never seen ducklings before, and they were very exciting.



“Why isn’t she on her lead?” Chloe asked her brother crossly, as she struggled to her feet and tried to brush the sticky mud off her denim shorts. “She’s not old enough to walk on her own, Mum and Dad said. She might run off and get lost, or get into a fight with another dog.”

Will shrugged. “There’s no one else around, Chloe; why shouldn’t she have a run? She isn’t bothering anyone.”

“She’s bothering me,” Chloe growled. She knew she sounded grumpy and miserable, but she had really been enjoying playing with the ducks, and she’d hoped the bravest one might even have let her stroke him.

Will sighed and rolled his eyes, and Jess, bored now that the ducks had

disappeared, scabbled her muddy paws up against Chloe's legs, hoping for some of the bread she could smell.

"Ow! Get her off me!" Chloe squeaked, dodging sideways and almost falling into the lake. Will grabbed her arm to pull her back, and Chloe shoved him away crossly. Jess jumped around them with ear-splitting barks, thinking that this was all a game.

"What's going on? Are you two all right? Chloe, come away from the edge, sweetheart, you might go in. And I'm not diving after you!"

Chloe and Will's grandad gently pulled them away from the water. Chloe had started crying, and Will looked cross. Jess whined. She wasn't sure what was going on, but suddenly

she didn't like this game any more. She slunk away from the children, and trotted off round the side of the lake.

"Go and get her, Will," Grandad said. "Put her back on her lead. She isn't really old enough to go off the lead yet."

Will chased after Jess, who darted away, glad that this was a game again. Grandad put his arm round Chloe. "What's up? Jess didn't hurt you, did she?"



Chloe shook her head. “She just knocked me over and got me all muddy. But I was watching those ducks, and she chased them all away. Why does she have to be so rough?”

“She’s only little, Chloe. Puppies are silly like that. And Jess doesn’t know her own strength.”

Chloe sniffed and looked over at Jess and Will, who were running back towards them now.

“Why don’t you take her for a walk round the lake with Will, once he’s got her back on the lead?” Grandad suggested gently. “I’ll come too, if you want.”

Chloe hesitated. She’d like to go, if Jess was on the lead... But then the puppy spotted two Canada geese flying

overhead and barked at full volume, jumping up and trying to catch the birds, who ignored her completely.

She shrank back against Grandad. “No, it’s OK. I’ll go back and sit with Mum and Dad, and read my book.”

Grandad sighed as he watched her run back to her parents, who were sitting on the picnic rug. He followed after her slowly.

Jess scampered off, and Will laughed as she pulled hard on her lead. She loved walks like this, with lots of different things to sniff out and chase. She caught sight of another duck in the distance and woofed happily, turning back to glance bright-eyed at Will. They raced away excitedly together.



Chloe sat down on the rug and stared at her book, but she wasn't really reading it. It was a book about a girl and her dog, which was quite funny really, she realized. Girls who read dog books were supposed to like dogs, not be scared of them.

Chloe propped her chin on her hands and reread the first line of the page, but she just couldn't concentrate. Why hadn't she gone with Grandad and Will to walk Jess? She had been so excited when Mum and Dad had finally given in and said yes, they could get a puppy at last. Will and Chloe had been begging them for ages. It was going to be a family dog, who belonged

to everyone, even though it was Will who was the keenest. He was ten now, and Mum and Dad had said that if he was really careful he and Chloe would be able to take the puppy out on their own, once they'd been to some dog-training classes.

Unluckily, although the Greys had had Jess for six weeks now and she was big enough to go out for proper walks, the dog-training classes had clashed with Will's football practice, so Jess hadn't been to any yet. Will didn't mind too much. He and Dad took her for really long walks when Dad got home from work, or sometimes he went with Grandad.

But Chloe didn't go at all. She had been sure that everything would be OK.

She couldn't possibly be scared of a tiny little puppy, could she? When they'd had a family discussion to decide what sort of dog they should get, she had said she didn't mind as long as it was friendly and sweet, and not too big. And not a boxer.

It had been a boxer who'd frightened her three years ago, back in her first year at school. She'd been running after Mum and Will through the park on the way home, and she'd gone a bit too close to the big dog. It had thought she was going to snatch the stick it was playing with and snapped at her. The boxer hadn't really hurt Chloe, just torn her cardigan sleeve, but she had been terrified, and Mum had been furious

with the dog's owner. She'd told the boy that his dog should be on a lead if it wasn't properly under control. She'd said she'd report him to the police if she ever saw it loose in the park again.

Then Mum had explained to Will and Chloe that they mustn't ever, ever go near strange dogs, even if they looked friendly. Chloe had known that already, of course, but she hadn't meant to upset the dog. She'd just run a little bit too close.

For ages, she would beg Mum to take them the long way home from school so they didn't have to go through the park, where there were always people walking dogs. But that had been three years ago. She could walk through the park now, although she wouldn't stroke

even the friendliest dogs.

Chloe had been certain that a puppy would be all right. She loved the *idea* of having a dog, and a puppy that she knew from when it was tiny – surely she wouldn't be scared?

But it hadn't worked out like that at all. The first time Chloe had seen Jess, the Border collie puppy was gorgeous – so fluffy, like a little black-and-white ball. They had gone to see the litter of puppies at the breeder's, and Chloe and Will had laughed at the funny little pups climbing over each other and bouncing around their pen. Chloe had been so excited, and when she finally plucked up the courage to stroke the little black-and-white head, Jess had licked her hand with a tiny pink tongue.

Chloe had loved her all at once.

She could see Will and Jess now, playing by the tall trees at the edge of the lake, Jess jumping excitedly at the stick that Will was waving. It was the kind of energetic game Jess loved.

