

## Chapter Two



“They’re here!” James charged to the front door with Jackson chasing excitedly after him. Aria paused the film they’d been watching and stood up uncertainly. She wanted to go and say hello, but the hallway already had seven extra people in it, and a puppy. She would wait just a little while, till everything had calmed down. She

went to the living-room door instead, peeping round the side of it and letting the noise wash over her from a safe distance.

Jackson was bouncing up and down, twirling and whining, trying to greet all these different people. Aria heard him start to make squeaky yapping noises too, and she went out into the hallway, gently catching his collar to stop him jumping up. Jackson wasn't used to seeing so many new people at once and Aria didn't want him to get too excited. Her dad had told them that Gran was a bit nervous round dogs, but Jackson was usually so gentle, they thought she would be fine with him.

“Hello, Aria! It's so good to see

you.” Gran kissed Aria’s cheek and Aria hugged her. It felt like ages since she’d last seen her grandparents and she’d missed them. “Goodness, he’s a bit, um, noisy, isn’t he?” Gran added, pulling her skirt away so Jackson’s whirling tail didn’t swipe it with dark hairs.



Aria sighed. That didn't seem very fair, with the noise everyone else was making. Especially Hannah, who was squealing for Gran to look at her toy pony. Aria watched her gran turn away from the puppy and start to fuss over her littlest grandchild. She had really hoped that Jackson would win Gran over.

Grandad noticed her hurt face and put an arm round her shoulders. "He's a lovely little dog," he murmured, smiling. "And he's doing very well with all these strange people."

"Dad took him to training classes," Aria said proudly. "Jackson got a rosette."

"One thing we didn't manage to teach him was to leave shoes alone,

though,” Dad said apologetically. “They’re his favourite thing to chew, which is why we have this.” He waved at the big wooden chest that stood against the wall. “Pop your shoes in there and they’ll be safe from little puppy teeth.”

Uncle Josh had been bringing in all the luggage from the car, now he stopped on the doorstep, rubbing his hands. “It’s colder than ever. I think it’s going to snow. A white Christmas, for once!”

“Yeah! Snowball fights!” James jumped in the air to high-five Matthew and Aria flinched back a little. Then she looked down, smiling, as she felt Jackson lean hard against her legs. How did he always know?