



# CHAPTER ONE

Lizzie rubbed her hands together. She blew on her fingertips, but her hands were still stiff and cold. She'd been silly to leave her gloves at home, but at least they wouldn't be covered in mud like everything else she was wearing.

"If you're cold, you can put your hands on Picadilly's neck," Maria said. "Dilly is super warm." Maria was Lizzie's best friend and Picadilly was the pony Maria rode in lessons and horse shows. Everyone called him "Dilly" for short.

"Thanks for inviting me to your horse show," Lizzie said to Maria as she buried her hands in Dilly's thick mane. Maria was right. The pony's



warmth made Lizzie's fingers tingle as the cold left them.

"It's great to have you here," Maria said.

Maria was in the saddle, getting ready to compete. She leaned forward and wrapped her arms around the pony's neck. She buried her face in his thick, gray mane, closed her eyes, and let out a happy sigh.

Lizzie smiled. Maria loved horses the way she, Lizzie, loved dogs.

And Lizzie *really* loved dogs. Especially her own puppy, Buddy. He was sweet and playful and loyal. He was the best. Of all the puppies her family had fostered over the years, he was the only one they'd kept forever. By now, Lizzie and her younger brothers, Charles and the Bean, felt like Buddy was another sibling.

"Dilly and I are in the next class," Maria said.



“Could you grab the cloth out of the brush box and wipe that mud off his face?”

Lizzie bent down and picked a brown rag out of the wooden box at her feet.

“Whoops! Not that one. That’s my boot rag,” Maria said to Lizzie. “The blue one is for Dilly’s face. Because he’s a blue-ribbon pony.”

Lizzie nodded. She knew that Maria and Dilly had not won a blue ribbon—yet! Maria had just started showing. She had already won one red ribbon for second place, which was pretty good for a newbie.

Lizzie found a clean part of the blue cloth. She ran it over the white swirl in the center of Dilly’s face. She looked into the pony’s deep, dark eyes, and he gazed back at her. He was so calm and gentle.

“It’s really a big help having you here,” Maria said.

“It’s fun,” Lizzie said. She used the rag to polish a silver buckle on Dilly’s bridle. “And I haven’t even seen you ride yet today.”

“Well, you will soon,” Maria said. “Our first class is about to begin.” She took a deep breath and patted Dilly’s neck. “Wake up, boy.” Maria sat up straight and tightened her reins.

Lizzie looked around. The horse show was a busy place. There were trucks and trailers parked all along the riding club’s driveway. Inside a big white barn, there were rows of stalls and a big indoor riding ring. Today, all the classes were taking place outside. The outdoor rings, each with a wood fence, were in a large, grassy field.

Kathy, Maria’s riding trainer, walked up to them. “Hey, Lizzie,” Kathy said. “It’s nice of you to help Maria out.” Kathy ran her hand down Dilly’s neck, and the pony snorted and pushed his nose against her arm.

Lizzie had met Kathy before. When Maria had talked Lizzie into taking riding lessons, Kathy had been her trainer. Thanks to Kathy, Lizzie wasn't nervous around horses anymore.

"What do you think of your first horse show?" Kathy asked.

Lizzie smiled. "It's great," she said. "I can't believe how many horses are here. There are horses everywhere."

At Kathy's barn, most of the horses were in stalls. It was very different at the show. Some horses stood tied next to trailers. Other horses jumped fences in another ring by the big barn. Horses and riders waited in groups by the show ring for their next class. All the horses were gleaming, their coats newly groomed. Tails swished. Ears twitched. Hooves stamped. Lizzie was very glad that she'd gotten over her fear of horses.

"There is a lot going on," Kathy agreed. "It's

good that Dilly is so mellow and cool.” She scratched under the pony’s chin. “He’s the calmest pony I’ve ever known.”

“He’s the best,” Maria agreed, leaning down to put her arms around Dilly’s neck again.

Kathy gave Maria some final pointers, and then Maria and Dilly entered the ring. Lots of other horse-and-rider teams went in, too.

Lizzie grabbed the brush box and went to watch at the fence. Maria had told Lizzie about this class. All the horses and riders went into the ring together. They would walk, trot, and canter. Then they would change direction and do it all again.

An intercom crackled. “Class eight, ages thirteen and younger, it’s time to begin,” a man announced. “Please walk. All walk.”

Lizzie was nervous for Maria. She gripped the top rail of the fence and watched. It was easy to

find Picadilly. He was the only dappled gray pony in the ring.

“Trot, all trot,” the voice said. The horses and ponies sped up to a trot.

Lizzie bit her lip as Maria and Picadilly passed. Maria didn’t turn toward Lizzie. She looked straight ahead, concentrating hard. The horses and ponies all seemed to move together. Lizzie sensed a rhythm: the creaking of saddles, the soft snorts, the even thuds of the hooves on the ground.

Then a dog’s loud, shrill bark rang out. There was another bark, even louder, followed by a long outpouring of high-pitched yelping that echoed off the barn.

“Barney, no!” a voice cried. “Barney, come back!”

Lizzie saw a flash of motion across the ring, followed by more barking.



The even rhythm of the show ring vanished. Bridles jangled as horses threw up their heads. Their high, frightened whinnies filled the air. Horses and ponies darted in different directions as their riders tried to hold on. Lizzie could feel their thudding hoofbeats in her body, matching the sudden beating of her own heart.

It took Lizzie a moment to figure out what was happening.

Then she spotted a puppy in the ring, a copper-colored puppy with short legs and a long body. He was fast! His front legs flew out in front of him as he dashed here and there across the grassy ring. It was hard to believe that just one puppy was making all that noise! One small puppy, with bright eyes, wild eyebrows, and a long, scruffy beard. The little guy was barking at—and chasing!—every horse he saw.