

The
Lost
Puppy

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The Lost Puppy



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The logo for the publisher 'Stripes' features a small, stylized animal head icon above the word 'stripes' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font.

For Max, and for Georgie Dog

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Chapter One



“Ruby! Happy Birthday!” Auntie Nell rushed down the garden path to hug Ruby, with Maisie the dachshund galloping after her.

“Hey, Maisie, where are the puppies?” Ruby asked. Ever since Maisie had her puppies, she’d been curled up in her pen in the kitchen with them, as though she didn’t dare let them out of her sight.



Auntie Nell shook her head. “I think she’s getting a bit fed up with them now they’re so much bigger. They spend all their time climbing over her, and nipping each other’s ears, or Maisie’s. They can’t get over the board we’ve got across the kitchen door, but their mum can, and she’s left them behind to have a bit of a break.”

“Can we go and see them?” Ruby asked. She’d always loved playing with Maisie, but the puppies were even more gorgeous than their mum, and she hadn’t seen them for a week. She was sure they’d have changed. They were eleven weeks old now, but they still seemed to be growing so fast she could almost see it happening.

“Puppies!” her three-year-old sister Anya demanded, stomping up the garden path. She loved the puppies as much as Ruby did. Ruby actually wondered if sometimes Anya thought she *was* a puppy. She curled up in their basket almost every time they came to visit Auntie Nell. Once she’d even tried their puppy food, but luckily she hadn’t liked it.

“And hello to you too, Anya.” Auntie Nell grinned, as Anya hurried past her into the house. Ruby chased after her little sister – if she wasn’t quick she’d probably find Anya sitting in the water bowl.

“So are you having a good birthday?” Auntie Nell asked. “Does it feel odd that you’ve already had your party?” Ruby had shared her birthday party with her best friend Beth the previous weekend. Beth was two weeks older than Ruby, so they’d split the difference.

“No, it’s great!” Ruby beamed at her. “It feels like I’m having two birthdays!”

“Well, I’ve got a present for you, in the house.” Auntie Nell was looking a bit smug and secretive, Ruby realized. She started to feel excited

about the present. She looked round at her mum and dad, wondering if they knew what it was. Mum had exactly the same expression on her face as Auntie Nell, which Ruby supposed wasn’t that strange, as they were sisters.

“What is it?” she asked curiously.

“Why don’t you come and see the puppies before you open your present?” Auntie Nell suggested. “Otherwise we’ll find them all nibbling Anya’s toes. It’s nearly their lunchtime.”

The puppies were still having lots of small meals. “Is it porridge?” Ruby asked hopefully, as they went through to the kitchen. The last time they’d visited, the puppies had eaten milky porridge, and all of them had dangled their big ears in the bowl – and came

out with porridge-crust-ed ears afterwards. It was really funny!

Auntie Nell laughed. “No, sorry, it’s just biscuits. Very boring. But they like them. Now they’re old enough for their new homes, I’m weaning them off the milky stuff.”

“Are they really big enough to leave Maisie?” Ruby asked, peering round the kitchen door at the seething mass of brown and black puppies wriggling around in their pen. Maisie hopped elegantly over the board in the doorway, and headed back to her babies. The puppies saw her coming and flung themselves out of the pen, then scampered across the floor to their mum. Ruby giggled. She was sure that she saw Maisie duck her head and dig

her paws in as she was hit by a wave of puppies.

Auntie Nell nodded. “A couple of people have come to see them already.”

“Six babies,” Ruby murmured to Dad, as she crouched down to get closer to the pups. “You always say me and Anya are enough!”

Dad nodded. “Quite enough!”



“I think she’ll miss them when they’re gone,” Auntie Nell said. “But right now I don’t think she’s going to mind *that* much. And I am keeping one puppy.”

“Oh, which one?” Ruby asked, crossing her fingers behind her back.

“The little black girl puppy. I’m calling her Millie. She gets on well with Maisie, I think. And I like the names both beginning with ‘M’.”

Ruby nodded, a little sadly. She had been hoping that Auntie Nell would keep her favourite puppy, the gorgeous boy with the black back and russet-orange paws. He’d spotted her coming in, and now he trotted over to her eagerly. In her head, she’d named him Toby, although she hadn’t told anyone.

There was no point naming him really, as he would be going off to live somewhere else, horribly soon. But Ruby hadn’t been able to help it. Toby was just the perfect name for him.

He was such a funny little dog, always bouncing about. Ruby rolled a jingly ball across the kitchen floor for him, and he skidded after it eagerly, his paws slipping around on the tiles. He was dashing after it so fast that he overshot, and had to screech to a halt and snatch it out of Millie’s paws. His sister growled at him crossly, and stomped away.

Toby picked up the ball in his sharp little teeth, and marched triumphantly back to Ruby, his ears swinging jauntily. Then he dropped it at her feet,

wagging his tail and nosing it towards her, asking her to do it again.

Ruby stroked his glossy fur. “Oh, you’re so gorgeous.”

Anya, who had been lying on the kitchen floor so as to be on the same level with the puppies, wriggled her way over to Ruby and Toby, and nuzzled him, nose to nose. Toby looked slightly shocked, but he nuzzled her too, and then licked her generously all down one cheek.

Anya squealed with delight, and was about to lick him back when Mum grabbed her. “No licking the puppies!”

Mum glanced worriedly at Dad, but he was laughing.

“It’ll be fine,” he told her.

Ruby frowned at them. What did

they mean? She was sure Toby licking Anya just once wouldn’t do her any harm.

“Why don’t you pick him up?” Auntie Nell asked her. “He won’t mind.”

Ruby gently slipped her hands under Toby’s smooth tummy, and snuggled him against her. He had climbed into her lap before, but she had never actually picked him up properly. He was so good to cuddle. She sighed quietly as she rubbed her cheek against his warm head, wondering if this was the last time she would see him.



Toby sighed too, but happily. He dug his nose under the shoulder of Ruby's jumper, which made her giggle and squirm, then he scrabbled his claws against the fabric lovingly.

Auntie Nell smiled at her. "So, do you like your present?"

Ruby looked up, confused.

Dad laughed, and Mum smiled at her, then eyed Toby meaningfully.

"Toby? The puppy, I mean?" Ruby stared at them all, her mouth falling open in surprise.

"I told you she'd already named him!" Auntie Nell said. "He's always been the one Ruby liked best. A lady wanted to choose him yesterday, Ruby, but I told her he was reserved for you!"

"You're giving me Toby for my

birthday?" Ruby sounded dazed. "Can we take him home?" she added hopefully. "Or is he mine but at your house?" Mum and Dad had always said no to a dog before, because Anya was too young. She looked up at them uncertainly. "You said not while Anya was little..."

"But he's not going to get big enough to knock Anya over, is he?" Dad pointed out. Toby was a miniature dachshund – he'd never be bigger than about thirty centimetres tall. "And yes, he's coming home with us. Mum and I have decided you're both old enough now. He'll be yours mostly, Ruby, but Anya's allowed to cuddle him too, OK?"

Ruby nodded. She didn't mind sharing at all. She was still gobsmacked

that they were actually getting their own dog! “Are we taking him home *today*?” she asked Auntie Nell.

“Absolutely. But you have to eat lunch first. And I made you another birthday cake!”

“Oh wow! Oh, I have to call Beth and tell her we’re really getting a dog,” Ruby whispered. But then she looked worried. “Don’t we need stuff? A basket ... and bowls ... and ... loads of things...”

Auntie Nell held up one finger. “Just a moment.” She disappeared into the utility room, and came back out with a huge cardboard box. “One perfect puppy parcel. This is your present from me, Ruby. Toby is from your mum and dad, so I said I would give you all the things you’d need to look after

him properly.” She dumped the box down in front of Ruby. “It’s heavy!”

Toby wriggled in Ruby’s arms, curious to see what was in such a huge box. Ruby laughed. “I think you and Anya are going to be fighting over it,” she told him. “Anya loves boxes.” She hugged Toby gently. It was still hard to believe he was really hers!

