

Charlie's Life

By CMA

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my theory of charlie's life...

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1 - Puppy Days

PART I: Puppy days

CHARACTERS

Charlie Barkin

Falia Barkin

Tom Barkin

Hart Barkin

Loni Barkin

Burt Barkin

Flo Collieon

Puppies

Now, Charlie is still a pup, no more than two weeks old. Let's enter the life of Charlie Barkin. "Ha, ha!" You can't reach it!" a very young Great Dane teased as he waved Falia's beloved stuffed toy in the air. Falia, being a collie shepherd mix, was much smaller than her brother was. "Hey! Give that back!" Charlie said, seeing the commotion. Falia and Charlie were not only siblings, they were also the best of friends.

"What are you gonna do about it, fatso?" the Great Dane, Tom, taunted. Charlie jumped on him, growling, and so a fight was started. Charlie, being a little overweight, he was often teased by his siblings. Loni, the mother, had heard the commotion and had rushed over to the fight scene. "It was all Charlie's fault. He was taunting Tom and started a fight with him. Tom had no choice but to fight." One puppy, a collie, said. "That's not true! Tom was teasing me and Charlie was protecting me!" Falia said. "Why do you always take Charlie's side?" "Because I don't lie!" Falia said and headed toward the fight to see if she could stop it without mom stepping in again. Charlie was constantly starting fights with the others, but it was almost always in her defense. He also always got scolded on her behalf.

"Charlie! Why do you always start fights like this?" Loni asked. Burt, the father entered the room.

"What's going on?" "Charlie started another fight." "Again? Loni, come here for a second." The two dogs went into the hallway and soon heard the growling and squabbles of the puppies. "Loni, maybe it's time I took Charlie out for a walk, just him and me. You know, a little father son time." "Maybe. I just don't see why he does these things. I hope you can do something. I don't want to have to do this until they all move out. I'll go crazy." "Calm down Loni. I'll find out. Don't worry." Loni nuzzled Burt before he went in the room and called Charlie out of the room. "He's gonna get it this time for sure!" "I don't think so!" Falia said. "That's what you always say, but we're always right." Tom said. "Beat that, goody-goody! Ha!" Hart, the Collie/Shepherd mix said. "Maybe it'll be different this time." They soon heard some talking in the hall and went to investigate. After listening and hearing the door open and close, Tom and Hart were shocked. "Goody-goody was right." Tom said. "Uh-huh." Hart replied. "Yeah, that shouldn't be a surprise to you. And I am not a goody-goody! Humph!" And with that, Falia headed to her room, wondering what would become of Charlie.

Meanwhile, in the park, Burt is talking to his son. "Why do you do these things, Charlie?" Charlie didn't reply right away. After a minute or so, Charlie said "They make fun of Falia and I wanna protect her. Then they make fun of me, so I fight." "You sound like a street dog. You're showing signs in action and speech that you are not growing up in the proper manner. Do you want extra lessons?" Burt asked Charlie. "No way! I hate those things. They all seem so pointless to me. Not to mention boring!" "Well, if

you want to become a proper housedog, you must learn the rules.” “Who said I wanna be a housedog? Nuh-uh. No way I’m gonna take more o those things than I need.” “Charlie, please restrain yourself from using that language!” Burt was appalled by how much slang Charlie had been using lately. “You make it sound like I’m cursin or somethin.” “Please, just try to restrain yourself from using that language as much as possible!”

“I don’t see no reason to do that.” “Just control yourself, Charlie!” “Why should I? I got no reason to, so I ain’t gonna.” “Charlie! Sometimes you’re impossible!” Burt almost yelled and headed back to the house.

Falia, who was still at her window, saw a discouraged father and a spunky Charlie approach the house. “How’d it go?” “Not too well. He has begun to use quite a bit of slang and has developed a bit of an attitude.” “Oh. Well, do you think we could do anything for him?” Loni asked, hoping for a definite yes. The reply she got was the farthest thing from what she wanted. “There’s not much we can really do for him. At this rate, he’s bound to get in trouble when he gets older.” “Well, what can we do?” Loni asked. She was getting more and more concerned about her son. “Well, all we can really do is give him extra lessons, pay a lot of attention to him and hope for the best.” Burt replied, knowing it was not the answer that Loni was hoping for, but it was the truth. “Well, I guess that’s what we should do then.” Loni said sadly. By now, tears had started to flow from her eyes, which Burt was wiping away from her cheeks with his paw.

Falia, who had been listening to the conversation, was also sad. She decided to have a talk of her own with Charlie. She would tell him what he was doing to the family. She walked downstairs and went outside. She found Charlie in the backyard, rolling the flowerbeds. “Hi.” Falia said. “Hey.” Charlie said, stopping his flowerbed rolling to talk to her. Falia flinched, then paused. “I heard what mom and dad were saying about you after the walk.” “Yeah, so?” “Maybe, if, you, um, well...” “Yeah?” “If you want, I could help you with your lessons if you’re struggling.” Falia said hesitantly. She wasn’t sure how Charlie would react, but hoped it wouldn’t be too bad. “If ya wanna, sure. But I ain’t easy to work with.” Charlie said. This was a better reaction than Falia had expected, but she still flinched at the way he talked. “Um, great. So, we should start off with the way you talk.” “What’s wrong with it?” “Well, in the lessons, we were taught not to talk like that.” Charlie just rolled his eyes at this remark. Falia shook her head at Charlie’s gesture. This was going to be harder than she thought. But then again, she did kind of owe him for all the times he had stood up for her.

“Well, ya gonna help me or not?” Falia flinched before saying, “I told you, the way you talk.” “Fine, fine.” Charlie said, reluctantly came over to her. “This is beginning ta sound like extra lessons.” Falia giggled and started teaching. From inside the house, Burt and Loni were watching as Falia taught Charlie. “It’s sad and nice at the same time.” Loni said as she looked out the window. “What?” “The fact that we can’t talk to Charlie without back talk saddens me. Falia seems to be the only one that can reach and understand him.” “That is saddening, however, the good thing is that at least one civilized dog can talk to him.” “I wonder what they’re doing.” “Well, from the looks of it, it looks like Falia is teaching him.” “Good. Hopefully she can do something about him She has always been the top of the litter.” “I don’t think it has to be the top of the class, Loni. Just someone who can understand him.” “You’re probably right, Burt.” They continued to watch Falia and Charlie as the two pups continued the lesson.

Despite all of Falia’s help, Charlie only got worse. One day, when Charlie and Falia were two months old, they had just finished their own little private lessons when Charlie said to Falia. “I don’t fit in here. Never have, never will.” “Charlie, don’t say that. Just a little more time, and maybe you’ll get there.” “Falia, you don’ t understand. We’ve been going at this for a month and a half and it’s not doin any good. I’ll never like it here. I’m gonna leave today.” “Charlie, you don’t mean... You’re running away? Charlie, don’t do it! Please! I’ll be lonely, and you’ll never survive out there.” Falia started crying and

held on to her favorite brother's leg. Charlie shook her off, pinned her to the ground, and ran toward the fence.

He pushed aside the loose board and struggled to get through the small hole. He was still a bit fat, so he was stuck for a bit. He struggled out of it and ran off. Falia watched him go until she couldn't see him. She whispered a tearful goodbye and then ran inside. She ran up to her room, crying. When her parents came up to see what was wrong, she only said this: "Charlie's gone." She then broke into a hysterical crying fit. Loni and Burt looked at each other. Then Loni picked up a still sniffling Falia, and Loni, who now also had tears in her eyes along with Burt. Loni rocked Falia to sleep with tears in everyone's eyes. After Falia had gone to sleep, Loni and Burt went into their own room and decided not to tell the other puppies just yet.

Pretty soon, they went to sleep for much needed rest. In the morning, Falia was not at breakfast. Loni made breakfast as usual, but neither Burt nor Loni ate. Falia rarely came out of her room. The next day had only little improvement. Burt ate, but Loni and Falia did not. This went on for a week or so, then Loni and Falia started eating private meals with just the two of them. Eventually, they began eating with the family again and the days became normal again.

Meanwhile, Charlie had met a dachshund named Itchy and a crazed girlfriend named Flo. As everyone began to recover, happiness just couldn't seem to find and stay with this family. Just after life had begun to take a normal pace again, a terrible thing happened. Burt died. This put the whole family into a down spiral. For a while, no one ate, again. However, the worst part was, that just before Burt had died, Loni had given birth to another litter. Most of the puppies, excluding Falia and Hart and one from the new litter, Alex, had been adopted. It was only these three left.

One day, when Charlie, Falia and Hart were six months old, Charlie stopped by his old home only to find a beautiful collie shepherd mix in the backyard. This was Falia. At first, she didn't recognize Charlie and jumped back. "Hey." Charlie said. Falia now knew it was Charlie. "Hi." She said as she began to approach Charlie. Charlie had become quite thin and grown quite a bit since they had last seen each other.

"You look so different." Falia said to Charlie. She now had to look up at him instead of looking straight. "You look beautiful." Charlie said to Falia. "You too." Falia said before nuzzling him. They talked for a while, then Charlie asked this: "Anything happen while I was gone?" Falia's reply was this: "Well, it's just me and Hart now. Mom had another litter, only one of them is left, Alex. Father's gone too." Neither talked until they heard a desperate cry for "CHARLIE?" Charlie recognized the voice, quickly said his goodbye, then ran off. Falia just stood there, confused. Not long after, a collie ran by, yelling "Charlie! Charlie get back here right now! Puppies! Get em!" Soon after a dozen puppies ran by, yelling "Uncle Charlie! Uncle Charlie!" Falia, not knowing what to make of the scene, just laughed to herself and went inside.

She never told anyone about her conversation with Charlie. She tried not to mention him at all. She kept it a secret until she forgot about him. Pretty soon, Falia and Hart became good friends despite their past experiences. They moved out, leaving Loni and Alex together in their peaceful home in New Orleans. Loni was often sad, but lived with it. That house held a lot of memories. She and Burt had married in this house. She had had Tom, Hart, Charlie, Falia and the rest of the puppies in this house. They had grown up in this house. Charlie had run away in the backyard. Her second litter was born. Burt had died. She couldn't bear the pain of the painful memories, but she couldn't make herself leave either. She would remain here for as long as she could.

2 - Teenage Years

PART II: "Age" Years

CHARACTERS

Charlie Barkin

Tom Barkin

Sasha La Fleur

Jolie Fannoila

Christy Fannoila

Sam Fannoila

Ben Fannoila

Itchy Dachshund

Flo Collieon

Principal Johnson

Bess Falls

Carface Caruthers

Killer Rellik

Eric King

CHAPTER I

When Charlie was around 2 years old (14 in dog years), he began to attend high school. Since he had had no one to tell him what to do, he had been completely free; he found it hard to adjust to the school life.

Charlie spent a lot of time with the principle. This is one of those times. "So, Charlie, we meet again. What did you do this time?" "Don't know, don't care." "Well, I guess why you did it is more important than what you did. So, why did you do it?" "Why should I tell ya?" Charlie said. "Charlie, you know the answer to this by now. Charlie, where do you live?" "Somewhere." "Yes, I know that, Charlie." "Well, I live in a car, in the junkyard." Charlie said reluctantly, not bothering to make eye contact with the principle. "Well, Charlie, according to my sources, you have no parental guidance, and you live alone. Is that correct?" "Maybe." The principle knew this was Charlie's way of saying yes. He had come to a decision. "Charlie, I think it would be nice if you got to live with a family. Some discipline couldn't hurt, now could it?" "Get to the point."

"Well, Charlie, there is a student exchange program going on between here and a San Franciscan school. Would you be interested in that? Otherwise, you could live with a family around here. It would last for the rest of this year and next year and you would come back here for the last 2 years of high school." "Um, sure, I guess." The principle was pleased and went to create a file for Charlie, which Charlie could fill out himself. Principle would then send it to the families that had volunteered to take in a student. Charlie filled out the form quickly and then left to find Flo and Itchy. He found them and fortunately for Charlie, no one asked what had happened in the principle's office.

"So, Charlie, you wanna come to my place later?" Flo asked Charlie during lunch. "Well, sure. How're the puppies doin'?" "They're fine, but they miss you." "All the more reason to come." Charlie said to Flo. They leaned towards each other to kiss, but were stopped by a paw. This paw was owned by the principle. "You know the rules. I've told you two plenty of times, Ms. Collieon and Mr. Barkin. I'm watching you." The principle only called them by first names in private. Itchy laughed a little. And when

the principle was gone, Charlie and Flo laughed also.

They continued on with the day happily. Charlie never mentioned the exchange program. During the last period of the day, English, the intercom came on. "Mrs. Johnson, may I please see Charlie?" They all knew which Charlie because this happened so often that there was no need to use his last name anymore. "Yes. He'll be right there in a second." "Thank you." Charlie left, and everyone started wondering What did he do this time? This time, Charlie had done nothing. He entered the office and the principle greeted him. They sat down in the principle's office, which was cut off from the rest of the main office.

"Charlie, we found you a family." "That was fast." "Yes, well, they heard your story and wanted to help. They have three children, two boys and one girl. All the children are about your age." This made Charlie remember his home with Tom, Hart and Falia. Although there were other puppies in the litter, they were the ones he talked to the most. "Charlie?" "Huh?" "Good, you're okay. You had drifted off for a second. So, you're okay with the family?" "Yeah, I guess." The principle smiled and sent him back to class. After school, Charlie went to Flo's and hung out with Flo and the puppies for a while. He went home and prepared for his trip. He would leave for San Francisco tomorrow.

The next day, Charlie got on the plane and he was off. After a two-hour flight, he arrived. When he saw the family he would be staying with, he was a little sad. The children reminded him of Tom, Hart and Falia. The parents didn't look like his parents thankfully or he would've avoided them. He walked over to them and they greeted him happily. On the way to the house the children chatted with him. Charlie found them to be very talkative and fun. "So, who are ya?" Charlie asked them. "Christy!" "Sam!" "Ben." They were really friendly and the way they said it seemed rehearsed. They arrived at a cute little home. "You live here?" "Yep!" Sam said. "Yep, yep!" Ben said. "Yep, yep, yep!" Christy said. "That was a little weird..." Charlie said to them. "We get that a lot." Christy said and the three siblings burst into laughter. Christy showed Charlie to his room and Ben and Sam entered. The four began to talk. "You certainly have a family vibe goin'." Charlie said to them. "Yep!" they said in unison. "So, enough about our family. What about yours?" Christy asked. "I'm not sure." "Did they die?" "No. I ran away." "And?" "What?" "What was it like? If you can remember." "Well, I was born a little fat. And my two brothers always made fun of my sister, Falia. I would always start a fight and I'd get in trouble." So it went, Charlie told the story of his whole life. He stopped just after he finished telling his talk with Falia. When he was finished, the trio said, in unison, "Wow." Then Christy spoke up. "Our life's no where near that interesting. We were born and we went to school, and that's about it. Having you stay here is probably the most exciting thing that happened to us." She stopped to think for a moment. "Yep. So, do you have a girlfriend or do you not want one?" Christy asked him, blushing slightly. "Yeah, I got one." "Oh. What's she like?" "Well, she's a little crazy. She chases me everywhere. She runs a puppy orphanage; the puppies are pretty fun. We love each other, pretty much though. You?" "Well. No. We're kinda considered weird at our school, so we kinda have no one to talk to but each other. So, what are you?" Christy said, the only one who was really talking to Charlie. "Huh?" "Your breed." "I'm a German shepherd, Collie, Great Dane mix...or something like that..." "Oh. We're Labradors, I think." Christy said, then all four of them laughed a little, then heard their mom calling.

"Dinner!" They all came down, except for Charlie. He wasn't used to eating meals. Down in the kitchen, Mrs. Fannoila, the mother, asked the three "Where's Charlie?" "I think he's in his room." "Oh. Well, I hope he's okay." "He'll be fine." Ben said. The family sat down for dinner and had a wonderful time. Later, when Mrs. Fannoila had tucked her three children into bed, she went into Charlie's room to talk. "How are you settling in?" "Fine." "Do you miss your family yet?" "Um, not really." "Oh, yeah. That's right, you ran away. How have you been doing on your own?" "Pretty good." "So, you're not uncomfortable living with a family for a while?" "It'll take a little adjusting, but yeah. I'll be okay." "So, why did you miss dinner?" "I'm not used to eatin' meals or with anyone." "Oh. Well, please adjust.

The kitchen's closed before and after meals and I don't know about you, but I'd like you to eat while you're here. Good night, Charlie." She walked out, and closed the door.

The next day, was school. Charlie wasn't the only one who had come from his school, or a lot of schools. There was a line for enrollment for the exchange students. Charlie waited, and waited, and waited. And waited. When he got there, he filled out his form quickly and went to his classes. He found that, unlike his school, the teachers were very boring and not at all friendly, except for one. Lunch was a relief. When he got there, he sat down with Christy, Ben and Sam, who he had become pretty good friends with and they had all of their classes together, which made starting school at this one was easier than it would have been if he didn't know anyone.

He was scanning the cafeteria when he saw a group of girls. One was unbelievably pretty. She was an Irish Setter, and was very thin. She seemed as if she and her friend, a beautiful cocker spaniel, were street dogs. His thoughts were interrupted by Christy. "That's Sasha and Bess. The Irish Setter's Sasha and the spaniel's Bess. They're pretty popular, so don't expect them to talk to you any time soon." Christy sounded jealous. She was obviously falling for Charlie, who had no idea she liked him liked him. She went back to eating after saying that. She was irritated by the fact that Charlie was falling for the spoiled popular girl.

However, the story is quite different from what Christy thought. Yes, they were popular; however, they were having a conversation of their own. "Who's that?" Sasha asked Bess as she looked at Charlie, who had stopped looking at her after what Christy had said. "I think he's an exchange student." One girl said. "From where?" Sasha asked. "New Orleans, I think." Bess said. "He's hanging with those three weirdoes." Another girl said. "So?" "So, what if he's like them?" "What if he's not? I mean look at him." Sasha said, not bothering to take her eyes off of Charlie. "Yeah, he's good looking, but he can still be weird." "Yeah, we'd better stay clear until we know that he's safe." Another girl said. Bess looked at Sasha to see if she was listening to any of this. She wasn't.

After school, Charlie, Ben, Sam and Christy walked home together. "I saw you looking at Sasha." Ben teased. "Well, only a little bit." Charlie argued. "Nuh-uh. You like her. Come on, admit it." Sam taunted. "Maybe a little." Charlie blushed slightly. "I say she's nothing but trouble. She's all looks. Nothing else." Christy said, not bothering to look at any of them. "Somebody's jealous." Ben said. "Definitely." Sam said. "I am not!" Christy said. Charlie decided to let them have a little time alone, so he went ahead. When he was out of sight, Ben was the first to speak. "You like Charlie, don't you?" he asked. "Not really." "Come on. You're in love." Sam accused Christy. "Am not!" "Are to!" "Not!" "Are!" "Not!" "Are!" "Ben, what do you think?" "Christy, you should know how you feel about someone. I personally think you're totally falling for him." Ben said before scurrying in front. Christy and Sam shrugged. "Am not!" "Are to!" "Not!" "Are!"

They continued this until they got home. Sam went upstairs to talk to Ben. Christy went to talk to her mom. "Mom, if you like a guy, what would you do?" Mrs. Fannoila stopped what she was doing to talk with her daughter. "Well, I'd tell him that I like him." "What if he's interested in another girl?" "Then lay off for a while. See if it's temporary. He might eventually loose interest." "If he doesn't?" "Forget him. Who's the guy?" "Well..." "Go on." "It's...Charlie." "Christy! You've known him for less than two days! Either you'll just stop or you'll begin to like him even more. Who's the girl he's interested in?" "Sasha La Fleur. I saw him looking at her. After he stopped, I saw her looking at him." Christy said sorrowfully. "Oh. Well, that's usually a pretty good sign that they're going to be in love for a while. I'm not sure what to do. You can't really forget him. Just hope he lies off. If they don't, don't worry. He's only going to be here 1 and half years. You'll have the whole last 2 years of high school to get over it." "You think?" "I know." Mrs. Fannoila said before hugging her daughter. "Now go get started on your homework." Christy went upstairs and Jolie (Mrs. Fannoila) went upstairs to talk to Charlie.

"Hey Charlie." Jolie said when she entered Charlie's room. "Hey." Was the only reply she got. "Not

much of a conversationalist?" "Not really." "Charlie, do you have a girlfriend in New Orleans?" "Yeah." "Oh. I heard about what happened with Sasha." "Why is that such a big deal to everyone?" "Well, Charlie, you've been at that school for one day and already you've begun to stir things up quite a bit." "I still don't get it." Charlie had not made eye contact with a single soul since he had arrived in San Francisco and he didn't plan to. "Are you enjoying yourself?" "Pretty much." "What's wrong?" "Well, other than the fact that I'm in a completely different state, your family kinda reminds me of my family." "Really? How?" "Well, Christy is kinda like my sister, Falia. And Ben and Sam are kinda like my brothers Tom and Hart. They're nothing like each other in looks or personality, but they still remind me of each other." "You miss your family, don't you?" "Yeah, but if I went back it would be too different than when I left." "How is that?" "Well, before I started high school, I stopped to talk with Falia and she told me that dad had died and mom had another litter. Then I heard that everyone of my brothers and sisters from both litters were adopted except for one dog." "Oh, yeah. I can see how that might change things." "Duh." Charlie said, only to be immediately sorry that he did. He looked completely away and said a soft "Sorry." Jolie understood. He was still adjusting. He could do so at his own pace. She left him in his room so he could have some more time alone.

CHAPTER II

The next day at school, the story from yesterday hadn't been forgotten yet. It had spread, become a rumor. Some things were changed, making it untrue and a bit embarrassing for the people involved. The rumor basically said that Christy had attempted to kiss Charlie and Charlie gladly accepted it, which got Sasha staring at them. This was especially embarrassing for Christy. She was not at all happy. Whoever started that rumor had better watch out. She thought as she walked to class. She then saw Sasha, gave her a mean look, then headed off.

"What's her problem?" Sasha asked Bess as they stood at Sasha's open locker. "It's probably the rumor." "Oh yeah. Do you think its true?" "The only way to find out is to ask Charlie or Christy." Bess said, hoping this rumor would die off soon before a teacher heard, because if it was true, Christy and Charlie both could get in a lot of trouble. You however, know that the rumor is not true. So now you might be thinking, who started this and why? Well, the one that had started this was none other than Tom Barkin.

Now you might be thinking, how did he end up here and why doesn't everyone notice their last names are the same? Well, I'll tell you why. Anne Marie's future family, the little girl that Charlie would soon meet, had adopted Tom. Yes, Harold and Kate had adopted Tom long before they knew Anne Marie. So, they lived in San Francisco before they lived in New Orleans. Tom attended the same school as Christy, Sam and Ben. His last name had been changed to Hew, after Kate and Harold's last name. Tom had heard about Charlie's arrival and he knew right away that it was his brother. He wanted revenge somehow on all the times Charlie had fought with him and when Charlie had run away, he had forced Loni and Burt into a desperate state of despair. He believed that the sorrow of loosing Charlie had killed his father, yet Charlie could live on without feeling guilty.

So, in short, Tom started the rumor. No one knew that, yet. Anyway, back to the story. When Charlie walked by Sasha, Sasha would've fainted if Bess hadn't stopped her. "You've got it bad." Bess said, looking at Sasha. "You should talk to him before you drive yourself crazy over him." Bess said, obviously worried about her friend. "You're right, but I can't do it. I'd melt to nothing just walking up to him. Do you think he likes me?" Sasha said, getting more and more energetic as she spoke.

"Calm...down." Bess said to Sasha. Very...slowly. "Take a deep breath. In and out. Good. Good. Now, go talk to him." Bess pushed Sasha into Charlie. "Sorry." Sasha said in a weak voice. "S'ok." Charlie said. The whole school turned and watched them. When Charlie smiled and Sasha smiled back, the whole school gasped. When the two separated, everyone returned to their normal beeswax.

After that, the rest of the school day was pretty normal. However when Christy, Ben, Sam and Charlie arrived home, Jolie called "Charlie, you have a phone call!" Charlie went to get it, and put it on speaker because Christy begged to listen. Ben and Sam listened too. "Hello?" a voice came from the phone. It was soft and sweet. Charlie recognized this voice as Flo's and said "Hello Flo." Flo giggled and asked, "How are you?" "Fine." Another giggle. Then, the unmistakable voice of Itchy came through. "Hey Charlie!" he said. "Hey Itch! How's it goin'?" "Fine. We're lonely are really bored though." Itchy said. "Oh, the pups wanna say hi." Flo added. "Hi Uncle Charlie!" the enthusiastic puppies said happily. Charlie laughed a little then asked "Itch, what're you doin' at Flo's?" "I was kinda lonely at the shack, so I went to Flo's for some company. You know, these puppies are a lot of work." Itchy said as Charlie heard the puppies' excited barks. Christy couldn't help giggling a little. "Who's that? Not another girlfriend I hope." Flo said when she heard Christy. "No, of coarse not Flo, that's Christy. She's one of the ones I'm livin' with." "Oh..." Flo said before saying a welcoming "Hi Christy!" "Hi Flo!" Christy said cheerfully.

"Hey!" Ben and Sam said to Flo and Itchy. Itchy, who had been busy with the puppies, asked, "Who's that?" "Itchy! That's Christy and some other dogs. Haven't you been listening at all?" Flo scolded Itchy. "Sorry. I've been kinda busy with these dozen puppies." Christy, Ben, Sam, and Charlie all laughed as she listened to Flo and Itchy talk. "Who are the others?" Flo whispered through the phone. "Itchy can still hear you Flo." "Oops..." Flo said after Charlie told her this. "Anyway, this is Ben and..." Charlie stopped, realizing that Flo wasn't listening. "You don't know their names and yet you're scolding me?" Itchy was scolding Flo. "Is that MY fault?" Flo asked Itchy. "Yes. You can control you're scolding better than that! Tsk, tsk!" Itchy said before saying an angry "Humph!" Everyone on the other end was laughing even harder now. "What?" Flo asked, hearing the laughter. This caused more laughter. Charlie was the first to stop. "Nothing. Anyway, the other two are..." He was interrupted by Itchy. "So Flo, who are the others? HM?" Itchy asked. "Charlie was just about to tell me." "This is..." He was interrupted this time by a shriek from Itchy. "EEP!" Itchy shrieked as he was attacked by 12 colorful puppies. Christy, Ben and Sam were laughing even harder than before. "Ben and Sam." Charlie said at long last.

Jolie, hearing the laughter, wen to investigate. "What is so funny?" she asked when she had found the source of the laughter. "Is that a girlfriend?" Flo asked irritably before realizing that Christy, Ben and Sam were laughing. "Why is everyone laughing?" Flo yelled through the phone. This caused more laughing. "Have you been listening at all?" Itchy asked before shrieking as the puppies attacked again. "Now you're scolding ME?" Flo asked as the Fannoilas and Charlie continued to hear shrieks from Itchy as Flo continued her lecture. Jolie was now also laughing. Flo, realizing that they were still laughing, repeated her question from before. "WHY IS EVERYONE LAUGHING?" She asked as the laughter continued. "Now, Charlie, tell me, who is the other girl? I demand to know!" "She's my host mom." "Why didn't you just say so? Itchy stop playing and take care of those puppies!" Flo scolded. Itchy continued to be part of attack of the rainbow puppies. "I can't!" "You can always stop playing! Have some self control!" Flo scolded.

Everyone was still laughing when Jolie said that they had had enough time on the phone and she had to pay the bills. They reluctantly turned off the phone then they continued to talk. "Your friends are interesting and a lot of fun." Christy said, still giggling a bit. "Yeah. I wish we could talk to them more." Ben said. They had homework to do, so they separated to do so. Over the next few weeks, they talked to Flo and Itchy quite a bit and Charlie and Sasha looked at each other more and more. Eventually, they began talking too.

One day at school, they started up a conversation. "Hey Charlie." Sasha started the conversation. "Hey." Charlie said back. "So, how've you been doing? You know, settling in and everything." "Pretty good. Hey, I was wondering, would you..." Charlie paused for a second. "Would you like to go to the

park this afternoon? If you don't want to, I understand..." Charlie babbled for a bit and only stopped when Sasha whispered "Hay is for horses." Then louder, she said "And yes, I'd love to! See ya!" She said before running off to tell Bess.

"HE WHAT?" Bess yelled when she heard the story. "Not so loud. I don't want the whole school talking again." Sasha said, trying to prevent another craze. "Right. But still, you are so lucky!" "I know! It's so great!" Sasha said excitedly. Christy had heard from Charlie and decided to spy on this little date. She really liked Charlie too.

Later, in the park, as Charlie and Sasha talked, Christy spied from her hiding place from behind a bush. The duo did a lot in the park together. As sunset arrived, they sang together. At the end of their song, they kissed. Christy was really mad when she saw this. She was also surprised. She had no idea Charlie could sing. She headed home so Charlie wouldn't have any clue that she had seen his and Sasha's date. When Charlie arrived, it was around 9. Jolie, knowing that Charlie had probably made some friends and had been out with them, didn't scold Charlie, but decided to talk with him later when she made her nightly rounds.

When everyone was in bed, Jolie made her nightly visits. Charlie's room was last. When she entered, she went over to Charlie and asked, "Where were you tonight?" "Out with someone." "Who? Anyone special?" "Kinda." "Who's the girl?" "Sasha." Charlie said quietly, slightly embarrassed. "Oh. C..well, someone tells me she's trouble. That she's really snobby, or whatever you'd say..." Jolie said, her voice getting quieter as she spoke. She now spoke at a regular voice. "So, how'd the date go, if that's what it was." "Great actually." Charlie said, staring out the window. "Charlie, sorry for sounding un-momish, but, do you ever miss your family?" Charlie's reply didn't come right away, but was this: "Well, sometimes I miss my sister. But that's it." "So, no worries about your mother or father?" "Well, my father died and I'm not sure about my mother. She's alive or somethin' like that." Jolie laughed a little and then said "Sorry. I didn't know." "That's okay. I don't miss 'em much anyway." Jolie looked at Charlie, who was still staring out the window, said a soft good night, then left. He misses them, I just know it. No one can hate their parents that much, can they? She thought as she walked down to her room to sleep.

The next day at school, Christy put her plan into action. What plan, you ask? Her plan to ruin Charlie and Sasha's relationship, of course! Anyway, first was telling anyone in school that was guaranteed to not be able to keep secrets. She told them about Charlie and Sasha's date and told them it was a secret. The whole school was soon talking about the date. Next was Sasha. She would tell her about Charlie and Flo. Then, she would tell Flo about Sasha. Then she decided to leave Flo out of this, for now. She told Sasha, who was furious and went to talk to Charlie RIGHT AWAY.

When Sasha found Charlie, she WAS NOT happy. She took him to a private spot (she didn't want the school talking more than they already were) and told him this: "Charlie, why didn't you tell me about this Flo? Why, Charlie? WHY?" She asked, sounding a bit hysterical as she fell against Charlie, beginning a slight cry. "Sasha, it's okay. She's just a girl. You're my girl and nothin's gonna change that." Charlie said sympathetically. Sasha didn't give in though. "Charlie, I thought you loved me." "I..." he didn't get to finish. Sasha ran away before he could finish. Bess saw Sasha's tears and followed her into bathroom. She found Sasha in front of the mirror, crying. "Sasha, it was only one date." "Oh, hi Bess." "Sasha, don't take it too hard. I'll talk to him." "No, Bess. I'm finished with him. I...I just want to be alone right now." Bess didn't say anything and walked out. Even though Sasha had said not to, she was going to find out what happened with Charlie.

When Sasha had gone to talk to Charlie, Christy had heard. She also saw Sasha run into the bathroom. And, well, she felt absolutely awful. What have I done? She asked herself as she walked home. As long as no one finds out it was me who did all this, everything should be fine. She argued with herself as she entered her home. "Christy, come here." Jolie called from the kitchen. Her voice sounded urgent.

Christy was nervous and wondered if her mother had found out about her "little" plan. When she got there she was relieved to see it was only a taste test. "Come here and try my new recipe." Jolie said as Christy entered the kitchen. "Why do you look so tense?" "Nothing. Nothing. I'll be fine." Christy replied as she tried her mother's new recipe. As usual, it wasn't that great. "So?" "It's...fine." Christy stammered as she hurried for some water.

"Mom, I have a really big problem and I NEED help. FAST." Christy said just as Charlie, Sam, and Ben walked through the door. They had stopped at a popular hang out to help cheer Charlie up. "Don't worry about the boys. Go on." Jolie said to Christy, who looked even more nervous. "Um, I have homework to do. So, yeah...I should be going." Christy said before running up the stairs as fast as she could. Jolie just shook her head and returned to her business. That night, she stopped to talk to Christy. "Christy, what were you going to tell me this afternoon?" Jolie asked as she entered Christy's room. "Nothing, it was nothing." "I think it is." Jolie said as she sat down on Christy's bed. Christy knew that her mother wouldn't leave until she had the full story. She started slowly, but then she talked faster and faster as she went. "Well, you know how I like Charlie and all? Well, I let my jealousy get the best of me and told some people about Charlie and Sasha's date. It spread across the school all in less than an hour. Then, I told Sasha about Flo and Charlie. She didn't take it too well. She and Charlie had a big break-up in private place and Sasha was really sad about it. She was crying and everything. I'm not sure about Charlie, but Sam and Ben took him to this place to cheer him up, so I know he was at least somewhat depressed. So, what do I do? I have no idea, but I still really like Charlie, but after this, it seems like Sasha likes him a lot more. But I think Flo is the one who likes him the most." Jolie had to think for a minute. Then she said "Well, it wasn't right for Charlie to try to have both Sasha and Flo for girlfriends at the same time. Believe me, one day he'll pay for that. But as for now, I suggest you try to let this thing die down. However, also let Sasha know why you told her about Flo and tell her that Charlie still likes her and all that." "Yeah, that's going to be kinda hard, but I'll try." Christy said before settling in for the night. "Oh, I suggest you leave Flo out of this whole thing for now." Jolie said as she exited Christy's room. She now went to talk to Charlie.

When she entered, Charlie was staring out the window, as usual. "Charlie, are you okay?" He didn't answer. "Um, I heard about Sasha. Must be painful to be you?" "Pretty much. My life stinks." "Well, I guess you could say that. I'd say your first mistake was running away." She was interrupted by Charlie. "No, it was not running away sooner. And coming here." Though this hurt Jolie a little, she understood. "Well, I can offer you some advice. Next time, don't try to make another girlfriend." When Charlie didn't say anything more, she said a quick good night, then left.

Though Charlie was irritated that Jolie was telling him what to do, he knew she was right. But he didn't care. He couldn't do anything about his life now, could he? His answer was no. The next day at school, Tom walked up to Charlie and said, "What're you doing here?" "Whaddya mean? Who're ya?" Charlie replied. "You don't know who I am? You've been away from home longer than I thought." Tom said the last part just to himself. "How'd ya know where I came from?" Charlie asked Tom. "Charlie, its me, Tom." Charlie looked at him for a second, growled and then went off. He looks so different, but hasn't changed much on the inside. Tom thought as he watched Charlie go. That night, Tom called his mother to tell her the news.

"Hello?" Loni voice came through the phone. "Hey, mother, it's me." "Oh, Hello Tom. Why might you be calling?" Tom paused for a bit, then said "Mother, I saw Charlie today." Loni did an exited gasp then questions poured from her mouth. Tom stopped her then began to answer some of her questions. "Well, he seemed fine. He's grown a lot. He's extremely thin though. Definitely something to worry about. Anyway, he's still the same old mean Charlie we've always known, maybe worse. Anyway, he's only changed on the outside." Loni was disappointed when she heard this. She was worried, like Tom had said that if he was too thin. "How thin?" "Well, any less fat and he'll be pure skin and bones." Loni was

now worried even more. "Do you think he'd want to see me, or anyone in this family?" "Probably not." Tom paused for a second then said, "Except for Falia." "Oh, yes." Loni said. There was a long pause between the two. Loni broke the silence. "I have a plan that I will put into action as soon as high school ends." She said. "But, mom, this is our second year! That seems way too long." "Believe me. You'll need the time. Now, all you have to do is warm up to Charlie. That is, if you can." "I'll try. But m...." He didn't get to finish. Loni hung up before he could protest or negotiate.

The next day, Tom approached Charlie again. "Whaddya want?" Charlie said not in the nicest of tones. Tom didn't answer immediately. "I...I was wondering if we could forget all that stuff from when we were puppies and maybe, start over." Tom said shyly. Charlie didn't say anything for a while then turned to him and gave him the best smile he could manage. "Sure." Charlie said. Tom didn't expect this to be easy at all. "So, um, Charlie...how have you been doing?" "Okay." "Any friends? Girlfriends?" Tom asked Charlie curiously. "Well, I got one friend. And had two girlfriends, but I'm down to one, too." Tom was a bit shocked, but wanted to know more. "So what were their names and what were they like?" Charlie told Tom about Sasha, Flo and Itchy. You've heard all that before, so there's no need to go over it again. Anyway, Charlie and Tom became fast friends.

When it was time to head home, Tom asked Charlie where he lived. "I'm stayin' at Christy, Sam and Ben's." Charlie said as the trio walked over to the two brothers. "Charlie, who's this?" "Tom, Christy. Christy, Tom. Ben, Tom. Tom, Ben. Sam, Tom. Tom, Sam." Charlie said this too fast. They were all slightly dazed after introductions. "How'd you meet?" "He's my brother." Charlie said, answering Christy's question. They were shocked. The triplets looked from Charlie to Tom, from Tom to Charlie. "You sure?" "Mm-hmm." Tom said. "Okay..." Sam and Ben said. "Yeah. We should get going. Come on Charlie." The four ran off. Tom watched them for a second. Christy was flirting with Charlie while Sam and Ben snickered as they watched. Tom went in another direction, thinking. He was confused. How could Charlie, the fat little puppy, grow to be THAT good-looking and thin? He was also confused that Charlie had taken his invitation so quickly. He did seem much happier, though. He may never be polite or nice, but he's happy and so are his friends. It would be nice if he could be like this around mother. Tom thought as he reached his home.

Tom, again, called his mother and told her of the events of that day. "Well, he accepted it quicker than I expected. He seems really happy." "This is good. Keep warming up to him. I am working on m plan." Loni said through the phone. She was eager to see her son again. "Mother, are you sure he'll want to do whatever you're doing?" "I already talked to Falia. She's eager to see her brother as well." "Does she know the plan?" "Like you, no. Now, good night Tom." Loni said before hanging up. Tom went to sleep after that.

Meanwhile, Charlie is also settling in. Jolie is talking with Christy. "So, this whole thing seems to have died down?" "Yes, but why should I talk to Sasha about this? Wouldn't that get the whole thing stirred up again?" "Maybe, but if we let these things sit, they could explode. Lemonade doesn't get sweet by letting the sugar sit at the bottom." "Doesn't the sugar getting picked off the bottom equal disaster?" "On the way, maybe. But once the sugar is mixed in, what do you get?" "Perfect lemonade." Christy said reluctantly. Jolie nodded, then Christy said "But what in the world do I say to Sasha?" "It'll come to you." Jolie said before giving Christy a good night kiss, then leaving Christy in her room to sleep. Her next stop was...you SHOULD be able to guess that by now.

"Hey Charlie." Jolie said as she entered. "So, anything happen?" "Well, unfortunately, my brother found me." Charlie said, still looking at her. "How is that unfortunate?" "I'm trying to get away from them, but they keep following me." Charlie said, as usual, staring out the window. Jolie felt sorry for him, but this time, she was out of words. She said good night, then left Charlie alone. These conversations always have the same essence. She thought as she went to bed.

The next morning, Christy went to confront Sasha. "Hey. Um, about Charlie. He didn't...I told you about

Flo because I was jealous.” “I don’t want to talk about him anymore. He chose to date me AND Flo at the same time. And that has nothing to do with you, so just stay out of this!” Sasha yelled at her before leaving. Christy shrugged and thought Well, at least I tried. Bess saw Sasha and wondered what had happened THIS time. She went into the bathroom, again. She found Sasha crying, again.

“Sasha, what did Charlie do this time?” “He met me, that’s what!” Sasha cried. Bess realized that someone must have brought up Charlie and she knew just who to ask. She, also, devised a plan. She decided, first, she’d call Flo, then ask anyone Charlie hung around with a lot, then ask Charlie. She needed to help Sasha before she went crazy.

That afternoon, Bess got Flo’s number from Christy. She called the number and was surprised when she heard a soft, sweet voice say “Hello?” Bess said, “Hey, I’m Bess.” “Who’s Bess?” “ME!”

“Who’s you?” “Oh, I’m Charlie’s girlfriend’s friend.” “I am his girlfriend and I don’t you.” Bess then realized that Charlie must not have told Flo about Sasha and she decided not to. She decided that it was only one date and that she didn’t want to ruin Charlie’s life more than it already was. “Never mind.”

Bess said as she hung up.

In New Orleans, Flo is talking to Itchy, telling him about the call. “Maybe I could go there and talk to him about it.” Flo said to Itchy. “Maybe I should go. That could cause a scene if you came, ya know?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Flo said, regretting realizing that Itchy was right. Itchy headed off to get on the exchange program, leaving Flo with the puppies.

Back in San Francisco, Jolie made her nightly rounds then went to bed. The next morning, at breakfast, as usual, Charlie wasn’t there. “Where does he go during breakfast?” She wondered aloud. “He goes out to hunt or something.” Ben said. “You can’t hunt around here.” Jolie argued. “You asked.” Ben accused her before leaving for school. Sam and Christy followed.

When they got there, they saw a dachshund in a green, sleeveless shirt and a red baseball cap. “Who are you and what in the world are you wearing?” Christy asked as she looked at the dachshund’s clothes. “You sound familiar.” The dachshund said. They recognized his voice as Itchy’s. “Itchy?”

“Christy, Sam, Ben?” “Hi! Somehow I imagined you much different.” Christy said, looking at his size and clothes. “Have you seen Charlie?” “We don’t see him until school starts.” Christy informed him.

“Oh.” “HEY!” A desperate call came from not far away. A beautiful collie approached them.

“Itchy...why...didn’t...you...wait for...me?” the collie said between breaths. “I thought you were staying with the puppies.” “I...got a...puppy...sitter.” She said, still breathing hard. “Flo?” Christy asked. “Christy?”

Flo asked. The two hugged then Christy said “You look beautiful, and why are you here?” “I had to help with this girlfriend thing.” “Oh. It’s nothing to worry about.” Christy assured her. “Ahem. I’m Charlie’s girlfriend and I’m going to help!” Flo stated, making it clear that she WAS going to help and wasn’t leaving until this was over.

As they approached the school, they saw Charlie talking with Bess. “Is that the girl?” Flo asked angrily.

“No, but that’s the girl’s friend.” Christy corrected her. “She’s pretty.” Itchy said, looking at Bess.

“Itchy! Stay focused!” Flo shouted at Itchy. Charlie obviously heard this and looked at them in disbelief.

“Charlie!” Flo yelled as she ran towards him. She kissed him and he kissed her back. Itchy, Christy, Ben and Sam just shook their heads.

Tom then joined them and saw Flo. “Who is that?” he asked Christy. “Charlie’s girlfriend, Flo.” She replied. “Another one?” “Huh?” “Doesn’t he already have Sasha, and you...kind of.” “I guess.”

“Charlie, where is she?” “Where’s who?” “This girl!” “Oh...who knows.”

Christy and Tom were pulled out of their conversation and watched Charlie and Flo. Just then, they saw Sasha coming over to them. “Who...is that?” Sasha asked when she saw Flo. Christy, Tom, Ben, Sam, and Itchy all looked at her. “Who’s she?” Itchy asked. “Who’s that?” “Who are you?” “Who’s that?”

“Who’re you?” “STOP!” Christy stepped in. “Sasha, this is Itchy. Itchy, this is Sasha.” The two stared at each other for a moment, then asked a different question, “What are you doing here?” Sasha’s reply

was “I live here.” Itchy said “Flo needed company and puppies aren’t easy to take care of.” Everyone stared at him. “What?” “What do you mean by puppies?” “Well, Flo has some puppies, but she wanted to take care of this whole mess. So she left me in charge. I’ve spent too much time taking care of those puppies, so I came along.” “Oh.”

CHAPTER II

I Well, Sasha saw Flo and WAS NOT happy about her. “You!” She growled before pouncing. Flo quickly dodged her and Sasha landed on the pavement. “Let’s not start a fight. Besides, you came after me, so I think it’s perfectly clear who’s at fault here.” Flo said. “Oh, perfectly.” Sasha growled. “Well, since you agree, why are you blaming me if you’re the culprit?” Flo asked. Sasha looked confused. “I thought you were talking about Charlie.” She said. “Oh yeah, that does make more sense.” Flo said thoughtfully. “Duh.” Sasha rolled her eyes. They turned to Charlie and growled. “Ladies, calm down.” They continued to advance towards him. “Do ya wanna talk it over perhaps?” Charlie asked. Sasha and Flo stopped and nodded. “Sasha, I really didn’t mean to get serious with you. I guess I was just using you.”

Obviously, Sasha didn’t like this AT ALL. She was now growling and about to pounce on him, teeth and all, but now it was Flo who stopped her. She pulled Sasha back, who sat arms crossed, teeth bared and her tail flicking frantically. Bess ran to Sasha to calm her down. Itchy and Christy tried to convince Charlie to say sorry to Sasha, which was NOT an easy task. He refused and Sasha wouldn’t look at Charlie. Bess growled at Charlie with a frown. Of course, he didn’t notice. Flo busied herself with the huge task of calming Sasha. To everyone’s relief, the school bell rang and everyone headed off to class.

Well, the school day was harder than usual and the teachers noticed this. They asked Sasha, Charlie and Flo to stay after school and they talked. Mrs. Johnson was the one to do it. You know that she’s Charlie and Sasha’s English teacher and Flo ended up with her too. Well, she began the conversation with the trio with this question: “What’s going on with you three?” She asked. She had noticed that Sasha wouldn’t speak to Flo or Charlie, who wouldn’t speak to Sasha. Flo wouldn’t speak to Sasha either. When no one answered, she repeated her question. This time, Flo answered. “Well, Charlie was dating me, but then he came here and began to date Sasha as well. I found out and came here. Just this morning, Charlie explained and I understood, but Sasha didn’t, so now Charlie and I aren’t speaking to her nor her us.” Flo explained. Mrs. Johnson was a bit overwhelmed by this explanation.

“So, basically, Charlie was cheating on both of you and you had a fight?” They nodded. “Well, I have one thing to say and it’s that Sasha and Flo, you two have no reason to not talk to each other, but DO have a reason to not talk to Charlie. However, not talking won’t help. You should talk about it.” Sasha protested. “Mrs. Johnson, we tried that and this is how it turned out.” “Then do it with me here.” Flo and Sasha knew they’d never get the full story out like they had this morning in front of a teacher. “Well, Charlie, why’d you do it?” Flo began. Charlie didn’t reply. Sasha tried to get him to talk, but he refused. Mrs. Johnson got an idea that she should’ve thought of before.

“Where did you have this fight?” “In front of the school.” Flo and Sasha said. “Well then, why don’t we get the security videos from this morning?” “You don’t have to go through all that trouble.” They all protested. Mrs. Johnson smiled and headed off. “We’re doomed.” Flo said. “That’s true.” Charlie and Sasha nodded. Mrs. Johnson came back with the tape and popped it in. They saw Charlie talking to Bess, Flo and Itchy running over the horizon, Christy, Ben and Sam coming, Tom coming, introductions and finally got to the fight. After it was over, Mrs. Johnson was shocked. “Charlie, I’m very disappointed. This maybe should be left to you guys after all.” She said before dismissing them. She watched the fight again and shook her head as it played. “The very idea. What has this world come to?” Meanwhile, Charlie and Flo came home to find Itchy, Christy, Ben and Sam bonding with a board game

in the living room. Flo and Charlie were speaking to each other again and everyone wondered what had happened. Christy ran up to Charlie said that she was sorry. He nodded and the two joined them in their board game. They had fun, ate dinner and went to bed. Surprisingly, they had enough rooms in the house for everyone to have their own room, almost. Flo had to stay with Christy, but that was it. They liked to talk to each other, girl to girl. They were used to talking to boys though. Flo really only talked to Charlie and Itchy and Christy only talked to her 2 brothers. The only other girl she talked to was her mother.

So they enjoyed these little talks because they could talk to a girl their own age. And, so they talked. "So, how's it in New Orleans?" "Oh, it's pretty good." Flo replied. "Um, about Charlie's brother, Tom, is he, well, free?" "I don't know. Ask him or Charlie." Flo replied again. Christy thought for a bit then said, "I was thinking, maybe I could to New Orleans for the last 2 years of high school." Christy said. Flo was a bit shocked. "Families aren't that easy to find there and you wouldn't want to go there anyway." Flo said. "I'm fine. I could stand to be a street dog for a bit." Christy said with a smile. Flo gulped and wanting to get off the subject, she said good night and they drifted off to sleep.

Now Jolie's night rounds had become less nightly and more weekly. Sometimes. They weren't every week, but most weeks. Well, the next day didn't go much better than the previous day. Christy began to suck up to Tom and Ben and Sam laughed at her many failed attempts to impress him. While Christy was struggling, Charlie, Sasha, and Flo were having their own problems. While Flo and Sasha did make up, Sasha didn't forgive Charlie when he left. After he left, she cried a bit and missed him. She didn't want to let him know, so she and Bess forgot him. Well, Sasha at least. Bess didn't forgive Charlie for the pain he had caused Sasha, but she did forget about him most of the time.

Charlie was glad to be back in his cozy cab home, but he also missed having a family around to talk to. Flo was back at the church and Itchy was back with his mom. They settled in eventually and just as they did, Christy came. Yes, she came to New Orleans. When she got there, she saw no dog restaurants. She wasn't sure where to eat now. She figured that everyone ate at home, but this too was a misconception. She was taken in by a kind, elderly couple. They were Cocker Spaniels and naturally, she was much bigger than they were, but she liked them. They were nice to her, but she wasn't too happy when she found out where she'd be eating.

The couple took her to their favorite dumpster and she wrinkled her nose. "Dear, come eat." "Out of that?" "Yes, of coarse. Where did you think you'd be eating dear?" Christy reluctantly put her head in the dumpster and immediately pulled it out. "It stinks!" "Of coarse it does, dear." Christy put head back in, held her nose and quickly pulled out the first thing she could grab. It was the remains of some buttered toast. She was about to put it back and not eat when Fanny, her host mother, stopped her. "Dear, that's a great find! It doesn't get much better than that!" "I thought old folk were all about clean and those things." Christy muttered to her self. "Usually, yes. But f we did that, we'd be dead." Fanny said before handing her the piece of toast.

Christy ate it with her eyes closed and held her nose. She raced for a nearby puddle only to find it dirty. "Is anything here clean?" she muttered before heading off in the direction that Fanny had said the school was. She came to a pretty decent building. While it was an old, unused human school, it was the most decent thing she had seen yet and probably will see. She entered and saw Charlie and Itchy fighting with a fat pit bull and a mutt.

"Carface, go away." Charlie said. "Make us." Carface said in his gravelly voice. "Yeah." Killer said. Itchy tried to break up the fight before it resorted to physical violence. "Guys, I know you hate each other, but could we not start anything for one day?" When this didn't work, Itchy took to his last resort. "Look! The principle's coming!" he said. Carface quickly ran off and naturally, Killer followed. Itchy didn't like to lie, but he didn't want to repeat the events that seemed to happen daily. Christy walked up behind Itchy and said "Boo!"

Itchy jumped and screamed. Charlie and Christy laughed and Itchy was still petrified. When they had calmed down, Charlie asked the question. "What are you doing here?" "Well, I came here." Christy said. "I know that, but how did you survive breakfast? No, don't answer that..." Christy answered Charlie's question anyway. "I just barely made it! How do live like this? I CAN'T TAKE THIS!" Christy cried. Flo came over, seeing the commotion. "Christy, what a wonderful surprise." She said before turning to Charlie. "Come on, we've gotta get to class! Itchy, you too!" Flo said before running off. Charlie and Itchy followed, leaving Christy alone. Carface and Killer joined her.

"You like him, do ya now?" Carface asked. Christy didn't answer. "Well, I can help." Christy turned to him the instant he said this. "What'd you have in mind?" "Well, I was thinking a trade." "Whaddya want?" Christy asked, not completely buying this yet. "Well, If you help me, then I'll help you." "How?" "Well, I know Charlie and I know how to get to him. I can help you get to him, just help me." "Fine, but how will you help me?" "You'll see." Carface said before heading off with Killer, who winked. Christy waved good bye, then turned around and cheered "YES!"

Well, Carface did help her. He sent notes in Itchy's handwriting and Charlie fell for it. The notes eventually convinced Charlie that he should be with Christy and not Flo. While he didn't completely break up with her, he did say that they should stay separate for awhile. Flo wasn't happy, but was curious as to what was going on. She saw Charlie and Christy together more and more often and she knew what was going on, she thought.

Well, as Charlie and Christy's relationship was getting strong and solid, Carface pulled Christy aside and said "Now you've gotta keep your end of the deal." "Okay, what do you want?" Carface handed her a note and went off. Christy could barely make out the writing, but made out as much as she could. As she read it, she didn't want to go through with it, but Carface had done his part, so she couldn't refuse, really.

Your end: Get rid of Flo and Itchy. Get Charlie alone. Then come tell me where. She went off to find Carface to see if he had any ideas about how to get rid of Itchy and Flo. He did. "I wants you should go and get Killer. He'll help you." Christy nodded. She found Killer, who was delighted to help, after he was told it was Carface's plan. "Well, in my experience, I've found it very helpful to ship 'em off to enslave them in Africa." "Has that ever worked?" Christy asked. Killer looked down. "Well...it goes fine...until we get to the part of getting them onto the ship." Christy rolled her eyes. She would have to get Killer when SHE came up with a plan.

Well, Charlie saw her talking to Killer and came over to them. "Beat it." Charlie told Killer, who ran to Carface for safety. Now, Christy knew she couldn't get rid of Itchy and live with herself so she'd get rid of Flo first. She did. Well, tried. She sent her off to the alley mall she and discovered. Flo went in and Christy was sure she wouldn't see her again for a while. She sent Itchy off to Canada for the week and led Charlie into the forest. She led him into the dark part and left him alone.

Well, she emerged from the forest only to find Flo and Itchy. This she didn't understand. She had sent Flo to an endless trip to the mall and Itchy to a week's vacation to Canada. "I've seen it before. I wanna be with Charlie." Flo said. "It's cold up there." Itchy said. "Oh." Christy chuckled nervously. "So, where's Charlie?" Flo asked. "I don't know. I've got to go do...something." Christy said as she ran off. Flo and Itchy looked at each other, shrugged and headed into the forest.

Meanwhile, Christy had found Carface and told him exactly where Charlie was. Carface tried to hold his maniacal laugh but failed. Christy shrugged and went home. Carface found Charlie in the place where Christy had told him he was and chuckled. Charlie heard him and growled. Carface pounced on Charlie and a fight started. Flo and Itchy heard the growls and ran towards them. They found Charlie and Carface fighting and would've jumped in to stop it, but it would be too dangerous for them. They needed someone bigger. They were about to get a teacher, but that wouldn't work. Besides, it was after school. They could get an adult, such as Itchy's parents, but that wouldn't help much either. They'd get

someone their age.

Eric King. They'd get him. He was a Great Dane and he was tall, even for a Great Dane. Well, they found him in his sophisticated home in the neighborhood that Charlie came from and understood why he ran away. It was too quiet and fancy. Eric's markings made a resemblance of a tuxedo. They told him their problem and he refused to help them himself, but his father was a police dog and went to get him. Flo and Itchy gulped, regretting this 100 percent.

"Well, let us go stop these savages." Kevin (Mr. King) said. Flo and Itchy shook their heads and lead him to the fight scene. As they did, they heard Kevin endlessly complaining. "Fighting! And you call yourselves dogs. Pff! You're mangy excuses for canines. Never bathing, howling, using teeth and claws! It's a disgrace to dog kind!" While Flo and Itchy did enjoy some of the comments, getting a good laugh out of a few of them, they also were QUITE annoyed and insulted after quite a SHORT while. Well, they arrived at the fight scene and it wasn't pretty. Mr. King stepped in and pulled apart a biting Charlie and a growling Carface. Now you might think this is one of those times where the adult steps in and tells them to stop and they do, but as you should know, this is NOT one of those times. "Gentlemen! Stop fighting! An RESPONSIBLE adult is here!" "Why?" Carface snapped. Charlie just snickered, which set off Kevin a bit. "WHAT IS SO FUNNY?" Mr. King stormed. Charlie continued to snicker. Carface joined him, but they soon remembered why they were angry, but the "adult" had succeeded. Ok, so maybe this is sort of one of those times, but the point is that they didn't forget about the fight. As soon as Mr. King left (oh so proud), they began again. They pounced and resumed their fight. Flo and Itchy stepped in, but when they each got a scratch, they gave up. The next day, Flo remembered her own troubles.

Charlie was still with Christy. When she saw Charlie and Christy fighting, she was glad that she might get Charlie back and sad that he might be depressed about it. She eves-dropped from her own locker. "Charlie, the reason I left you there was..." "Waiting." "...Well, I trusted Carface. And he did his end of the deal, so I had to do my end, which was to get you alone." "What was his end of the deal?" Christy blushed and looked away. "Well?" "It was...It...It was to...It was to...He was supposed to get you to like me and he did. It worked." "You trusted Carface?" "Well, yeah, and it worked!" Christy beamed. Flo stepped in.

"Not really, Christy. Charlie and Carface got in a fight. Itchy and me each got our share of the fight, and Carface and Charlie each got...who knows what! They could've killed each other!" Flo scolded just as Carface came upon the scene. "Thanks Christy. Charlie, I'm not finished with you. Flo, tell Itchy I'm sorry for the scratch." Flo looked confused. "Just to let him know that it was an accident, you know?" Flo shook her head. "What do you want from Itchy?" "Well you know how he and you are the only ones who actually live with your parents out of the 5 of us?" "Yeah." "Well, I was wonderin..." "Oh no. You miss your parents and were hoping that we'd help you?" Carface looked down and moved his paw in circles. "Forget it." Charlie told Carface. Flo frowned. She didn't like Carface, but she might be able to do something. "I'll try." She said. Christy looked lost. "Huh? I know Charlie ran away, but what about the duo?" "Killer-abandoned. Carface-Dad died, ran away." "Ah." Christy nodded.

Meanwhile, Carface and Killer, Charlie and Itchy had begun a boss-boss, assistant-assistant duel. They weren't bosses and assistants yet, but you know what I mean. Flo and Christy left this one alone and went off to find some peace, if that was possible.

Now, Loni's litters were home schooled and they would be allowed to leave the house/yard for a while. It was after school for the street dogs now and they just hung out at the school grounds for a while before going to their alley or whatever they lived in. Flo had gone home and Christy was exploring. She saw the duo you know as Hart and Falia exploring as well. They had some resemblance to Charlie, so Christy decided to check it out.

"Hi." She said. Falia and Hart jumped. They had been admiring a buttercup and giggling. "Hello." Falia

said. "Who are you?" she asked. "Christy. You?" "I'm Falia and this is Hart." Falia said politely. "You're a housedog aren't you? You know Eric King?" "Yes, I'm a housedog and yes, I know Eric. Why do you ask?" "Well, It's just that, well, you looked like you might know him." Falia and Hart nodded. "So, you know how to stop fights?" Christy asked. Falia looked shocked. "What kind?" Hart asked. When Christy gave him a confused look, he said "Physical or verbal?" "Oh, both." Christy said. Falia and Hart nodded. "Is anyone fighting?" Falia asked nervously. "Oh yeah, for days now. They take a break, but they start again no matter what we try."

Falia and Hart were both confused now, so Christy led them to the scene. "So, what's your last name?" Hart answered Christy's question. "Barkin." Christy stopped. "No way!" She squealed. "What?" Falia asked. "Do you know a Charlie Barkin?" Falia and Hart beamed. "That's our brother! Do you know him?" Falia asked. Christy nodded and started to continue in the direction she had been going before stopping again. "You two ready to see a street dog fight?" Falia and Hart gulped, but nodded slowly. 'When they arrived, Charlie and Carface had resorted to violence again while (as always) Killer and Itchy left their fight to stop the C duo. Christy ran over to Itchy to ask what had happened. "Well, you can guess most of it, but this time, me and Killer HAD to be here to support each of them with our 'yeah!'s and such and you can guess the rest. Falia and Hart had no idea what had just happened, but stepped in anyway.

Of course, both looked different, so neither recognized each other. They had no idea who was who, so they just assumed they never met. They thought. Christy found no need to introduce them, thinking that they already knew and everyone else had no idea who they were. "Hey, who're you?" Charlie asked. "You motley street kind! Of course you'd be in a fight!" Falia flicked her chin high and walked off. Hart stared at Charlie suspiciously and also walked off. When they arrived home, they told Loni about their incident.

"Why are you two home so late?" Loni asked as they walked in the door. "We were observing the flowers and this labrador came over and started talking to us." Hart explained. "Her name was Christy and she asked us if we knew how to resolve fights and we said we might be able to, depending on the fight." Falia explained further. "There was a street dog physical fight going on. We broke it up and walked off, but the Shepherd seemed oddly familiar." Hart finished. "Yes, he did." Falia agreed. "Now, my children, we do not gossip." Loni said as she finished cooking dinner. "We're having chicken tonight, so go wash up. The bird is ready!" Loni said happily before pulling "the bird" out of the oven. As usual, the Barkin family dinner was very social. "So, about this afternoon, I don't want neither of you to ever follow a street dog again." "Yes mother." Falia and Hart said together as they nodded. "But, about the Shepherd, what was he like?" Falia and Hart giggled. "We didn't talk to him really. He asked who we were and we told him we couldn't tell him. He was definatly a street dog." "Yes." Hart nodded. "Ah. If I didn't know better, I'd say it was Charlie." Loni said. "No. He was WAY too skinny for that and he looked so diferent than Charlie did." "Well, I'd like to meet him. Bring along tommorrow." Loni insisted. Falia and Hart, knowing she wouldn't take no for an answer said ok.

The next day, the same errors of yesterdays were made and yet another fight broke out. This time, without Killer and Itchy's help. Loni saw this and was disgusted. "how can they fight like that? It's...uncivilized!" She said as she watched from behind a bush. Falia and Hart were in the open and told her it was okay to come out. She resisted. "Well, mother, they ARE street dogs." "I know that, but still, they're dogs, not cannibals." Falia and hart rolled their eyes and laughed.

Christy saw them and approached. "Hey, Falia, Hart, who's the bush girl?" Loni was very insulted and almost exploded. "I'll have you know I am the mother of 24 and I am not a bush girl! Now, young lady, you shouldn't be hanging around such cannibals." Loni said as she began to pull Christy away, who wouldn't let her. "Who? Charlie, Itchy, Killer, or Carface? Sure they can be rough, but they're nice." "Did you say Charlie?" "Yes, why?" "I have a lost son named Charlie. But none of them are him, are

they?" "If you're thinking of Charlie Barkin, then that would be the Shepherd that's fighting with the fat pit bull." Loni's jaw dropped and almost fell off, if it went any lower.

She ran right over and broke up the fight with her motherly strength. Charlie right away knew who she was and backed away. Loni stared at him angrily. Falia and Hart had no idea what was going on and just looked back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. And so on. Falia and Hart were even more shocked when Loni asked this: "Is this what your life has come to? Huh? You left me to join the uncivilized?" Loni had a few tears in her eyes. Charlie tried to say something, but she didn't let him. He just backed off and left nuzzling Flo. Christy tagging close behind. Itchy looked at Loni, then left aslo. Falia and Hart had no idea what had happened, so they shoed Carface and Killer, who gladly left. Falia tried to comfort Loni, then asked "Who was that?" Loni was shocked. Falia had no idea why. "What?" she asked. "That was Charlie." Falia gasped and almost fainted. When she awoke, they headed home and Loni devised her plot.

Charlie decided to drop out of high school and along with him, Carface, Killer, Itchy and Flo. They began their own lives at 15 (dog years) and we all know what happens at 16 or less to Charlie. Yes, the first movie! So, here ends this part.

3 - Loni's Plan

PART III: Loni's Plan

CHARACTERS

Loni Barkin

Falia Barkin

Tom Barkin

Hart Barkin

Charlie Barkin

Christy Fannoila

Flo Collieon

Eric King

Jane Coffman

After all of her puppies were out of school, Loni put her plan into action. She asked Falia if she would join her, and she agreed. Falia created invitations that looked something like this:

REUNION IN PROGRESS!

DATE: 6/15-whenever

TIME: 2:00 PM-who knows

PLACE: 1386 HALO CREEK RD, FALLS BROOK, LOUISIANA

Please bring anyone special to you. No parent supervision will be available. I look forward to seeing everyone!

-Falia Barkin

Loni decided not to come because she had planned this whole thing knowing how much Falia missed Charlie and she had figured that if she were there, Charlie wouldn't come. Well, Falia sent the invitations and everyone received theirs, including Charlie.

Well, Charlie had almost finished high school without being held back, thankfully. He didn't dare attend college because 1. He had only barely gone to high school and 2. He did not like it there. Well, he spent his days in the alleys, looking to find any food in the dumpsters and supposedly the rare opportunity of a human passerby feeding him. His life was quite simple, when he wasn't at a casino or nightclub, he was visiting Flo. He didn't realize how messed up his life had become, except for the occasional homesickness. He would soon get over it temporarily and head off to a nearby casino or nightclub.

Falia's life was quite different, though. She had moved to a small town and found an old, run down house in a peaceful valley. She fixed it up to its original Victorian beauty and was happy. She met Eric King. They fell in love and soon Eric moved in with Falia. For food, she would find a loose chicken, beg for food, or catch a mouse or two. She was happy, but she missed her brother Charlie.

Well, the day of the party arrived and Tom and Christy were the first to arrive. Falia greeted them cheerfully and she and Christy became fast friends. After a while, Hart and his girlfriend, Jane, arrived. Falia and Jane also became fast friends. So did Jane and Christy. Everyone arrived and Falia was so happy to be reunited with her family.

The house became too crowded, so Falia moved everyone out. When everyone was going outside, Falia noticed that Charlie wasn't among the enormous crowd. She couldn't help but shed a few tears. Then, a paw wiped a tear from her eyes. She expected this to be Eric's paw, but it wasn't.

This paw was Charlie's paw. Falia was delighted to see her brother again. She hugged him, then she saw Flo looking at her in a strange way. "What?" Flo continued to stare. Charlie looked back and forth, wondering the same as Falia. Flo then said "You're a collie too!" Falia was relieved to find out it was only this. She studied the couple for a bit, then noticed how thin they were. "When was the last time you ate?" Falia asked. They looked at each other for a bit, as if they had never thought about it before. "Well, I think the last time I ate anything besides garbage was about two weeks ago." Charlie said. "I think the last time ate was when you visited me, Charlie. When was that? A month?" They discussed this for a bit, and Falia finally got the point. She then rose another question "What do you drink?" "Rain water, any type of water I can get my hands on." was Flo's reply. "Lotta stuff." Said Charlie. Falia didn't know what to make of this, so didn't push the subject any further. She took Charlie to the males' group and Flo to the females.

When everyone left, Falia asked Charlie and Flo to stay. They accepted, in no hurry to return to the city. That night, Falia and Charlie were talking. "So Charlie, how's life?" Falia asked. When Charlie didn't respond, she realized he wasn't going to tell her. After a while, Charlie asked her the same question. She responded with this: "Well, my life's pretty normal. I moved here, met Eric and had this party. Nothing special." Just then Flo walked out. Falia didn't want her interfering with their conversation, but she let her. "Itchy called. One of the pups caught a cold. Should we leave?" Flo asked. "Which one?" Charlie asked. "Joey." Flo replied. "Who's Joey?" Falia asked curiously. "One of our pups. He'll be fine." Said Charlie. "You two had puppies?" Charlie and Flo laughed when she said this. "What?" Falia asked them. "I run an orphanage." Flo told Falia. "Oh." Falia blushed. She was embarrassed for asking. "Sorry for thinking you two were married." Falia said. "S'ok." Flo said before kissing Charlie, then leaving.

When Falia was sure that Flo was gone, Falia asked, "Why don't you ever call?" "Why d'ya think?" Charlie asked, sounding a bit irritated. Falia didn't know he had developed a temper and was a bit scared. Charlie realized this then said "Sorry, I didn't mean ta scare ya." He said before hugging his sister closely. Falia didn't know what to make of this either, which made Falia wonder more about what he had been doing lately. She decided to ask Flo if she knew anything or anyone who would know, since Charlie obviously wasn't doing to tell her.

The next morning, Falia and Eric went out to catch breakfast while Charlie and Flo stayed behind. "She doesn't know, does she?" Flo asked. "No. And I don't really plan on it." Charlie said. They were discussing things when Falia and Eric returned, laughing. "What happened?" Flo asked them, seeing how hard they were laughing. "There...was...a..." Falia couldn't continue, she was laughing too hard. Eric said, "It was smart." This made Falia laugh more. Flo repeated her question, this time to Eric. "A giant rodent attacked." Falia, who had finally managed to calm down, laughed again. After about an hour, Falia managed to calm down. "There was a mouse and Eric jumped at it. It escaped. It was also a baby. Eric couldn't catch a baby mouse!" She then began laughing again.

If you don't get it, don't worry. Charlie and Flo didn't get it either. They looked at each other, confused. Eric was sure that they'd laugh at him too. When they didn't, he was also confused. Falia noticed that everyone else wasn't laughing and was confused. She stopped laughing and they discussed that day's plans. "So, why don't me and Flo go to the beach for some girl time while you boys do something else?" Charlie nodded. "Okay..." Eric said. "Yeah!" Flo said.

Eric went over to Falia and said, "Falia, we hardly know these two. Are you sure it's all right to do this?" Eric asked nervously. He didn't completely trust Charlie or Flo yet. While he was glad that Charlie wasn't going with Falia, the arrangement made him nervous. "Don't worry. You just don't know Charlie yet. I think you two will be great friends." Falia said happily. Eric wasn't so sure, but he went along with it.

When Falia and Flo headed off for the beach, Charlie and Eric stayed behind. When the two females

were out of sight, Charlie went inside and up to his room. Eric followed secretly wondering what he was up to. He heard Charlie doing something, but he couldn't quite make sense of what he was doing. When the noise stopped, Eric was glad, but when he looked into the room, Charlie was gone. He saw the window open and he raced downstairs. He saw Charlie on the roof, trying to find a place to land. "What in the world are you doing?" Eric called to Charlie. Charlie looked at him, growled, then returned to his activity. Eric watched him for a while, then gave up.

When Charlie finally found a way down, he jumped and then he went over to where Eric was sitting. "What were you doing?" Charlie hadn't said a word to Eric yet and Eric hadn't heard him speak to anyone yet. Eric was much bigger than Charlie was, even though Charlie was bigger than most dogs. Charlie felt a bit intimidated by Eric's size, but showed no sign. Charlie just sat there, staring into the distance, licking his paw. Eric looked down at Charlie and asked "What were you doing up there? It's my house, and I'd like to know!" Eric said, trying to stay as calm as possible. "Hey, it's Falia's too." Eric wasn't happy about this reply, but tried to ignore it. "Are you always like this?" "Like what?" "Well, you know. You never tell anyone what you're doing, you just so antisocial. Your tone isn't too pleasant either." Eric said, trying to sound as nice as possible. He hadn't heard any of Charlie's way of talking yet, so he was surprised and annoyed when Charlie began speaking with informal language.

"There somethin' wrong with it?" Eric hadn't expected Charlie to say this, so he backed off to let Charlie cool down a bit. "Sorry if I offended you." Eric said to Charlie after a while. When a reply didn't come, he said "So, would you like to tell me what you were doing up on the roof?" "Why are ya so interested?" "No reason. I was just curious." "Well, forget about it." Charlie snapped. Eric was finding it hard to figure out Charlie. Then he remembered last night. He had seen Charlie hug Falia and didn't like that at all. "About last night, what were you doing hugging Falia?" "She's my sister, ain't she?" Charlie asked. "Well, yeah, but, you barely know each other. I just don't feel comfortable with you doing that stuff." "Fine. Be that way." Charlie said before walking off. Eric followed.

"Charlie, what's life in the city like? I've always lived in the countryside and wondered what it's like." Eric said after they had walked quite a bit, trying to get along with Charlie. That wasn't as easy as it was to get along with most dogs. Charlie ignored him for a bit, then said, "It's not great or anything. I basically look for food in dumpsters and sometimes get food from people. Occasionally I visit Flo and her puppies. That's pretty much it." Charlie told Eric. "What do you do for fun?" Eric asked. Charlie stared at him, looking a bit startled. "You don't wanna know." Charlie said. "Sure I do. Why else would I ask?" Eric paused for a second. "You don't do anything bad, do you?" "Depends what ya consider 'bad'." Charlie said. Eric was now even more curious about Charlie now than he had been before. "Well. Shoot." Eric said. Charlie didn't speak right away. "Fine, if ya really wanna know. Just don't tell Falia. I don't want her worryin' 'bout me." Eric nodded and Charlie told him how he went to casinos and nightclubs often. "You're not serious." Eric said. He couldn't believe that Charlie went to casinos or nightclubs. He had heard about them from his parents. "Never go into any nightclubs." They would tell him firmly. He had always wondered what it was like in them and what you did in them. He asked Charlie and he couldn't believe what he heard. When Charlie was finished, he asked "Why do you do you go in then?" "Well, I like it. I have fun. My only friends besides Flo are there." Eric couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"So, you actually gamble?" Eric still couldn't believe this. "How many times do I gotta say it? Yes!" Eric didn't want to irritate Charlie any more, so he shifted the subject a notch. "Um, sorry for sounding stupid, but what is gambling?" Charlie shook his head. "Where have you been? It's basically bettin and stuff like that." Eric wasn't sure what to think of Charlie now.

"I'm sorry if I made you mad. My parents were over protective. Yours and Falia's parents they taught you what this stuff was. My parents just told me not to do it." "My parents were strict too." "How do you know all of this stuff then?" "You'd think youda learned by now. I ran away when I was little. My parents

woulda never told us about this stuff.” “Oh. So, then I take it Falia doesn’t know about any of this?” “Yeah. And I’d like to keep it that way. Don’t you dare tell her.” “Sure but...why not?” Eric asked. “I told you already. I don’t want her worrying.” “Yeah, I know, but I’m not sure if that’s the only reason.” Eric looked at Charlie, then after a long stare, Charlie gave in. “Okay. There’s more reasons. I don’t want her to tell mom about this. If she knew, I’d be dead.” Eric laughed a little. “How would she kill you?” “She’d drag me back to our house and try to straighten me out into some kinda proper thing.” Eric laughed a little at this too. Charlie was pretty fun after you got past all of the tough guy stuff. “So, you don’t want Falia to know about this, then?” “No.” Charlie said. “So, you ever drink anythin besides water?” “No. What do you mean?” “So, you’ve only drunk water?” “Yeah.” “Oh, your parents never told you about anythin else?” “Yeah.” “Oh, then never mind.” Charlie said. Just then, Eric realized that they had reached New Orleans. He had never known it was so close to the house.

“Come on. I’ll show ya some real fun.” Charlie said before heading down the hill towards the city. It was night now and Eric didn’t feel so good about this. “Shouldn’t we head back?” “There’s plenty of time left before the girls’ll get back.” Eric didn’t have anymore excuses, so he followed. They reached a pier with a boat at the end. “Where are we?” Eric asked, looking around. “Follow me.” Charlie said before entering the boat. Eric followed, but didn’t feel too good about the situation. There were no signs to tell the name of the place. Eric entered the boat, only to find Charlie at the bar. He looked around then he knew where he was. He quickly turned around and left.

He had been taken to a nightclub. He headed back to the house. He argued with himself about whether or not he should tell Falia about this. He had told Charlie he wouldn’t, but he felt that Falia should know. He arrived at the house.

Meanwhile, Flo and Falia were also having a nice time on the beach. They had just finished swimming and were drying out on the beach before heading home. “I wonder what Eric and Charlie did.” Falia wondered aloud. “Who knows. They could have gone just about anywhere.” Flo replied. Falia looked at her then remembered what she had wanted to ask her. “What does Charlie do anyway?” “What do you mean?” “Like, where does he hang out and do for fun, that kind of stuff.” Flo stared at her then said, “Why are you asking me? Ask Charlie.” “I did, but he wouldn’t tell me. “Then what makes you think I’ll tell you? He doesn’t want you to know about it, and I’m loyal.” “I just thought that maybe you’d have a care for him. His family’s worried about him. I’m worried about him.” “I’m loyal to Charlie. He ran away, so what makes you think that I’d be loyal to the ones he’s trying to get away from?” Falia hadn’t expected a comeback like that. Flo changed the subject. “So, what do you and Eric do?”

“Well, we sit around and talk, go for walks along this beach, hunt, walk around the valley. We do a lot.” “Maybe the four of us could all go around the valley tomorrow.” Flo suggested. “Or maybe, we could go in groups of two?” Falia suggested. “Like me and Charlie, you and Eric?” Falia said. “I’m not so sure.” “Why?” “Well, that might not work out so well.” “Well, you know, Flo. Charlie acts different when he’s with you. So, maybe we could go in these same groups.” Falia said. “I guess. But I think me and Charlie have a few tings to settle.” “Oh. Well, then okay.” Falia found that Flo and Charlie were trying to hide something from her and Eric.

Back at the house, Eric watched as Charlie walked out of the forest. He walked right past Eric without a word. A few minutes after Charlie came, Flo and Falia arrived home. It was around 3 AM now and everyone was tired. Flo joined Charlie. Eric and Falia went to their own room. “Falia, there’s something I have to tell you. I told him I wouldn’t tell you this, but I have to. Charlie...” He didn’t finish. Falia interrupted him. “So, did you and Charlie have a nice time today?” Falia seemed to be ignoring him. “Um...sure.” “Good. Flo and I had a nice time as well.”

Eric wondered why she was ignoring him. The next day, Charlie and Flo didn’t hunt with them. When the house was out of sight, Eric asked Falia “Why did you ignore me last night?” “I didn’t know I was doing it.” “Oh. So, um, yesterday, I was talking with Charlie and...” “Look! There’s a chicken!” Falia

whispered. She pounced and the two had a nice breakfast and a nice time being chased by the farmer that owned the now devoured chicken. They laughed while they were chased. They arrived home, only to find Charlie and Flo gone. "Where could they be?" Just as Falia finished, they walked in the door. "What were you two up to?" "Nothin." Charlie said before heading back outside. "We went for a walk around the valley. Of coarse, it turned into an Olympic event." Flo told them. "Heh?" "We had a contest for everything. Who could jump higher, who could swim across the lake faster, jump over the pile of rocks in the road. Then we got to a patch of flowers. That was lovely. We found a rainbow when we went through that waterfall." Eric and Falia were stunned. Every time they explored the valley, they always stayed on the trails. They never went into the water. Actually, they feared the giant waterfall. They were afraid what might be lurking behind it; their thoughts were interrupted by Flo. "You two must have so much fun!" "Actually, we just stay on the trails." "Then you two have missed out on so much! Come on, Falia! Please come with me!" Falia agreed, and Eric pulled her aside. "Falia, are you sure about this?" "What? It worked yesterday? Didn't it?" "Yeah, but no." Falia had left when he had said yeah, so she didn't hear him say no.

Flo took Falia to the lake. She dove off the bridge crossing the lake and began to swim towards the waterfall. "Come on, Falia! Whatcha waiting for?" Falia took a nervous dive into the water and found it cold. "It's freezing in here! How do you stand it?" "I'm used to it! You will be too!" Falia swam a bit, and the water seemed quite warm after a while. "Oh, wow, it is nice." "Told you! Now, Follow me!" Flo called before heading towards the waterfall. Falia followed, but stopped when she got there. "It's so big!" She said to Flo. Flo just jumped onto a ledge then said, "It's fun! Come on! Do you want to see the rainbow or not?" She said just before jumping through. "Well, here goes." Falia jumped on the ledge Flo had jumped on, then nervously jumped through the waterfall. She had her eyes closed when she landed. She froze and didn't dare open her eyes. "Open your eyes!" Flo said to her. She was petrified. Flo called her, and she opened her eyes. She saw Flo prancing around in front of a rainbow. "It's beautiful." She said.

They had the waterfall behind them, and a rainbow in front of them. It was beautiful. She also noticed they were on a cliff. "Flo!" She called. "What?" "Do you know that we're on a cliff!" "Yeah, so?" Falia calmed down. Flo jumped through the waterfall, down back into the lake. Falia soon joined her, in a hurry to get off the cliff. When they got back to the house, a tormented looking Falia and a spunky Flo arrived, both soaked. "Falia, what happened?" "The waterfall's on a cliff, and it's big and scary!" Falia said to Eric. Eric looked at Charlie and Flo nuzzling in the meadow. He looked back at Falia and nuzzled her. She calmed down when he did this. "Thanks, Eric." "Your welcome." He had done that only because he felt like he should be nuzzling Falia because Charlie and Flo were. He didn't expect it to work. "So, are you two lovebirds ready for lunch?" Falia said. Charlie and Flo, who were still nuzzling, jumped a bit. They were startled when Falia called to them. "What do you have in mind?" Flo asked. "Well, the usual. Rodent or chicken?" The two looked at each other. Flo said "I think that we could go to the city for lunch." "Oh could we come?" Falia begged.

"Sure. I you'd like." While Falia was happy for a change, Eric knew where Charlie would go. He hoped Flo didn't go to the same place. When they arrived, Charlie headed in one direction and Flo in the other. Falia was confused. She started to follow Charlie, but Eric pulled her towards the direction that Flo had gone. Falia followed him. "When I said that, I thought they ate together." Falia remarked while they followed Flo. They arrived at the ruins of an old stone church. Falia and Eric stared at it in disbelief. "You live here?" Falia asked. "Yep!" Flo said happily before entering the church through a decaying hallway. They found themselves surrounded by old stone benches.

Flo was heading up a stairway, then another. They followed, and after quite a bit of stair climbing, they arrived in a cozy room filled with a dozen puppies. Flo called for them and they ran towards her hungrily. After the puppies had eaten, Flo began heading down the steps and out the way they had come. She

came to a lake near the church. She drank from the water then headed towards Eric and Falia. "So, go get a drink." They hesitated, but went to get a drink. It wasn't the cleanest water, but it would do. Flo then headed towards the inner city. She went into an alley and found a Dumpster right for her purposes. She found something somewhat decent to eat. Falia and Eric wrinkled their noses, but also found something to eat. They knew that next time; they would go for begging in front of a restaurant.

Meanwhile, Charlie was at a bar, since the nightclubs were closed. He was having his usual fun. Flo, Falia and Eric headed towards the house. Falia wondered what had become of Charlie. She asked Eric and he said, "Well, Falia, don't tell Charlie I told you this, but at night I know he goes to nightclubs. He's probably at a casino or something like that." Eric looked at Falia and she was shocked. "Eric, are you seriously serious?" she asked. They were whispering so Flo couldn't hear them. "So, do you know anything else?" Eric's reply didn't come right away, but was this "Falia, he's a gambler." She didn't know if she was hearing this right. Eric had never lied to her before, but this had to be a lie, right? No. He wasn't joking, much to Falia's dismay.

She now felt the need to get to a phone. They arrived and Falia asked Eric whether or not to tell her parents. His reply was "I don't think so." Falia still thought she should do it and that she did. "Hello?" her mother's voice came on the phone. "Mother, it's me, Falia." "Hello Falia! Why do sound so sad?" Loni said happily. "Well, mother, Charlie did come to the reunion and I was happy about that. I asked him and his girlfriend, Flo, to stay. But just now Eric told me something. Mother, Charlie's a gambler." Loni laughed. "You're kidding, right?" "I wish I was." Loni's voice went from cheerful to tearful. "Maybe I should come and talk with him." She suggested. "I don't think so..." "I'll be right over." Loni said before hanging up. Falia groaned. She went downstairs. Flo asked, "Who was that you were talking to?" "Mother's coming." Flo gasped. "Why did you do that for?" "I didn't invite her! She just said she'd come and hung up." Just then, Charlie emerged from the forest, kissed Flo and headed off towards the lake. Flo blushed then went after him.

"What are we going to do?" Falia asked Eric as she nuzzled him. "I don't know." Eric said. Since Loni didn't live far away, she arrived soon. When she did, Falia stared at her. "So, where is he?" she asked. "Mother. Um, why don't you go upstairs and settle in. "Okay, but let me know the second Charlie comes back." She said before heading towards the guestroom. Falia let out a sigh of relief, but this wasn't finished.

Charlie and Flo came back from their walk, nuzzling once again. Loni saw the couple and headed downstairs. She raced towards Charlie and hugged him. Charlie and Flo were both confused. "Who's this?" Flo asked Charlie. "I'm not sure." Charlie said. "Charlie! I'm your mother! I've come to help!" Charlie and Flo both groaned. They headed towards the city. Loni tried to stop them, but they left anyway. "Well, how rude!" Loni said before heading to her room.

Loni, Falia and Eric never heard from Charlie or Flo again, until they came to him.

4 - Alex Barkin's Search

PARTIV:

Alex Barkin's search

CHARACTERSAlex Barkin

Loni Barkin

Charlie Barkin

Kim Dachshund

Itchy Dachshund

Gail La Fleur

Terri La Fleur

Sasha La Fleur

Flo Collieon

Anne Marie Hew

David Clark

Vanessa Shepherd

CHAPTER I

Welcome to the third part of our story. In this part of our little story, Alex Barkin begins a search for his brother. We'll start off just after school. Alex is escorting his girlfriend, Vanessa, home. "Would yo-, would you like to come to my house today?" Alex nervously asks Vanessa, for this is the first time he's asked her for a while. They're housedogs, you see. And, naturally, they are very clean and polite. They like to stick to the good old ways. They generally do not ask other housedogs over unless they have known each other for a year. Alex and Vanessa have only known each other for about 6 months now. This is why he is nervous; he also simply loves her. They arrive home. "Mother, I am home!" Alex calls to his mother. "Hello, Alex. Who might this be? Is it the wonderful Vanessa I have been hearing about?" She asks Alex, glancing at Vanessa. "Why, yes, she is, Mother." Alex says to his mother, while Alex and Vanessa continue to look upon each other as if Alex's mother were not there. As you should know, she is not happy about this, yet she is happy that her son is so happy. She allows them upstairs until Vanessa's sister and Mother come to pick her up. Vanessa and her sister embrace each other and soon walk off with their mother, laughing for no apparent reason.

"Mother, why do I not have a brother?" Alex asks his mother after Vanessa had left. "Why, you have one, Alex." "WHAT? Where is he? What's his name? What's his name? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, I gotta know!" Alex said, suddenly exploding with energy. His mother, appalled by this sudden explosion, just stared at her son with horror. "Excuse me!" she said. Alex, knowing he was not going to get any answers this way, said, "Please, mother, I must know." "That's much better. His name is Charlie." She said showing Alex a picture of a German Shepherd mix puppy. "Is he really that young?" Alex said, now very confused. "No, he would be around 20 by now, if he is alive. He ran away when he around 2 months old. He never did fit in, not in this neighborhood, anyway." She said sadly. Alex looked at her for a moment before saying, "You must miss him." "Yes, very much." She said, her eyes filling with tears. This was obviously hard for her to talk about.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, Charlie looks up at sky, watching as the stars twinkle peacefully in the night sky. "Hey, why are you up here?" Sasha asks as she walks towards Charlie. "Don't know." Charlie says, not stopping his star gazing to look at Sasha. She looks at him for a second, and they both

lay down, holding each other's paws. "You were thinking weren't you?" Sasha says, breaking the long, peaceful silence that had lasted quite a while. "I guess." Charlie mutters, never stopping to look anywhere but the stars. "What were you thinking about?" Sasha asks. Knowing Charlie, he is not the one to keep stuff secret or be shy at all. "Stuff." Charlie says. "What kinda stuff?" asks a now giggling Sasha. "Stuff." Charlie says again. Sasha now realizes that she isn't going to get anything more out of him and the two stand together in the moonlight.

Back in New Orleans, Alex is now even more determined to find out everything he can about his brother and, hopefully, find him. "So, do you any clues whatsoever on where he might be?" Alex anxiously asked his mother. "Just these letters." Loni says, holding a stack of papers at least an inch thick. "Which is the most recent one?" Alex asks thinking it would take forever to read every letter in the stack. Loni stares at him for a second before throwing papers everywhere as she tears through the stack. A while later, she holds a paper in front of Alex. "Gimme, gimme!" Alex says as his mother wildly waves the paper out of his grasp. "Say please!" she yells while Alex is frantically grabbing for the paper. "Please." Alex says calmly. The paper is now in front of him within his reach. "Now give me that." Alex says as he snatches the paper away from his mother. He begins to read the letter. Loni is looking over his shoulder, also reading the letter. This is what it said:

Mrs. Barkin-

If you wanted to find Charlie, this is what the house looks like: its brownish, has few boarded windows and looks something like one of those flat roofed houses made of sand and mud.

Or something like that... Don't tell Charlie I told you this.

~Itchy

PS. We live in San Francisco.

"So, we go to San Francisco." Alex says as he finishes reading. Loni is still reading. When she finishes, she pauses for a moment before answering Alex's question. "It would appear so. However, San Francisco is quite a ways from here and he could be anywhere in the big city." Loni says. "Yeah, that's true." Alex mutters under his breath, now discouraged. There was a long pause. Suddenly, inspiration strikes. "Would Itchy's parent's know?" Alex asks his mother who looks rather discouraged. She stares at him for a moment, then holds her paw in the air as if it held a sword. "To Itchy's!" She exclaims before running in the direction of Itchy's childhood home with Alex tagging along not far behind.

After a long run, they finally arrived at Itchy's childhood home. Why they ran, that reason is unknown. They slowed down as they got closer to the house, mainly because they were nervous about barging into a house in which someone whom they had never spoken to lived. They slowly walked up the path, not saying a word to each other as they approached the door. They rang the bell and after a little while, they saw the door open and looked down. There they saw a little dachshund. Them being German Shepherds and her being the dachshund that she is, this made conversation a bit uncomfortable. After a while, the dachshund was the first one to gather enough courage to speak. Why it took courage to speak, no one knows. "Charlie, Sasha, is that you?" she said, by the way, her sight is not the best it could be. Loni and Alex looked at each other for a moment, then back at her. They were clearly surprised by this remark. "No, we are Charlie's family." Loni said in the calmest voice she could manage. Kim, the dachshund, gave them a mad look before saying, "Then go away!" She then slammed the door.

Loni had never experienced such rudeness, except from Charlie. She thought for a second, then tried again. Once again she rang the bell. "Fine, I'm here. Now, what do you want?" Kim said to them, still with a cross face. "Well, we were hoping you could help us with something." Loni told her. Any confidence from before had long vanished. "Well, what do you want?" Kim asked again. More silence. "I'm here. Now what do you want?" she asked again. She was beginning to sound more and more annoyed, as if she were about to explode. "Well, could you, could you help us?" Loni said. She was clearly about to also explode. "I know that part already! Now tell me what you want!" Loni was clearly ready to turn and run. She wanted to, too. "We're trying to find my brother, Charlie. We have been getting letters from your son, Itchy. We were hoping you might give us a clue on where to find Charlie or Itchy." Alex said. He had finally gotten up enough confidence to actually speak. His eyes had been darting frantically between his mother and Kim.

"Oh. I just don't see why you didn't search for him sooner." Kim said as Loni and Alex followed her into the house. "They live two blocks from "The Flea Bite Club". It shouldn't be hard to miss." She said as she fiddled with random things she found around the house. "How do you know Charlie? And where he lives?" Loni asked Kim, curious about this dachshund, which she had never met, seemed to know more about her son than she did. Kim stopped fiddling and replied. "I visit Itchy quite often, so I know where he lives. Charlie and Itchy live together, so of course I know." This was all she said before she began fiddling with things again. "You'd think a mother would know these things already. Tsk, tsk." Kim said, breaking a silence that had existed for what seemed like forever. "Well, how am I supposed to know these things? Charlie never contacts me. I almost forgot about him until Alex here brought him up a short 3 hours ago." Loni said, annoyed by Kim's remark. She was also getting frustrated. It shouldn't take this long to find her own son, right? Luckily, Alex stepped in before things got worse.

"Mrs. Itchy, you've been a big help, and we're very grateful, however, we must be going. Have a wonderful day!" he said as he pushed his mother out the door. "Wait," Loni said, stopping so suddenly that Alex bumped into her. "How are we even going to even to get to San Francisco? Walk?" Kim grinned. "Catch a bus, of course." She said just as Alex gave Loni a final push out the door. "Bye!" Loni said cheerfully. Alex, however, would have said good bye, but, one, he was pushing his mother down a garden pathway, and two, he had already said good bye.

"How are we even going to catch a bus?" Loni and Alex both said at the same time as they headed towards the bus stop. As they neared the bus stop, after a long silence, "Do we jump?" Alex asked his mother, hoping she had had some type of experience with busses. "I guess, but I think we should wait until it stops before jumping on." Loni said just as they arrived at the bus stop. "Duh." Alex muttered, sure that his mother couldn't hear him.

"Alexander Joseph Barkin! How dare you speak to your mother like that! In all my life I have never heard you be disrespectful to anyone! You're beginning to sound like your brother! This is so embarrassing!" Loni said as she began to have a nervous brake down. "There's no one here but us." Alex said as his darted from here to there and there to here. "What if they're hiding?" Loni said, she was beginning to sound desperate. Her nervous break down had started. "You're only embarrassing yourself by doing that." Alex had been looking at her, as if she were and insane. And, at the moment, who could blame him? Loni was now down on her knees. And Alex decided to help her up before someone either saw her or she hurt herself. "I'm fine. I am fine and calm." Loni said, breathing deeply. "Sure." Alex said, not sure of his mother's sanity at the moment. "Okay. I am okay. I'll stop now." Loni said as she began to recover from the nervous breakdown of the bus stop.

As the duo finally began to settle in at the bus stop, they heard the bus approaching the bus stop. "Here it comes. It doesn't look like it's going to stop, though." Loni said as she peeked out from the bus station as the bus quickly approached them. "I guess we jump." She said as the bus came closer. Alex would have loved to have pointed out that they had already decided that they would jump, but for one

thing, there wasn't enough time to say it, or they would miss the bus and two, he didn't want to risk another break down. "On the count of three." Loni said, obviously nervous. "One, one and a half, one and three quarters..." "Three!" Alex said as he jumped onto the back of the bus. Loni realized this and quickly followed. "That was scary." Loni said. Her face was mortified and her body, petrified. "You lived. See, you're okay." Alex said while gently patting his mother on the back.

For the next few hours, Alex asked questions about his brother and Loni answered everything she could. They then made up stories about what Charlie might have been doing in the past 20 years that he had been away. Some were bizarre, obviously only for entertainment. Others were silly, and some could have happened. After a while, they realized that it was late and they slept.

In the morning when they woke up, they were in the country. As they passed farms and such, they stared blankly at the peaceful scenes that whizzed by. Never before had they seen a farm or anything but the city. Neither talked until they came to a small town. "Wow. This is..." Loni said, pausing while she admired the small town. "...different." There were no big shops, only small, little shops, probably no bigger than the average bedroom. "Wow." Alex said quietly. Kids were playing with their pets in the dirt road, throwing balls around and playing an endless game of tag. Alex and Loni felt as if they were intruding, for there were no cars passing through the town. The bus seemed like the only motorized or electronic thing in the town.

After about ten minutes or so, the bus emerged from the town and they turned onto the highway. It was very noisy compared to the peace they had just been exposed to. They returned to their conversations from the night before, new stories and editing some from the night before. After a while, they became bored and didn't talk for a while. They daydreamed, and soon started talking about any random thing they could think of. They decided to take a nap, seeing that they had nothing to talk about anymore, and they still had quite a ways to go. When they awoke, it was dusk and there was also a sunset. They could also see the skyline of San Francisco. "It looks so pretty from this angle." Loni said as she stared at she stared at the sunset. She had never seen a sunset from the outside of the city before.

As they crossed the bridge, they looked down at the beach and saw two dogs sitting together. Loni seemed entranced by the sight, as if she wanted to be one of the dogs that were sitting down on the beach, watching the sunset. She wondered if they were married, just together, close friends, just met friends, best friends, or dating? Alex clapped his paws in front of her face. "Mother, snap out of it!" Alex laughed. "Hey, you can't blame me!" Loni said, on the verge of laughing herself. Neither knew why they were laughing, they just were.

After they recovered from their laughing fit, they moved onto the question they were both wondering, "How are we going to find Charlie?" they said in unison. "What if he doesn't recognize me? What if he hates me? What if he thinks I hate him?" A dozen negative questions began pouring from Loni's mouth. Alex reply was a parade of questions that were positive, such as "What if he does?" Loni's reply was an ambush of questions countering each of Alex's questions. Alex countered her questions. And Loni his. This went on for an hour or so.

The bus came to a sudden stop, which caught Alex off guard and he went flying and landed next the sidewalk.

A beautiful Irish setter came over and half said, half giggled "Charlie, did you get hit again?" This was followed by another giggle. Alex regained his strength and sat up, holding his paw to his head and said, "Do I know you?" The Irish setter took one good look at him and said "Oh, never mind." She then walked away after. "Who was that?" Loni said after Alex returned to her. "I'm not sure. She thought I was Charlie." "Oh, well, she was very pretty." Loni said then began walking the opposite way that the Setter had gone only to stop short and freeze.

"Wait! That means she knows him!" Loni said rather loudly. "WAIT!" Alex yelled, realizing that the Irish Setter must know something about his long-lost brother. "Sorry, but I've already got a boyfriend." The

setter said smiling, then turned around and continued on her way. "Let me handle this." Loni said, then ran after the setter. "Excuse me, but do you know a Charlie Barkin?" Loni asked her. "Yeah, why?" the setter asked. "I'm his mother and I'd like to find him." This seemed to surprise the setter and delight her at the same time. "Really? My name's Sasha. I'm kinda his girlfriend." Sasha said now smiling even more than before. Loni was now also smiling. "Really? That's so cool!" They were suddenly best friends.

Alex was still back at the sewer hole, rolling his eyes. Sasha was about Charlie's age and very thin. "So, who's the guy, Charlie's dad? Wait, he's too young for that..." Sasha said, gaining momentum as she spoke. Alex, seeing that the girl talk was over, decided to join the cheerful duo. "That's Charlie's brother, Alex." "Interesting." They began talking fast again and Alex lost himself. He regretted leaving his spot next to the sewer hole. "Hi, I'm Sasha." Sasha said, now facing Alex, who was still somewhat dazed from all the fast-talking. He had never known his mother possessed such a power. "Oh, h-hi." Alex said as he began to recover. "She's Charlie's girlfriend." Loni said while nodding. "Kinda." Sasha said, also nodding. "No, you can't be kinda. Either you are or your not." "Nuh-uh." "Uh-huh." "Nuh-uh." "Uh-huh." This went on for a while and the nuh-uhs and uh-huhs were getting faster, again. Alex knew he had to do something or he would either faint or die. "Help." He said quietly. Neither Sasha nor Loni heard him as their endless brigade of uhs continued on.

Though they never made a decision, they did stop bickering after a while. "So, so do you wanna see Charlie or not?" Sasha said to Loni and Alex. "Of coarse." Loni said. "Then come on! Follow me!" Sasha said as she began to run again. Alex just rolled his eyes. Despite Sasha's good looks and his mother's usual competence, his mother and this Sasha seemed to be getting stupider by the minute. He followed at his mother's pace, which was walking. "So, are you jealous or nervous?" Loni said when he had caught up with him. "Both." Was all Alex said. "Well, are you coming or not?" Sasha yelled. She was now at least ten feet ahead of them. Alex and Loni continued to walk at the same pace, ignoring Sasha's question completely. Sasha waited. After quite a while, they caught up to Sasha, who began running again. After another ten feet, she yelled, "Come on, slow pokes!" She was getting irritated and wondered if they'd speed up anytime soon. At this rate it'd take a week to just get to the café, and from there they'd still have to walk two blocks. Alex and Loni caught up and this time Sasha walked with them.

After a ways, Alex was behind and the girls were up front. "What worries me is that you are so thin. Is Charlie that thin? He was always a chubby little thing. But that could've changed by now." She rambled on, gaining more and more speed as she talked. Alex could hear them a little bit and he was getting annoyed. Thankfully, Sasha stopped Loni before Alex exploded. "It's fine. Don't worry." They had been gaining speed since they had first started walking and were now in front of an old, beat up, run down house. It was tan and had three windows, two of which were boarded up. The door had long disappeared. "Darn, he's not home." Sasha said, seeing that no lights were on and Charlie and Itchy were never asleep this early. "Wanna hang at my place until he gets back?" Sasha asked Loni, who was staring at the old building in disgust. "Charlie actually lives in that pile of junk?" Loni asked, her face still showed a hint of disbelief. "Hey, they're pretty lucky to live there." Sasha irritably said. "I'm just used to better." Loni said. "Look, I don't know what planet you're from, but no dog I've ever known has ever lived in a good, clean, new home." Sasha said to Loni, who just stared at her. "You're sick." Loni said, popped her chin up and walked on like the queen of England. Alex, who had stopped to look at Charlie's house, heard the commotion and decided to catch up in case another fight broke out. He was relieved to find that it had pretty much died out.

They soon arrived at Sasha's. Her house was nicer than Charlie's, but still no where near as nice as Loni and Alex's home. They went in and found it to be a very humble, homey place. Sasha plopped down on a couch that looked like it had been picked off of the curb. "Have a seat." Sasha said. "N-no

thanks." Loni said, looking at the torn furniture in disgust. "So, you wanna go to the café?" Sasha asked Loni, who was still glancing around. "Huh? Oh, um, wouldn't it be closed by now?" "No, it's sort of a night club. But it has more of that café feel. You know what I mean?" Sasha said to Loni, then looked at Alex. "What about you, little guy?" Sasha asked. Alex had been sitting in the corner, looking rather nervous. "Uh...sure, sounds like fun." "Then come on!" Sasha said before heading out the door. After a few blocks, the formation was quite a bit different from their last walk. Loni was ahead, with Sasha and Alex following. "So, little guy, you got a girl friend?" Sasha asked Alex as they continued on their way. "My name is Alex. And yes, I've a girlfriend." Alex said, trying not to show that he was not annoyed. "What's she like, Alex?" Sasha asked. "Well, she's beautiful, kind, and sweet." Alex said. He had a softness in his voice that Sasha had not yet heard from him. "Sounds nice." Sasha said, sounding a little jealous. "Well, we'd better hurry if I'm going to make my time." "Time?" "I sing at the café. It's what I do." Sasha said, quickly catching up to Loni, who was about to take a wrong turn. Charlie is so lucky. Alex thought as they turned into the café.

When they arrived, Sasha saw Itchy at the bar and went to talk to him. Loni followed not so Alex. He decided to wander the café, seeing what he could find. "Itchy, where's Charlie?" Sasha asked Itchy when they had made it to the bar. "He had to meet with Annabelle." He said to Sasha, completely oblivious to Loni's presence. "Who's Annabelle?" Loni asked. No one noticed. "Oh. So, when do think he'll be back?" "Who knows." "Okay, well, any updates on Belladonna?" "Nope." "Well this isn't good." "Do we at least know where she is?" "Yep. She's still on Alcatraz." "Hasn't moved yet?" "Nope." "Wow." "Have any idea on what she's doing?" "Nope." "Oh." "Who's the dog?" "Which one?" Sasha had completely forgotten that Loni was there. "Who's Annabelle?" Loni asked again. "She's the head angel." Itchy said. "And Belladonna?" "Head devil." "How do you and Charlie and Sasha know them?" "Say, are you sure you're Charlie's mother?" "Tell me." "You look nothing alike." "Now." Loni said sternly. She had to know how her son had stumbled across angels and devils. "Are you absolutely sure that you're his mother?" "You will talk!" Loni yelled as she picked up Itchy by the collar of his shirt. "Okay, okay, I'll talk!" Itchy said, covering his face with his paws, sounding frightened, and you can't really blame him. Loni had a crazed look in her eyes and had a fist out, pointed towards him. Her tone didn't help either.

"Then talk." Loni said as she dropped Itchy. Itchy paused to recover from the fall for a moment, then began to say, "Basically, Charlie was murdered by Carface and returned to earth, then died again. I died then Carface. We returned to Earth to stop Carface from destroying Heaven and here we stayed." Loni and Sasha were both speechless. Loni then turned to Sasha. "Why were you so interested?" "I've never heard the full story." "Oh." Sasha had to leave for her song, so she said goodbye and left Itchy and Loni to talk amongst themselves.

"Now where did Alex head off to?" Loni said as she scanned the café. "Who's he?" "Charlie's brother." "Oh, that guy went off to the poodles." Loni looked to where Itchy was pointing and sure enough, across the alley, there was Alex surrounded by two poodles. They were all over him. She stomped over to the trio, madly. "Hello, gorgeous." One said, pulling Alex toward her. "He's mine!" The other said as she pulled Alex toward her. "Hi." Loni said when she came to the spot where the trio sat. "Who's she?" "Yeah!" "Where leaving!" "Yeah! Humph!" The poodles flicked their ears and with their chins high, they walked off.

"Mother!" "What?" "You chased them off!" "It is most certainly not my fault!" Suddenly, a saxophone began playing on the stage and they saw Sasha singing. "Wow. She's good." Alex said as he and Loni watched Sasha's performance. A German Shepherd mix walked in, he looked exactly like Alex except for his muzzle, which was brown instead of tan. No one noticed. He went to the bar and began talking to Itchy in a low tone. Itchy kept nodding and soon the two ran out of the café.

Sasha finished her song and there was a big applause. She glanced at the bar, then headed towards

Loni and Alex. "Where's Itchy?" she asked. "He ran off with some mutt." Loni said. "What? What did he say?" "I don't know. They were whispering." You know, that mutt looked a lot like Charlie." "It probably was. Well, there's not much we can do about it now. They could be anywhere." Sasha said. She looked worried. "Well then, where should we stay?" Loni asked Sasha. When she still stared at the door, Loni said "Sasha? Are you okay?" "Huh? Oh, I'll be fine." She still had those worried eyes. "Why do you look so worried?" "I'm thinking about why they ran out. It probably has something to do with Belladonna."

"Oh. Well, I guess we should head back to your place then? I'm beat." Loni said, still concerned about Sasha, who was concerned about Charlie. "Yeah, you can. I'm gonna see what this is about." "Okay, um, have fun?" Loni said as Sasha headed out. Alex, who hadn't said a word, said "What?" "I'm not sure. Come on. Let's head to Sasha's." Loni said. Alex was now concerned about why Sasha was so concerned about Charlie.

Sasha soon caught up with Charlie and Itchy after a long search. "Hey...wait...up." She said between breaths. "Sasha?" Charlie said when he turned and saw Sasha right behind him. "Yeah, it's...me. I...wanted to know...if I could...help." She was still out of breath from her long run. "Whoa. Slow down. Breathe." Charlie said as he walked over to Sasha. "Sasha, shouldn't you be with Loni?" Itchy asked, wondering what would become of Charlie's mother without proper guidance. "Well...I let her head back to my place." Sasha said, smirking briefly. She was nervous about how Charlie would react once he found out that his mother was in town. "Whoa, who's Loni?" Charlie asked. He had completely forgotten his mother. "She's well...um, how should we put this..." Sasha paused as she stopped to think if there was a way to tell Charlie this and keep him as calm as possible. "Your mother's in town." Itchy blurted out.

"Itchy!" "What?" "UH! I cannot work with this!" As Sasha and Itchy entered squabble land, Charlie was more concerned with the fact that his mother and him were on the same planet, let alone the same city. "What? Itch, you knew about this?" "Not until about an hour ago." "Sasha?" "Nuh-uh." "The who told her?" Charlie was beginning to sound really irritated, and as Itchy can recall, the last time this happened, let's just say it didn't exactly turn out the way they'd hoped.

"Well...I may have been writing letters to her telling her about you, but I didn't think she'd actually come. My mother could've told her something, too. Don't hurt me!" "Itch, I'm not gonna hurt ya. I'm just not in the best of moods because SOMEONE told her where I am. I'm trying to get away from her! I thought I had succeeded. Nuh-uh." Charlie said, he seemed to be speaking to himself. "So, this was another one of your schemes?" Sasha asked. They all knew Charlie was constantly coming up with schemes for almost everything. "Not really. It didn't start out that way, but the way I just said it does make it sound kinda schemeish...hmmm..." Charlie began thinking and Sasha and Itchy knew it was another one of Charlie's plots and that somehow, they would be involved, like always.

"Wait. What did Annabelle want you for?" Sasha asked, remembering why she had come here in the first place. "She just said that Belladonna's movin' offa Alcatraz to an unknown location." "Oh, well, that's...nice." Sasha said, a little disappointed that it wasn't something more exciting. "Well, should we head back to my place?" Charlie asked as they all headed toward Charlie and Itchy's.

Meanwhile, Loni and Alex are trying to get into Sasha's. "Where in the world could she have left a key? Hmm...If I were a key, where would I hide?" As Loni searched for a key, Alex tried a more direct attempt, turning the doorknob. "Hey, mother, it's open." Alex said as the door opened. "Why didn't I think of that?" Loni said as she and her son entered the den and soon fell asleep on the makeshift furniture. At around 1 AM, Sasha entered the den and accidentally woke Loni up. "Who's there?" Loni asked in a sleepy voice. "Go back to sleep." Sasha said, brushing her bushy tail across Loni's face as she walked by.

Loni recognized Sasha's voice and jumped off the couch. "Where have you been?" Loni asked, kind of

loud for the time. Alex woke up, but acted like he was asleep. He wanted to find out where Sasha had been. “Well?” Loni asked. “First, I’m not your daughter. Second, I don’t have to tell you everything. It’s my life, not yours.” Sasha said to Loni. Loni recognized Sasha’s tone and realized her motherly instincts had shown up. “Sorry. I was just curious.” Loni said. “It’s okay. If you want the truth, I was at Charlie and Itchy’s.” “What? How?” “I found them, Charlie and Itchy, and went over to their place.” “Oh, so does he know I’m here?” “Yeah.” “How did he take it?” “Not too well. He seemed to forget about it after awhile, though.” “That’s a relief, I think.” Loni said. Sasha laughed, then said, “Come on, let’s get some sleep in before the night’s over.” Alex was content with the conversation and also went to sleep.

In the morning, Sasha made breakfast for Loni, Alex and herself. Alex was curious about what Charlie, Sasha and Itchy had done the night before, but didn’t want to let anyone know he had been eavesdropping. He was now listening to Sasha and Loni go over the plans for the day. “So, we’ll sit back and relax until lunch. Then we leave for the café. Charlie and Itchy should be there, so while I’m on stage, you could talk to him, then if he takes that okay, he could meet Alex. You know, he might not take it so well that he has a brother now.” “Could we do it the other way around? As long as Alex doesn’t let on that he’s Charlie’s brother, maybe they can get some bonding time in before we tell him.” “Yeah, that could work. I’ll go tell Itchy.”

When Sasha arrived at the café, sure enough, Charlie and Itchy were there. “Hey, Itchy, can I talk to you, in private?” Sasha asked as she approached them. “Sure.” Itchy followed Sasha out of the café, and as soon as Sasha was sure Charlie couldn’t hear them she told Itchy her and Loni’s plans for the day. “So, you got all that?” “Yeah, but what if Alex doesn’t remember the plan and accidentally tells Charlie too soon?” “Tell me what?” Charlie asked as he emerged from the café. “Oh, Charlie, we were just talking about stuff.” “What stuff?” Sasha and Itchy’s defense was weak, but they didn’t know what to say.

“Charlie, you owe me. This is payback.” Sasha said to Charlie. “Huh?” “Remember that night on the cliff? You didn’t tell me, I won’t tell you. Don’t think about telling me now.” Charlie was confused, and Itchy was even more confused. “Well, okay, but Itch doesn’t.” Itchy knew he’d give in to Charlie’s pressure, as he always did. He found Charlie very convincing. Charlie could always find a way to get Itchy to give in, and right now was one of those moments.

“Well, Itch?” Thankfully, before this moment entered disaster, Sasha came to the rescue. She scooped up Itchy and said, “Well, Charlie we’d love to stay and chat, but I’m using Itchy in my act. He’ll be the piano player. Don’t get too anxious about seeing me.” Sasha couldn’t resist teasing Charlie; even it was only a little bit. “Sasha!” Charlie began to chase after her, and Sasha began to run towards her place. Charlie stopped chasing, and decided to try a different approach. They were hiding something from him.

At Sasha’s den, Loni and Alex had made themselves right at home. When Sasha walked in, they were surprised to see Sasha scared half to death, with Itchy on her back, laughing uncontrollably. “What happened?” Loni asked them, on the verge of laughing herself. Alex was way ahead of her. “You ran...right away...like a...scared...chicken.” Itchy said between laughs. “Where is he? Is he still coming?” “Sasha...he...was never...chasing...us. He...stopped...right...after...you turned...the corner.” By now, Loni was also laughing. “What...happened?” Loni asked, also between breaths.

CHAPTER II

Itchy was finally beginning to calm down. “Sasha took me out of the café to tell me today’s plans. Charlie heard the last few words. So he wanted to know what was going on. Sasha got out of telling him. Charlie came after me, and Sasha teased Charlie a little bit. He faked that he was following us. I was on Sasha’s back, facing backwards, and I saw Charlie turn back into the café just as we turned the

corner.” “WHAT? HE WAS NEVER FOLLOWING US?” Sasha yelled. “Yep!” Now everyone except Sasha was laughing so hard, they were on the floor and silent, except for an occasional gasp for air. “I RAN ALL THE WAY HERE FOR NOTHING?” No one was able to answer.

After about an hour or so, everyone had calmed down and was in pain. Sasha had prepared lunch for the trio and herself. They ate and reviewed the day’s plans. They made it very clear to Alex that he was not to tell Charlie anything about himself, except for his name. “Okay, Alex?” “Yeah, yeah. I know, I can only tell Charlie my name, nothing else. But what will we have to talk about then?” “Believe me, you’ll find something.” Sasha and Itchy said, not able to remember a time when they were bored with Charlie. They were always mad, sad, happy, laughing, always something, never nothing. They were also always on the move. They could never recall a time when they were able to sit and relax when Charlie was around.

As they headed toward the café, Itchy was, of course in back with, of course, Alex. Sasha and Loni were in front. “So, how about you?” Itchy asked Alex. They’d been talking about their own lives. Itchy had just finished telling his life story to Alex, now it was Alex’s turn. “Well, my life’s no where near as interesting as yours. I was born. I went to elementary, middle, and started high school. I met Vanessa, my girlfriend, and found out I had a brother. Now I’m here.” “Seems like your life’s been pretty normal. Other than the last part.” “Yeah, it’s pretty boring.” “There’s gotta be at least one thing interesting that happened to you.” “Nope. Coming here was the most interesting thing that’s ever happened to me.” “Well, you’re bound to find something this afternoon. Believe me.” Sasha and Loni had been listening to Alex and Itchy’s conversation and had fired up one of their own.

“So, he’s never been out of New Orleans before?” Sasha was shocked. “Yeah, pretty much, but it’s not like you’ve been out of San Francisco before.” “Wrong. I was born in a small French village and moved to New York when I was old enough. I soon made way for here after a while.” “Oh.” “Yeah. Well, here we are. Alex, don’t blow your cover.” “What cover?” You know what I mean! Now, go.” Alex walked over to Charlie and said hi. Charlie said hey and didn’t say anything more. Alex gave up quickly and headed back to the eager trio. “Well, why are you back so soon?” “He’s not much of a socialist, is he?” “He doesn’t know you. Now get over there and make sure he does. Alex opened his mouth, but had nothing to argue with, so he headed back over to where Charlie sat.

“Um, hi.” “Yeah? Whaddya want?” Charlie asked, curious about this stranger. “Um, well, I’m kinda new in town and was wondering if we could, you know, be friends.” Alex knew that sounded weird, but had no idea what to say. “Well, okay.” Charlie said. Alex was surprised at this. He had expected Charlie to be mean to him for some reason. “So, whaddya wanna to do? I don’t like just sittin around. It’s way too boring.” Alex had never heard so much non-formal language used in 3 sentences. He and his mother, at home, used nothing but formal language, and had just begun to talk like regular dogs to fit in more, but now regular language sounded formal. “Well, I don’t know. I’m new, and I have no idea what to do.” “For starters, let’s go ta my place for a while.” Alex half admired, and was half irritated by Charlie’s careless way of speaking.

When they arrived at Charlie’s, Alex thought the smell of the slowly decaying building stunk more than a skunk, but Charlie seemed used to it. Inside was not much nicer than the outside. Junk such as old newspapers cluttered the floor. “Sorry, ya caught us on a bad day. We haven’t had much time to clean lately, so it’s not in the best shape.” “That’s okay, I think.” Alex said, wrinkling his nose, trying to block the smell. But, being a dog, it didn’t work. Charlie had plopped down on the floor. Alex did the same, but didn’t slump, as Charlie was doing.

“You look so tense and refined. It just doesn’t seem right.” Charlie said as he stared up at Alex. “Sorry, I’m not used to the street dog life. I’m usually a house dog.” Alex said. Charlie was now belly up on the floor, stretching. “So, what are you? Your breed, I mean.” Charlie asked as he stretched. “I’m a German Shepherd. And you are?” Alex asked. “German Shepherd, Great Dane, Collie mix.” Charlie

said, straining to remember. "Oh, how'd you know that?" Alex asked, curious how a street dog knew all the breeds he was mixed with. Alex thought he was purebred, but that couldn't be true, if his brother was not, he didn't think so, anyway. "David got worried about me, thought I was sick or somethin. He took me to the vet and the vet discovered my whole breed thing n all that." "Who's David?" "A human I met." "How does a street dog meet a human?" "Simple. The human runs away, a dog finds him and takes care of him. Another dog meets that dog, and so a triangle is born." "Triangle?" "You know, maybe it was more of a square in my case, but that's not the point." "Okay..." Alex said, still confused. He could tell that understanding his brother completely like he had planned was going to be impossible. "So ya wanna meet em?" Charlie asked Alex, pulling him out of his thoughts. "Sure." Alex said, wanting to know if Charlie really knew a human or not.

As they approached David's home, Alex got nervous. "Why are you nervous?" "Well, um, wait a second, what's your name?" Alex asked, remembering the lectures from that morning. "Charlie, yours?" "I'm Alex." "Interesting. Anyway, don't worry, it'll be fine." Charlie said as he called out "David!" Alex was sure that the family had only heard a bark, but soon a boy came out, around 16, and hugged Charlie. "Charlie! What are you doing here?" "Well, this guy over here wanted to meet you." Alex was really confused now. "He can understand you?" Alex asked. David only heard a bark, so Charlie was stuck as translator. "Of coarse he can." "How?" "Well, um, I'm not sure?" Charlie said. He didn't sound sure himself, and Alex wasn't satisfied with this answer but didn't say anything more. "Anne Marie! Come here!" "Wait, is she who I think she is?" Charlie asked as a girl, also 16 emerged from the house and yelled "Charlie?" And when he said "Yeah." Anne Marie ran to Charlie and hugged him. "I can't believe this! I thought you were in New Orleans with that wallet family." "First Charlie, their names are Harold and Kate. Second, we moved and third, thanks for not breaking your promise." "Huh? What promise?" "Remember? The promise to find me a family, and also that I'd see you again." "Oh, yeah, those." Charlie had completely forgotten that he had made those promises to her. "Who's this?" Anne Marie and David asked, looking at Alex. "Alex. I'm still not sure about where he came from." Charlie said. Anne Marie turned to Alex and said "Hello." "Hi." Alex said, even though he was sure that he could've said nothing. Surprisingly, Anne Marie did understand him. "Well, he's seems pretty shy. Where'd you meet him, Charlie?" "Down at the café, just now." "The one where you and Sasha met? How's she doing, anyway?" David asked. He hadn't seen Sasha for a while and wondered if she was okay. "Who's Sasha?" Anne Marie asked. "Charlie's girlfriend." David said. "Charlie, I thought Flo was your girlfriend." Anne Marie said to Charlie, remembering the puppy orphanage Charlie had taken her to when she was around 4. "Huh?" Charlie asked, he forgot about Flo. "Don't play dumb, Charlie. I saw you two flirting over in the corner while the puppies were eating." "Oh, well, I uh, figured she forgot about me." "Uh-uh." Anne Marie shook her head. "She still loves you, and the puppies are gone. They grew up. She's really lonely without you." Neither David nor Alex knew what Charlie and Anne Marie were talking about and had begun asking each other "Who's Flo?" even though neither could understand each other. "In fact, Charlie, that looks a lot like her coming right now." Anne Marie pointed to a collie running towards them.

"Um, we should be going. It was nice talking to ya and I'm sorry I can't stay but I really need to go and don't tell Flo where I am or what I'm doing! Bye!" Charlie dragged Alex along as he ran as fast as he could away from Flo and didn't stop until they were at the Flea Bite. When they arrived, they were breathing hard and Alex saw Loni, Sasha and Itchy over on the circle of couches. Itchy saw them panting and decided to find out what the commotion was about, as did Sasha and Loni. "What happened?" Itchy asked when he got to the two panting dogs.

"Well, we went over to David's and Anne Marie was there. We talked a while and somehow Flo ended up here." "Wow. That's a lot to happen in 30 minutes." Itchy said. Sasha was not as impressed. "Who's Flo?" "Ex...girlfriend." Charlie said, hesitating. "Well, we never broke up, but we never talked to

each other since I left for San Francisco.” “Oh. Why didn’t you tell me?” “Well, I didn’t want you to take it the wrong way.” “Well, at least you weren’t doin double time, thank goodness.” They kissed each other quickly and turned to Loni, who ran to Charlie, hugged him and said “Charlie, you’ve grown up quite lovely.” “Who’s she?” Charlie asked as Loni continued to hug him. “Charlie, don’t you recognize me?” “No. Whaddya think?” Loni realized that Charlie had no idea who she was and felt he wasn’t ready to know who she was just yet. Maybe, just maybe, she could get some bonding time in before telling him.

“So, who are you?” Charlie asked again. “My name’s Loni.” She said and hugged him again. “Will you stop hugging me? I barely know you!” Charlie said, trying to stay calm. He was also wondering why Sasha seemed okay with this. Just then, a Collie walked in the café and walked towards them. She began to create movement that was supposed to impress Charlie. She was flipping her long ears as she walked towards them. It was all for nothing, though, as she slipped on a banana peel and fell to the ground. The group giggled a bit and Flo walked towards them again.

“Hello, Charlie.” Flo said when she finally had made it to the group of five. She had recognized Charlie and Itchy and the whole reason she came to San Francisco was to get rid of Sasha and get back together with Charlie. Sasha watched as Flo tried many attempts to kiss Charlie and with each attempt, got closer and closer. Thankfully, Charlie kept backing up and dodging each kiss. This still made her uncomfortable. “What are you doing and who are you and where’d you come from?” Sasha asked the Collie, who was shocked at the question. “I’m Flo Collieon. I come from New Orleans.” Flo said friendly, stopping just long enough for Charlie to get away. Suddenly her expression changed to a frown. “You must be Sasha. I’ve been wanting to meet you.” Flo said, stepping towards her with that evil looking frown. This made Charlie uncomfortable and he said hi to Flo, who completely forgot about Sasha, as soon as he did.

“Well, Charlie, why did you leave me with those 12 puppies?” Sasha misinterpreted this and thought otherwise. “You two were married?” She blurted out. “No, no. She owned an orphanage.” Charlie told her in the calmest tone he could possibly muster. “Oh.” Sasha said, now sorry that she had asked that question. Now Flo spoke up. “Well, Charlie I’ll see you later and when I do, I want her gone and me in.” She left with her chin high and eyes closed and with a “Humph!” she was gone. Charlie breathed a sigh of relief. “Well, I’m glad that’s over.” Alex, Loni and Itchy were all confused about what had just happened. “What just happened?” Loni asked Charlie and Sasha. Their answer was clear and in unison, they said, “I have no idea.” “Oh, that is so cute!” she exclaimed and hugged Charlie and Sasha. “What?” They said at the same time. “How you almost always seem to know what each other are thinking!” Loni said and hugged them again. “Mother, I think that’s enough.” Alex said and put his paw on top of hers to restrain her from another hug.

“Loni, you’re his mother?” “Yes. Of course I am! Can’t you see the resemblance?” She put her head next to Alex’s and began rotating herself and Alex. “Okay…” Sasha, Itchy and Charlie said, not able to see any resemblance between the pink Collie and the German Shepherd. “You can stop now.” Charlie said. “Loni? You can stop.” Charlie said again when she didn’t stop turning. “Loni?” Charlie wasn’t sure what she was doing anymore. Sasha, Charlie and Itchy decided to leave the turning duo to their rotating and went off to the couches to sit and talk.

“Who’s she?” Charlie asked when they arrived at the couches. This seemed to make Sasha remember something very important to her. “I just remembered, my family’s coming to town.” Loni, who had been eavesdropping behind the couch, popped out from her hiding place and said, “We could do a meet the family thing!” “GAH! WHERE’D YOU COME FROM?” Charlie yelled, startled by Loni. “I thought you were still spinning.” Sasha said. “Well, I was, but Alex got bored and headed toward the poodles again. Wretched beasts!” Loni said, sounding depressed that she couldn’t spin more. “Can’t a guy talk to girls without interference from his mom? Tsk, tsk.” “Well, usually, I’d agree with that, Charlie, but he’s

already got a girlfriend. He probably figured that she wouldn't know." "She'll find out somehow." Sasha said, glancing at Charlie. Loni was already headed toward Alex and the two poodles. "You again?" "Yeah! What do you want?" The two poodles walked away, again. "Mother! Why did you do that?" "You have a girlfriend." "Oh, mother! She'll never find out!" "Well, somehow Flo found out. Do you want to end up how Charlie's love life is turning out?" "You worry too much."

Sasha, hearing the conversation, went over to see if she could stop the day from more disaster than it was already in for. "Hello, forget me?" Sasha said when she got to the not-so-cheerful duo. "No." Alex and Loni had their backs to each other, but they were obviously trying to keep straight faces. Suddenly they burst into laughter. Sasha didn't understand why. Charlie and Itchy came over. "What's goin on here?" "I'm not sure." Sasha said. Alex and Loni were still engaging in their laughing fit. While Charlie tried to stop them, a paw pulled Itchy aside. "Hi." It was Bess. "Hi." "So, what's going on? Who are those two?" "We're not sure what's going on, but the collie's Charlie's mother, Loni and the shepherd's Charlie's brother, Alex." "Oh. So come on! It's time for a date in the park!" Bess said before heading off. Itchy followed.

A black Irish Setter with curly fur and another one that had a smooth, tan coat entered the café. Sasha saw them and became nervous. Charlie stopped wrestling the two when he noticed Sasha's expression. "What?" Charlie asked. "That's my mother and sister over there, I think." "Oh. What is this? Some kinda reunion?" "I know so many visitors, it's weird." Sasha said. The black Setter saw the two nuzzling and went over to them.

"Sasha, dear! How have you been?" she said to Sasha. The tan one hugged Sasha saw Charlie and asked in a snotty tone "Who's the mutt?" Loni heard this comment and went over to them. "Excuse me?" she said to the tan Setter. "What?" "Did you not just call Charlie a mutt?" Loni yelled at the Setter. Charlie, trying to stop the commotion, said to Loni, "Why don't you go over to Alex and spin some more?" He winked at Alex, who understood what it meant. He and Loni began rotating again. "So, who is he? Putting his arms on my daughter?" the black Setter asked. Sasha answered as calm as she could. "He's my boyfriend." "WHAT?" the Setter exploded with anger. The tan one congratulated Sasha. Charlie decided to leave them alone. He left to help Alex and Loni's turning crisis. "Who's the other girl and boy over there? I'll bet the collie's another girlfriend of his. Just you wait." The Setter scolded Sasha. "Mother! That is Charlie's mother and brother!" the Setter looked embarrassed. Then Flo returned. She was relieved to see Charlie away from Sasha, then he saw him with Loni. "OOOOOOO!" she yelled when she saw him. She went over to them and began frantically trying to kiss Charlie.

"See! I told you!" Gail, Sasha's mother, said. "Mother! I already saw this happen and he's not happy about her trying to kiss him!" Sasha said, outraged. Sasha's sister, Terri, said, "Well, he is good looking. Tell me if he's ever available." "Terri, you drive me nuts." "Thank you." Sasha went over to Flo and Charlie and pulled Flo aside. "Flo! Um, would you like to stay at my house?" she said as nice as possible. "Of coarse, Sasha." Flo said, also trying to be nice.

"So, Sasha, where do you live?" Terri asked. "Not with the mutt. You'd better not live with him." Gail said irritably. "No. I don't live far though." "Well, it's a start." Gail muttered. "So, take us home! We'd like to settle in!" "In one second." Sasha walked over to Charlie. "Charlie, could Loni and Alex stay with you and Itchy? My house is going to be full with Flo, Terri, and mother along with me." "Sure." Charlie said. "Thanks." Sasha said before kissing him and leaving with her three guests.

Charlie decided to head home, so he told Loni and Alex and they followed him. "So, mother, when are you going to tell him?" Alex whispered to Loni. "Probably tonight." Loni whispered back. They arrived at the run down house. Loni wrinkled her nose and when she went in, she gasped. "Charlie! This place is a mess! It's filthy! When was then last time you even considered cleaning?" Loni scolded. "Ya sound like my mother. Anyway, I haven't had anytime to clean. So this is how it looks. And Itchy and I don't

mind.” Charlie said. Charlie then left. Loni decided to clean. Alex asked her what in the world she was doing and she said “Cleaning! You can’t expect me to live in this filth do you?” Loni asked shocked. Alex laughed a little, then helped. They found all sorts of interesting stuff. They found old pictures and stuff like that.

When Charlie came back, it was late. “Were have you been young man?” Loni asked, outraged. “Out. Will ya stop sounding like my mother?” “Why?” “Because you’re not!” “Actually, I am.” Loni said. Charlie was shocked, then shook his head. “You found me again?” “Yes. Now you will listen to me!” Alex was confused. “Wait, so you saw him before?” “Yes. When he was around 18 or so. Very shortly, I saw him, and he left.” “Yeah. Who told you about that anyway?” “Falia called. She was worried about you Charlie! Don’t be mad! Oh, have you stopped all of that gambling junk?” “Yeah. How’s Falia, anyway?” “She and Eric are doing wonderful! I’m a going to be a grandparent!” “What?” Charlie asked. “They’re going to have 3 puppies! They’ll be just adorable!” “Oh. Well, I’m glad she’s...happy.” Alex was now lost. He didn’t understand a word he just heard.

“Doesn’t that make Alex an uncle?” Alex was now even more lost than before. “What are you two talking about?” Alex asked. “Whaddya mean?” Charlie asked. “I heard something about a Falia, an Eric, puppies, gambling, and me being an uncle! Am I supposed to follow this?” Charlie and Loni looked at each other then said “No.” Just then Charlie noticed that they had cleaned. “What did you do?” he asked. “We cleaned. You didn’t expect us to actually live in that mess, did you?” Charlie rolled his eyes, then left. “He doesn’t stay at home very often, does he?” “No. No one does around here it seems.” Alex said.

Just then, Itchy came in the room. “What are you doing here?” “Sasha’s was full, so we’re staying here.” Alex replied. “Oh.” Itchy said, then put the groceries away in the fridge and left again. “It would be nice if someone was home. Now I feel weird.” Loni said after Itchy had left.

Meanwhile, at Sasha’s, things weren’t going much better. “Mother!” “What?” “Will you stop all that meaningless criticism towards Charlie?” “It’s not meaningless, dear! You should fall in love with a purebred Irish Setter such as yourself or not fall in love at all preferably!” “But mother! I’m already in love! I can’t just leave my true love and find a spoiled jerk to replace him!” Sasha and Gail continued to argue and Terri and Flo watched. “So cheerful.” Said Terri. “Um-hmm.” Flo said. “So, why were you trying to kiss Sasha’s guy?” “He’s my boyfriend! We never technically broke up, so that makes him mine too!” “Yes, but he’s moved on now, so you should forget him.” “Maybe so, but I still want him to like me.” “Flo, I’m going to go to bed.” Terri said before leaving for her room. “Excellent idea Terri!” Gail said before also going to her room. “Flo, I just want to know, why are you trying to get Charlie back?” “I’m sorry, Sasha. When I’m around him, I can’t help it. I love him and I know he’s happy with you, but I still want him.” “I can understand that. Good night Flo.” “Good night Sasha.” They both went to their rooms and slept.

At Charlie and Itchy’s, things had also calmed down for the night. Loni and Alex were asleep on one sofa and Charlie on the other sofa. Itchy was in the chair. When Charlie woke up, it was around 4 AM. Lately, he had found it hard to sleep in the night and easy to sleep in the day. He would try to fall back asleep, but couldn’t. He went outside and saw a black rock with gold writing on it. He sniffed it and it smelled weird. He left it alone and continued his walk. He got back around 6. Itchy, Loni and Alex were all awake now. “Where have you been?” Loni scolded. “I went for a walk. Calm down.” Charlie said calmly. Itchy had been cooking breakfast, and now served it. Loni complemented Itchy, as did Alex. Itchy just said thanks, then returned to eating. After breakfast, Charlie and Itchy left. Loni said to Alex “Why do they even have a home?” “I’m not sure. They only use it for breakfast and sleeping.” Loni nodded, then followed.

“Hey Charlie.” Sasha said, then kissed him. Charlie kissed her back and Gail groaned. Terri smiled and Flo just stared. “Charlie, can you come here for a second?” Flo asked. Charlie looked at Sasha for her

approval and she nodded. They had agreed last night that Flo could talk to Charlie alone for a bit, as long as she didn't try anything. "Charlie, I just want to say I'm sorry for yesterday. When I'm with you, I can't help myself." Flo said softly. "It's okay." Charlie said before hugging her. Flo liked it. She liked it a lot. Gail peeked around the corner and yelled "Ah HAH! See, Sasha! I told you!" Sasha looked and also got irritated. "Flo!" Charlie saw Sasha and said "Sasha, I did it. I'm sorry." Sasha knew he must've meant it because he had never lied to her before. Charlie hugged Sasha and Gail didn't like this either. "You low lived mutt! You will stay away from my Sasha!" Loni heard the commotion and rushed over to the alley that the entire ruckus was coming from.

"What do you mean 'low lived mutt'?" Alex could see that this was a mother's duel and he saw that Charlie, Sasha, Flo and Terri knew it too. They left the alley, leaving Loni and Gail to argue. "What happened?" Alex asked. "Well, I took Charlie into that alley to apologize, and Gail saw us hugging. So did Sasha. Charlie explained and Sasha understood. Gail started scolding Charlie and then you two came along." Flo explained. "Oh." Alex said. "We'd better get away from here!" Flo said. The five ran and came to the beach.

Flo, Alex and Terri went swimming while Charlie and Sasha stayed on the beach. They nuzzled for a bit then joined everyone in the water. After they emerged from the water, Loni and Gail came. "Sasha! You're soaked and smell like seawater! Go home and take a bath this instant!" Sasha refused, causing Gail to explode. Meanwhile, Loni was thinking about jumping in the water herself, but Alex stopped her. Flo, Charlie and Terri had headed over to a dueling Sasha and Gail to break it up. Alex brought Loni over and joined the break up.

Bess and Itchy came, took one look at everyone and was confused. They saw that everyone except Gail and Loni was wet, and two were arguing and the rest had formed a line between them and Gail and Loni were poking their heads out from either side of the line, trying to continue. Finally, Sasha stepped out and so did Charlie, causing the rest of them to fall over. Bess and Itchy laughed at the domino affect. Charlie and Alex took Loni aside to scold her while Sasha and Terri went to do the same to Gail. Bess and Itchy sat down with Flo and Bess leaned over to Flo and whispered "What is going on?" Flo leaned towards Bess and whispered "Charlie and Sasha's mothers don't exactly like each other and fights keep breaking out between them." Bess nodded "Ah." She said, then explained to Itchy, who also nodded and said "Ah." Well, by now, Charlie and Alex had Loni calmed down, but Sasha and Terri had not yet succeeded.

As you can probably tell, Loni was much easier to calm down than Gail was. Gail was still fuming and everyone except Loni would've helped, but they were half the reason she was mad, so the seemingly impossible task was left to Sasha and Terri, who weren't have as much luck as they needed to succeed.

"Mom, calm...down." Sasha said, trying to stay calm herself. "Yes, mom, listen to Sasha." "I refuse to allow her to date, talk, or even look at that mutt or anyone aquatinted with him!" Gail protested angrily. Loni was about to get up and fight, but she was stopped by Charlie and Alex, who didn't even look at her. By now, Sasha was to the point of frustration that she couldn't hold it anymore.

"MOTHER! STOP IT!" Terri just nodded at Gail. Gail didn't care anything about how Sasha felt about anyone. "Sasha! I'm your mother and what I say goes! You will marry a purebred IRISH SETTER and that's final!" "No! NOT FINAL! I refuse to marry anyone but Charlie!" Sasha protested. "Do you dare go against your mother's wishes?" Gail asked irritably. "If that means staying with Charlie and being happy, then yes." Sasha said, turning away from Gail. "UH! UH! UH, UH, UH!" Gail yelled angrily before storming off. Terri was frozen and Charlie ran to comfort Sasha.

"You okay?" He asked. Sasha nuzzled him as she said "I'm not sure anymore." Flo wasn't happy, but restrained herself. Gail spied from her hiding place from behind a sand dune. Her only company was a crab claw, which she talked to. "So, Mr. Crab, what do you suggest?" Gail picked up the claw and made

a high pitched voice. "I say that we break them up!" "I KNOW that. But how?" "Get Loni to take Charlie AWAY!" Gail thought about "his" suggestion. "Yes, you were a big help Mr. Crab. Thank you. What am I doing? I'm talking and imitating a crab claw, that's what! But why?" Gail shrugged and began her grand plan.

Gail pulled Loni aside the next day at the café. "Charlie doesn't belong in San Francisco. He belongs in...wherever you come from." She told Loni. "I don't agree. He's happier here and in New Orleans he was, well...uncivilized" Loni told Gail, who was determined to succeed. "Now look, he has a girlfriend there and his family's there. He could live just outside the city if you're worried about civilization." Gail persuaded. Loni thought, then agreed.

And so began another persuasion of the messed up. However, Itchy had the unfortunate incident of hearing the things he shouldn't, as always. He became worried for his friend. He didn't really like Charlie that much when he was...engaging in his old ways. He didn't realize how mistreated he was back then, but now he knew better. He was determined not to let this now perfect friendship be messed up once again.

Well, he did what he did last time. Of course, last time there was a door and last time it was much more important. LAST time it was involving murder. Charlie's murder. And as far as Itchy was concerned, losing his best friend for good was much worse than losing him and having him alive. Anyway, long story short, Itchy didn't want to be bossed around by Charlie.

So, Itchy did the only thing he could do at the moment. "CHARLIE! CHARLIE! CHARLIE THEY'RE GONNA RID OF YOU!" Charlie of course, didn't hear this. He was off waltzing on the beach with Sasha. Itchy found Bess, who had been waiting for their day at the beach, and told her, who suggested they tell Charlie and why Itchy was so worried. "It's not like they CAN persuade him to go anywhere. Don't worry, he won't lose Sasha." Bess said.

They never told Charlie Loni and Gail's plans, however, the enemy did find the time to do their part. "Charlie, come here." Gail said. She persuaded Charlie a bit differently than expected. "Go back to New Orleans and leave my Sasha alone! Do think she wants you at all? Her so refined and you so uncivilized. Don't you miss your old habits and ways of doing things?" Gail continued this when she was finished, and Charlie left very confused and was soon reeled in by Loni, who also did her part. Of course how all of this worked out, you will know in time

5 - Not So Young

PARTV:Not So Young

CHARACTERS

Loni BarkinL

Charlie Barkin

Alex Barkin

Vanessa Shepherd

Falia King

Eric King

Sasha La Fleur

Dana La Fleur

Crystal La Fleur

Mrs. Shiz

Carface Caruthers

Killer Rellik

Itchy Dachshund

Flo Collieon

CHAPTER I

Charlie and Sasha eventually had two pups. One, a tan and brown Irish Setter, they named Dana. The other, a pure white shepherd, they named Crystal. However, just before they were born, Charlie left Sasha. He and Sasha both felt that they weren't ready to be parents. So they split. Even though they still loved each other, Charlie left California and went back to New Orleans. They never talked and eventually forgot about each other.

Charlie went back to his old life of gambling and Sasha went back to her singing. Charlie had left her with the two puppies. She had thought that Charlie couldn't be a father or a good influence, so she was left to take care of their two children. Sasha proved to be a wonderful mother. Dana showed signs of being like her father while Crystal was more like her mother. Dana would get into all sorts of trouble while Crystal was in many plays and sang quite a bit of solos in chorus. Dana went to parties with her many boyfriends; Crystal stayed home to help her mother with the dishes and other household chores. They are about 16 now. They have no memory of having a father. Sasha never mentions Charlie either. However, one day in English, a family tree project came up. The girls were able to fill every space in the tree and tell everything about anyone on the tree except for their father's side of the family.

They had never thought about their father before, but they needed to know to pass the project. First, they asked their teacher if they could leave their father's side out of it because they were sure that their mother would never tell them anything. The teacher just said, "She'll tell you. If she doesn't, go on the Internet and type in your father's first and last name." "We don't know his name." "Look up your mother and find out who she married. Or look up yourselves and find out your parent's names. You'll find something." The girls couldn't argue with this, so they did it. They found their mother's name, but it didn't say whom she was married to. It said that she never married.

They found this weird. So they looked up themselves. It didn't say who their parents were. Then they had another idea. They asked their mother to see their birth certificates. They found out their father's name. It was Charlie Barkin.

So they went and typed their father's name. Surprisingly, it said that he had died in 1939. They found this hard to believe. Their mother hadn't been to America yet at that time. How could he be their father when their mother had never been in the same country when their father died? They were now confused. They saw another Charlie Barkin with the same middle name and looked exactly alike. This one didn't have a birth or death date. They had no idea what to do anymore.

The next day at school, they told their teacher about what had happened. She was also confused. Ms. Shiz, their teacher, decided to help them out. "What's your father's name?" "Charlie Barkin." Ms. Shiz typed in their father's name and clicked on the first one. "There you go." "No. Our mother wasn't in America until after 1939." Crystal told her. Ms. Shiz went back and clicked on the other one. When she saw there was no birth or death date, she had no idea what to do. "Girls, I'm not sure. You could ask your mother about it, but if she doesn't tell you, let me know."

That afternoon, Dana brought up the subject. "Mom, what happened to dad?" Sasha looked at them then said, "Dana, Crystal, I have a show tonight. Can you manage without me?" Neither Crystal nor Dana spoke. Then Dana said "Sure." When Sasha left for the concert, Dana said to Crystal "Did you see how she avoided the question?" "Yeah." "Something's weird here. The Internet, mom, this whole thing." Dana said before heading to the computer. "Dana, I think I know what Ms. Shiz is going to do." "What?" "She'll probably tell us that we can not do the part about our father." "Yeah, Crystal, I know, but don't you want to find out what happened to dad?" "Yeah, but maybe there's a reason." "I'm not so sure. Our father could be dead, but I wanna know about him even if he is dead." "I'm still having second thoughts about this, Dana."

Crystal said, "Maybe we could get some information on dad from one of his friends or relatives. You know like Grandma, Grandpa, aunt, uncle, enemies, friends..." Dana interrupted Crystal. "I get the point. I wonder..." Dana went on the computer and found a conversation between Loni, Alex, Falia, Eric, Itchy, Carface and Killer. Her name popped up on the list and she started to chat. "Dana, this is weird. There's so many people on and they seem to know each other." Dana chatted anyway.

Dana: ello.

Itchy: who r u?

Dana: dunno

Itchy: heh?

Carface: Itchy, who's that?

Itchy: stop interrupting! Go back 2 killer!

Killer: excuse moi! Im right here!

Itchy: srry. Forgot for a sec

Killer: humph

Falia: Who's that?

Loni: FALIA!!!!

Falia: yes, mom. Im here.

Loni: I thought u ran off w/ eric...where'd flo go?

Falia: puppy reunion attack

Eric: ello

Alex: I don't know most of u...

Vanessa: ALEEEEEXXX!

Alex: what r u doing here?

Vanessa: a girl can get bored, cant she?

Alex: maybe...

Crystal: greetings from san fran!

Carface: u live there? Do u know red?

Itchy: I thought he went down the tube.

Carface: he did...

Loni: so, anyone seen charlie?

Itchy: I think I saw him yesterday at carface's...

Loni: did u now?

Itchy: it wasn't pretty...

Dana: charlie?

Itchy: will u get otta here?

Dana: its my beeswax too!

Itchy: how?

Dana: hes my father!

Itchy: oooooohhhhhhhhhh...

Killer: I thought he and sasha split.

Itchy: they DID

Killer: srry...SOMEONE never tells me anything.

Carface: is it my fault u became some clerk at that shop?

Killer: yes! U died and went off to work for this RED...

Carface: well, that's over now...he joined the underworld.

Killer: oh...

Loni: I have no idea what u 2 r talking about!

Killer: good.

Charlie: ELLO!

Loni: CHARLIE!!!!!!! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN???????

Charlie: places...

Falia: CHARLIE!!

Charlie: yeah...

Killer: charlie, I just want to let u know the stuff I did was all carface's idea.

Charlie: yeah...I know...

Dana: ello!

Charlie: whos she?

Itchy: she claims 2 b ur daughter.

Eric: Charlie, well, its nice 2 hear from u?

Charlie: thx 4 such a warm welcome

Carface: I was influenced by red!

Charlie: uh huh...tell me, was he seriously THE devil or a cousin?

Carface: im thinking he was just a bad cat with some powers...

Loni: oh dear, I just realized something...

Itchy: what?

Loni: Erica and Falia are in the same house, Alex and me are in the same house, but were talking over the computer! Say, what happened 2 ur puppies?

Falia: theyre asleep.

Crystal: Dana! U r brilliant!

Dana: I am?

Itchy: anyone know what theyre talking about?

Crystal: I just realized that we shouldn't go to school tomarrow!

Dana: we shouldn't?

Crystal: moms out on tour, shiz'll be at school, all the more reason the skip.

Dana: how am I brilliant?

Crystal: well, u gave me the idea just now when I thought about how you talked 2 shiz earlier and...yeah...

Itchy: anyone following this?

Loni: nuhuh

Falia: nope

Eric: uh...

Carface: im not sure...

Killer: um...

Charlie: whos shiz?

Dana: Crystal, u know that pink girl that came a while ago when we were like 10?

Crystal: yeah...

Dana: well, I just realized that she had wings!

Charlie: oh god...

Loni: what?

Charlie: Annabelle...

Itchy: howd she find those u?

Carface: I never liked her...

Dana: ?

Killer: lemme guess she's an archangel. Just kidding...

Charlie: ur right, 4 once...oh god...

Loni: what now?

Charlie: flo's here...

Loni: ?

Charlie: not here at my house, in this chat thing...

Flo: CHARLIE!!! I JUST BARELY ESCAPED A PUPPY ATTACK!!!! I NEEEEEEEEEEEEED UUUUUUU!!!!!!

Flo: y don't u call?

Charlie: flo, all of this ended a while ago...when was that? like at least 2 yrs ago...

Flo: CHARLIE!!!

Killer: ?

Itchy: ?

Carface: ?

Falia: FLO!

Flo: FALIA! Darling, how r u doing?

Falia: still in the same old house with the same old diet and the same ol' things.

Charlie: please no...

Falia: yes!

Eric: hey, u didn't even try it!

Charlie: but chicken and rodents?

Falia: u prefer beer I presume?

Loni: EXCUSE ME? CHARLIE!

Charlie: what?

Dana: u drink?

Charlie: a little bit...

Itchy: wasn't that the cause of ur murder? Carface...

Carface: Hey, ive changed!
Itchy: I still havent forgiven u...
Killer: I still wish I could of pushed the car...
Dana: ?
Crystal: ?
Flo: I thought u drowned...
Charlie: that was AFTER carface murdered me! * glares*
Carface: well, I did end up in heaven just like u!
Charlie: still...I thought u went w/ red...
Loni: ?
Eric: ?
Alex: ?
Falia: ?
Dana: ?
Crystal: ?
Charlie: that looks cool...
Loni: KGET ON W/ IT!!!
Charlie: I thought itchy blabbed it out 2 u...
Dana: ?
Falia: mom, u can leave him alone now...
Loni: falia!
Falia: srry...
Sasha: ello everone!
Loni: SASHA!!! I WANNA HUG YOU!!!!
Charlie: uh...
Flo: im leaving! Its me or her!
Charlie: neither
Flo: AHEM!
Charlie: bye flo
Flo: gone.
Falia: ?
Eric: ? Carface: back 2 our little pep talk...
Charlie: how was that a pep talk?
Killer: hes got a point...
Sasha: ?
Falia: they've been talking about charlie's murder...

When Dana and Crystal saw their mother's name, they decided to leave. They checked back around 3 am and to their surpise, some were still on.

Charlie: Look carface, can we stop now?
Carface: no. im not finished.
Killer: bye, I gotta get some sleep.
Loni: r u still on? Charlie, get some sleep.
Falia: I think he's become nocturnal. So what happened w/ Sasha?
Charlie: plz, not that...
Falia: yes that...

Falia: u 2 still talking?
Charlie: no...
Falia: I didn't think so...
Charlie: could we drop that?
Falia: charlie, I didn't think that u or her had it in u...
Charlie: spare me...
Falia: look, im just saying, u 2 got rough...
Charlie: plz?
Falia: fine...bye
Charlie: bye.

Dana didn't let anyone know she heard that.

The next day, Crystal and Dana didn't go to school. "That was some chat last night." "Yeah. It was. Did you happen to catch the part about dad drinking?" Crystal asked. "Yeah. I'm not so sure about that." Dana said. "So...maybe tonight we could check it out again." "Dana! We really shouldn't be barging into other people's business." "Well, isn't it kinda our business too?" Crystal wasn't sure what to say now. "Then tonight we'll go back." "I suppose. For now, do you want to call mom?" "Yeah! Crystal let's call her and tell her we skipped school!" "Oh, yeah. We can call her this afternoon. I'm going to go do my homework from yesterday." "I'll get started on our project." Dana said before heading off to get some paper. Crystal finished her homework, eventually. "Okay, so, Crystal. What do you think of this?" "What?" "I was thinking about something mom said awhile ago." "Go on, Dana" "What did she mean that I showed signs of being like my father?" "Dana! This is great!" "It is?" "Think about it! If you're like dad, then we could think about the stuff you do and find out about him!" "You know what, I love that plan, but I don't drink." "We can leave that part out." "Fine." Dana said, finally giving in to Crystal's superiority. "So, what do you like to do, or what do you do?" "I go to parties with my boyfriends, visit the principal a lot, and that's about it." "Well, that means dad goes to parties with his girlfriends and gets in a lot of trouble." "Couldn't we just ask him?" "That would be a lot easier than what we're doing now." "Ok, let's go work on the project until around 9 PM, then we'll go check up on that chat room, okay Crystal?" "Fine." The two worked on their project and got most of it finished. They noticed the time and it was 10 PM. They went on the Internet and found the chat room again. Surprisingly, the chat was just starting.

Itchy: What happened after I left last night?
Carface: I left 2.
Loni: My head's still spinning...
Killer: I have no idea...
Falia: I heard some curse words, then who knows what...
Itchy: We could ask Charlie...
Falia: Would he REALLY want to talk about that?
Itchy: He could...
Loni: Probably not.
Falia: YEAH!
Eric: ?
Falia: I CAUGHT A CHICKEN 2DAY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
Eric: that farmer was hostile...
Falia: Don't u just hate spears?

Dana: !
Itchy: u again?
Dana: So, tell me what u ppl can about dad.
Itchy: I don't like . , they mean commands...
Loni: Well, he ran away when he was 2 months old...
Itchy: became a gambler...
Falia: never contacted his family...
Eric: died...
Falia: came back...
Carface: got "married"
Killer: went back to no
Charlie: that brings us 2 now.
Flo: CHARLIE GET UR SRRY BUTT OVER HERE **RIGHT NOW!!**
Charlie: Another pup attack?
Flo: YES!
Falia: Charlie, would u like to come over here again sometime? It's a 5 min walk...
Flo: I wanna go swimming!
Falia: that waterfall's scary!
Flo: but the rainbow was pretty!
Falia: still...
Loni: Flo, dear, ive never met u...
Flo: charlie's grlfriend @ ur service!
Charlie: I told u! that's over!
Loni: oh...ur that collie who was harassing him when he was still w/ sasha...
Flo: we never broke up!
Charlie: hey, I died! Can u blame me 4 that?
Flo: u couldve told me that u were alive in sf
Charlie: uh-huh...
Flo: how do u do that? !
Charlie: ?
Flo: u always make me mad!
Itchy: then y do u want him?
Flo: I miss him...
Loni: I can understand that
Falia: mom...
Killer: ello! Ello, ello, ello!
Carface: no cheers...
Charlie: itchy...
Itchy: what?
Charlie: I just got off with anne marie and david...
Itchy: and?
Loni: ?
Alex: that was confusing...that talk we had...
Charlie: u cant exactly talk 2 humans...
Carface: CHARLIE!!! Y did u steal my little annie anyway?
Charlie: that was YEARS ago, carface
Itchy: when charlie was still alive...

Dana: ?
Itchy: will u leave us alone?
Dana: no? what does that mean?
Itchy: ...
Dana: !
Itchy: ...
Dana: !
Loni: uh oh...
Falia: Sasha's here?
Loni: yep.
Sasha: hello!
Dana: um...
Sasha: Dana? What r u doing here?
Itchy: I don't think she knows much...
Dana: !
Itchy: ...
Loni: will u 2 stop that plz?
Sasha: Dana, crystal told me that u 2 have found out about ur father?
Dana: perhaps...
Itchy: could u do that l8r?
Dana: yes mom...

Charlie: im gonna go now...
Sasha: u didn't mean those things last night, did u?
Charlie: ...
Sasha: !
Itchy: could we not do that again? Like father/mother like daughter?
Sasha: he called me...I shouldn't repeat that front of the children!
Itchy: oh dear...
Dana: mom, im 16.
Itchy: Charlie, ur that old?
Charlie: how can I be old?
Itchy: oh yeah...

Dana: going going gone. "Dana? How'd it go?" "Mom discovered me, no thanks to you." Dana said reluctantly. "We're in trouble." "Big time, Crystal." Dana said. "Let's go to bed." Crystal nodded, then headed off to her room.

The next day, Sasha arrived home. "Dana! Crystal!" Sasha yelled angrily. "What?" Dana called from her room. "Get down here!" Sasha yelled, still angry. "I'm here. Whaddya want?" Dana said. Sasha saw that Dana had been crying and asked why. "Mom, I want a father." "Yes, I know. And after everyone left last night, I talked with your father a bit, and we made up for only last night." "Then, you're not mad about whatever happened with dad the night before?" "Well, I was, but your father has these ways. And, well, we never were married." "Huh?" "We had you two, but we never married." "Is that legal?" Just then, Crystal came down. "Mom!" she said before running down to hug her mother. "I think we should find dad." Crystal suggested. "I was thinking, maybe we could attempt to find your father?" "Yes!" Dana and Crystal exclaimed. Sasha said "But I didn't tell your father about it. So he doesn't know that we're coming." "Shouldn't we tell him?" "No." "Oh." "So, let's get going!"

Sasha, Dana, and Crystal all set out to find Charlie. They caught a bus and so began their trip. "Mom,

why did you and dad break up?" Sasha looked away when Dana asked this question. Crystal asked a different question. "What was dad like?" Sasha knew she had no reason to avoid this question, so she asked this: "Personality, what he does, or in general?" Sasha asked. "Well, we just wanna know everything that you know about him." Dana replied. "Ok. Well, basically, when I met your father, he was already 'dead'. Well, we were together for a while, then we began to live together. So just before we had you two, neither of us felt that Charlie would be a good influence or father for you two. I didn't expect him to leave, but he returned to New Orleans. And the first time I spoke to him since we split up was last night."

"Oh, so that's all you know about him? That's not much. What about personality-wise?" Crystal asked. "Well, when I first met him, he wasn't all that smart. But he was kind and caring. But after a while, he became mean and selfish and well, empty. He told me that before I met him he was that way. So, right now, he still seems pretty much the way he was when we broke up. Itchy told me last night he's returned to gambling. That's all I know." "Thanks for finally telling us, mom." Crystal said. Dana groaned. "Can we talk about this stuff with out getting all mushy?" Dana asked. Sasha and Crystal giggled a bit. Dana cracked a smile. "Well, it's a long ride, so let's get some sleep, shall we girls?" Both nodded and the three drifted off to sleep.

The next day, they woke up and saw the skyline of New Orleans. Sasha yawned and looked around. She saw New Orleans and looked at Dana and Crystal. They were still sleeping. She smiled and then thought about what lied ahead of them. Where should we stay? She thought. She then thought about staying at Flo's, but Flo seemed to hate her. Just then, Dana awoke. "Hello, sleepyhead." Sasha said happily. "Morning mom." Dana said. "Good morning, mom, Dana." Crystal said when she woke up. "Good morning." Sasha said. "Girls, that's New Orleans." Sasha said, pointing to the city. "Where dad lives?" Crystal asked. "Yes." Sasha replied. The bus drove on, and they soon reached the city. "It's humid." Dana observed. "Yeah. Hot too." Crystal said. "It smells too." Dana said, sniffing the air. "How does dad stand it?" "He must be used to it. Most cities smell." Sasha said before hopping off the train. "Come on! I'm starved!" Sasha said before running off. Dana and Crystal shrugged, then jumped and ran after their mother.

"I wonder where the food is?" Sasha asked herself as she wandered around from alley to alley. "Mom, I'm thinking it's in the dumpsters." Dana said, pointing to some dogs digging in a nearby dumpster. "I'm not eating from an over grown trash can!" Sasha said before running to the next alley. One dog heard her and said "You're not gonna find anythin else but garbage here, little lady." The dog said. "Get off me!" Sasha yelled. She ran off with her chin high. Dana and Crystal shrugged then followed their mother.

They passed many alleys, and Sasha eventually found a Dumpster to her liking. She went over to it and peered in, wrinkled her nose and looked away. A Shepherd mix went over to the dumpster and began eating, not caring. Sasha again wrinkled her nose and began to walk away, but Dana and Crystal had gone over to the dumpster. "Dana! Crystal! You know better!" "Mom, I'm starving. I don't care anymore." Dana said. She was feasting on the garbage, Crystal didn't seem so happy. She was wrinkling her nose and making weird faces. She was disgusted with every bite. She swallowed reluctantly.

The shepherd mix stopped eating and looked up. He saw Sasha and froze. Sasha also froze. Dana looked up, saw the two frozen dogs and asked "What?" The two didn't seem to hear her. The Shepherd mix was the first and last to speak. "What?" He asked before walking off. "Mom, what just happened?" Dana asked after the dog had left. "He just looked familiar, that's all." Sasha said before heading in the direction that the Shepherd had gone. Dana and Crystal shrugged then followed their mother.

They found their mother in front of a nightclub, staring inside. "Mom, why are we here?" "Shhhh."

Sasha whispered the whispered something else. "I'm going in." "Mom! Don't go in there! Why do you even want to?" Dana asked disgustedly, making Sasha sound like she was crazy. Sasha went anyway. Dana and Crystal shrugged and Dana started to follow her mother, only to be stopped by Crystal. "What?" Dana asked after Crystal pulled her back to their spot. "They'll never let you in!" "Just you watch." Dan said before heading to the door. "Dana!" Crystal called, but Dana had already approached the guard who had stopped her.

"Whoa! You can't come in here!" "Why not ya big hunk?" Dana said in a flirty tone. "Aw shucks." The guard said, blushing. Crystal couldn't believe what she was hearing OR seeing. She slapped her paw to her forehead as she continued to watch. "Go on ahead." Dana whispered in his ear "Thanks." kissed him on the cheek, then went in. Crystal couldn't believe Dana just did that. She had had more practice than she thought.

In the club, Sasha had seen Dana and went over to her. Drunken dogs surrounded Dana, all going gaga over her. Sasha went over to Dana and scolded her "What do you think you're doing?" Sasha scolded. "How did you even get in here?" Sasha asked, looking at the guard. "Hey, easier to get past than most guards. Sucker." Dana said looking at the guard. "We'll discuss this later young lady. I'll be right back." Dana shrugged, then left the club.

"Dana!" Crystal called. "I can't believe you just did that?" "I can't or I shouldn't?" Dana asked with a grin. "Forget it. What was it like in there?" "Boring. Just a bunch of drunk guys drooling over me and mom." Dana replied. "Speaking of which, why did she go in there anyway?" "Who knows. I think it could have had something to do with that guy from before." Dana told Crystal. "Yeah, about him. Why is mom so interested in him?" Crystal said. "Dunno. I mean, he WAS good looking, but I didn't think mom cared about that stuff, ya know?" "Yeah. Say, here he comes now." Dana followed Crystal's paw and sure enough, the Shepherd mix was coming out the door.

Just as he passed by, Dana pulled him aside. "Who are you and what business do you have with our mother?" Dana demanded. The shepherd didn't seem the slightest bit scared. He stood to his full height and Crystal was just a bit shorter than he was, but Dana was the size of her mother, who was shorter than the shepherd. "Okay, okay. Sit down dude." Dana said. "So whaddya want?" he asked them. "We already told you!" Crystal said angrily. "Fine. Who's your mother?" "The Scarlet Irish Setter from the alley!" Dana said. The shepherd just said, "She looked familiar, okay?" Dana smelled his breath and held her nose. "Your breath smells like alcohol." She said still holding her nose. "Yeah. So who're you?" the shepherd asked. "Dana and Crystal. You?" "Charlie. What are your last names?" "Why should we tell you?" "Well, your mother's?" "Well, Sasha La Fleur." "Um, I'm gonna go now." Charlie said after he heard the name.

After he left, Dana and Crystal began talking. "Dana, that was weird." "I'll say. He's obviously been drunk." "Not that! He seemed to know our mother and yours and his markings are almost the same!" Crystal said. "Then what are we waiting around here for? Lets go!" Dana said before running off after Charlie. Crystal had no choice but to follow. There's no telling what kind of trouble a dog like Dana can get into with no supervision. Sasha came out and found both girls gone. "Dana? Crystal?" She called. When no answer came to her, she became worried. "Crystal? Dana?" She continued to call while she searched frantically. She picked up their scent, but soon lost it. "Oh no." Sasha said. "Sasha?" It was Flo. "Flo?" "Sasha!" "FLO! Oh my god, I need your help!" "What?" "I need to call Dana and Crystal." "Then come on! We'll go to my place and you can call from there." Flo said before heading in the direction of the old church. Sasha followed Flo until they came to an old stone church.

CHAPTER II

"I didn't know you lived here." Sasha said, staring at the church. Flo had already entered through the end of a used-to-be hallway. Sasha followed at her own pace up a rickety staircase and came to a cozy

room in the bell tower. Flo handed her a phone and she dialed Dana's cell phone number. "Hello?" Dana's voice came through the phone. "Dana? Where are you?" "At that guy's place." "Which guy?" Sasha asked outraged. "That guy from the alley." "Put him on the phone!" Sasha demanded. Charlie's voice came on. "Why you low lived, no good mutt!" Sasha yelled through the phone. "Sasha, calm down." "Calm down? CALM DOWN? YOU HAVE OUR CHILDREN AT YOUR HOUSE! THEY BARELY KNOW YOU! I'M COMING OVER THERE RIGHT NOW!" Sasha yelled angrily. "Once again, calm down. Deep breaths."

"UHHHHH!" Sasha yelled before slamming down the phone. "Easy there. What happened?" Flo asked. "Charlie has them." Sasha said before falling to the ground, almost fainting. "It's just too much stress. Why don't you wait until tomorrow?" "Will they be all right?" Sasha asked nervously. "I'm sure of it." Flo assured her before showing her to her bed.

Dana and Crystal were having a blast at Charlie's. They enjoyed their father's company. He didn't seem like a father at all, just a friend. "Wow, dad. You've LIVED." Dana said as she rolled on the floor. "Yeah. Hey, it's gettin late. Ya wanna go out?" Dana and Crystal looked at each other and grinned. "Yeah!" Dana said before following Charlie out the door. As they walked, Crystal began to feel a bit nervous. "Wow, this is great, isn't it, Crystal?" Dana said as they followed Charlie. "Dana, I don't feel so sure that we should do this. I'm getting a bit on the queasy side." Crystal said as they approached an old ship. Charlie entered and Dana and Crystal followed. They knew where they were after a look around.

"Dana, we're at a nightclub." "Yeah so?" Dana said as she headed in the direction Charlie had gone. Crystal took a nervous look around and instantly headed out the door. She ran away, frantically searching for her mother. "Mom? Mom?" She called as she ran from alley to alley. Sasha heard her cries and began to run towards the cries. She soon saw Crystal and the two hugged. Crystal was crying a bit because she had so nervous that she would never see her mother again. They hugged and released each other eventually.

"What did Charlie do to you?" Sasha asked in a nervous but stern tone. "Nothing, mom." Crystal said not wanting her mother to worry more than possible. "Then what happened?" Sasha asked her. "Well, everything was fine, but then dad took us out. He took us to this nightclub. Dana stayed, but I left." "Well honey, you made the right choice, but Dana really shouldn't have done that. Where is the club you went to?" Sasha asked Crystal, wiping the few tears that remained on her cheek. Crystal hesitated a bit, then said "This way." Crystal went in the direction of the old boat that Dana and Charlie had entered.

As they approached the boat, Sasha was also getting nervous. "Crystal, are you sure this is the place?" "I'm sure mom. They're in there." Sasha nodded, gulped and approached the old ship. She entered, looked around and saw Dana. "Dana!" she called. Dana looked at her and groaned. "Who's that?" one of the boys that Dana had been talking to asked in a snobbish tone. "Mom." Dana said reluctantly. "Oh. Why's she here?" He asked. "Dunno, maybe came for dad and saw me." Dana said before taking a bit too much beer in. She didn't know what happened, but she did know that she was now in a cozy room with Charlie, Sasha, Crystal and a collie that she had no idea was.

Crystal and the collie were leaning over her and Sasha and Charlie were bickering in the far corner. "You okay?" Crystal asked her. The collie came to her with a glass of water fresh from the nearby lake. "What happened?" Dana asked, still slightly dazed and she had a horrible headache. "You had too much stuff and it didn't go so well." Crystal said as Dana drank the water that the collie handed her. "Oh. What'd I do?" Dana asked. "I'm not sure. Mom or dad might know though." Crystal said. "Who're you?" Dana asked the collie. "My name's Flo." Flo said. Dana didn't say anything more because 1. She wanted to eavesdrop on her parents' discussion and 2. Her headache was getting worse. She listened to as much of the conversation between Charlie and Sasha as she could.

“How could you even think of taking them to that place?” Sasha asked and everyone could tell that she was both annoyed and mad. Not a very good combination. “Sasha, I...” Charlie started but couldn’t finish, she didn’t want to hear it. “Charlie, why? For the whole time we knew each other, you never entered a nightclub, went near an alcoholic drink and absolutely DESPISED gambling. Now you’re doing all of that! You’ve become the complete opposite of yourself!” Sasha began to cry slightly as she leaned on Charlie’s shoulder. Charlie stroked her back lightly to comfort her.

Just then, Annabelle entered the room. “You again?” Dana and Crystal asked. “What’re ya doin here?” Charlie growled. Sasha and Flo just stared. “Charles! How dare you speak to ME that way! Hello Dana, Crystal. Sasha, Flo, I don’t believe you’ve met me yet. I’m Annabelle, the archangel.”

Annabelle said. This only helped Flo a little bit, still petrified. Sasha remembered her and calmed down. “Hello Annabelle. Nice to see you again.” Sasha said in a friendly voice.

“Flo, it’s okay.” Annabelle said lovingly, then turned to Charlie. “Charles, go in a corner somewhere rethink your life.” Annabelle scolded. She then turned to Sasha, Dana and Crystal. “Would you three like to see Charles’ life?” They were all confused. “I can take you back in time and you may witness any part of Charles life that you wish to see.” Annabelle explained. Sasha spoke up “Yes, please.” Annabelle smiled, then opened a portal. Sasha, Dana and Crystal followed and they were in an old, Victorian house. “Where are we?” Dana asked as she looked at the rich looking furniture. “Year 1937, Charles’ puppy hood home.” Annabelle said as she entered a room. They saw the scene that you read when you began this book. They watched as Burt took Charlie out for the walks and Falia helped Charlie with his lessons. They watched as Charlie ran away and met Flo and Itchy. Annabelle signaled towards another portal. Sasha, Dana and Crystal followed. They were soon in a junkyard. “Heh?” Dana asked. Annabelle replied “Charles’ home while he was in high school.” “Oh.” Dana said. They watched as Charlie’s high school life unfolded before their eyes. After that, Annabelle took them through yet another portal. They were in a dark, cold and gloomy room, which was barely an excuse for a room at all. They saw a fat pit bull with a cigar in his mouth and a knife in his paw and a mutt with oversized glasses dragging a chocolate lab.

The pit bull raised the knife in the air and despite the cries of the lab, the pit bull brought the knife down into the lab’s chest and the lab was instantly dead. Sasha, Crystal, and Dana all gasped and looked away. Just then, Charlie walked in. “Carface? Whadid ya want?” he called. Carface, the pit bull, dropped the knife, grabbed the mutt with glasses, Killer, and dragged him out the door. Charlie went over to the lab and sniffed around. He saw that the lab was dead and he saw the knife on the ground. He gasped as he realized what had just happened. He backed away and ran out the door. Just after Charlie left, two police dogs came in with Carface saying “I saw everything!” and other things like that. One police dog sniffed the air and said “Charlie.”

“You say somethin?” the other asked. “Smell the air.” The second police dog sniffed and knew what he smelled. “Charlie Barkin?” “Yep. He did this, I’m sure of it.” “It does seem like he’d end up like this, don’t it?” The first police dog rolled his eyes and headed over to the knife. He put it in a plastic bag and the two left. Sasha, Crystal and Dana couldn’t believe what just happened. “Oh that little...ooh!” Sasha said as they followed Annabelle into a portal. The next thing they knew, they were at a trial. “We gather here today to discuss the case of the murder of Sir Reginald Harold.” The judge said. “In one spot is Charlie Barkin, accused of murder. The victim can’t make it today for obvious reasons, however, the witnesses are here, few as they are.” The judge continued as he pointed to Carface and Killer and some other dogs that were over on Charlie’s side. “State your defense, Mr. Dachshund.” The judge gestured towards Itchy. Itchy began to speak.

“Well, there isn’t much evidence to prove or disprove your theory, however, I have witnesses that say that they were either talking to Charlie or saw Charlie while the murder occurred.” “Witnesses, speak.” The judge commanded. One dog stood up. “Well, I was talking to Charlie during the murder and these

guys saw him.” The dog finished and sat down. “Well, Mr. Caruthers, what do you have to say?” the judge asked as he gestured towards Carface and Killer. “Well, while the murder occurred, I saw the defensive witnesses over at the bar, drunk. They weren’t talking with Charlie at all. I did not see Charlie during the murder.” Carface finished and the judge gestured to Killer who stood. “I was with Carface and I second his statements.” Killer finished and sat down. “Of course you would.” The judge murmured under his breath then said “The evidence.” The judge now gestured towards the police dog with the knife and Charlie and Carface’s paw-prints. He began to speak. “We ran some tests on the knife and after taking the paw-prints of Mr. Barkin and Mr. Caruthers, the suspects, we find the paw-prints on the knife to match Mr. Barkin’s.” No one believed what he or she had just heard. “I musta stepped on it when I went in the room.” Charlie muttered to himself.

“Jury, discuss amongst yourselves.” The judge commanded. The jury discussed for a short time then a basset hound stood and said “After much discussion and arguing, we find the defendant guilty. As for punishment, we would suggest the death penalty.” The judge stopped him. “That won’t be necessary, yet. Perhaps there is a reason for the murder. Anyone?” A small Chihuahua stood and said, “Reginald was caught tinkering with the machines the day before the murder occurred.” “And by ‘tinkering’ you mean?” the judge asked. The Chihuahua replied, “he was jacking the machines, your honor.” “Excuse me, jacking?” “He ‘fixed’ the machines so they would always hit the jackpot. Cheating, if you will.” The Chihuahua replied becoming a bit impatient.

“Thank you. Anyone else?” when no one else stood, the judge said, “Well, even if that was the reason, the punishment should be left in the hands of the court. And we hereby close this case as we find the defense guilty and he shall spend 5 years in jail. Human of course.” The judge said before slamming his mallet on the pedestal to dismiss the court. Two Great Dane police dogs took Charlie away to the jail. Itchy watched in dismay as his best friend was put in the police car. “He couldn’t have done it.” He said to himself. Dana, Sasha and Crystal couldn’t believe anything that had just been said. “Annabelle, dad didn’t do anything! That rotten pit bull! Ooh, I just wanna...lemme at em!” Dana said angrily as Annabelle created another portal. “Now, now, Dana. They were not there and the only evidence they had to go on proved Charles guilty. It may not be fair, but it’s how things went.” She said before jumping into the portal.

“How many more of these things do we gotta go through?” Dana asked as they found themselves in a dirt tunnel. Itchy was breaking Charlie out of the pound or “jail”, as the dogs knew it. You know what happens next, so there’s no need to tell that part. Annabelle took them into another portal and they found themselves in San Francisco. “Now what?” Dana asked, then realized where they were. “Hey, why’re we here?” she asked, then saw younger versions of Charlie, Sasha, Itchy and Bess. “Hey! It’s Aunt Bess!” Crystal said, then saw Charlie and Sasha nuzzling and suddenly felt sad. “Mom, you two look so happy.” “Yeah.” Sasha said as tears filled her eyes. Charlie and Sasha entered a cute little house in an alley, one that Dana and Crystal knew as their home.

Annabelle took them into the house and Dana and Crystal were surprised to find it quite different than it was now. It looked cheerful with vases of flowers and the smell of fresh bread filled the house. They watched as Sasha and Charlie shared a kiss before heading upstairs to their bedroom. They curled up together and slept peacefully. Annabelle put them through the portal and they found themselves in the same place. “Annabelle, why are we still here?” Crystal whispered. “We’re actually a few months ahead of what we just saw.” Annabelle informed them before they saw Charlie wake up, stretch, look at Sasha, kiss her lightly and jump quietly off the bed. He left the room and came back around 5 AM. Dana and Crystal looked at each other. Around 8 AM, Sasha woke up and began to nuzzle Charlie, but smelled his breath and withdrew. It wasn’t morning breath, but something else. Charlie woke up and Sasha showed no sign of suspicion.

The next night, Charlie did the same as the night before, however, after he left, Sasha woke up and saw

that Charlie wasn't beside her. She jumped a bit, looked around and shrugged. "Must've gone to bathroom." She said before returning to sleep. The same thing happened for several nights before Sasha told Bess. "...And his breath smells weird in the morning." She finished. Bess thought a bit before making a suggestion. "Well, one option is to ask him. Another is to find out what that smell is. The last option I can think of is to stay awake and then follow him, secretly of course." Sasha thought a bit. "Well, what I want to just ask him, but I could never do that. I have no idea what the smell is, so I would have no idea where to start. So I guess I have to follow him, but Bess?" "Yes?" "I'm a little nervous about this." "You'll do fine." Bess assured her.

That night Sasha stayed awake, but looked asleep. Towards midnight, she felt movement next to her, a kiss and a jump off the bed. When she heard Charlie going down the stairs, she came out of bed and began to head towards the stairs. She waited until Charlie was out the door, then followed out the door. Dana and Crystal comforted their mother. Sasha knew what was going to happen and had begun crying. Annabelle watched with interest.

Anyway, back to our little trip in time. Sasha followed Charlie until she came to a hole in the ground, with stairs. She was in the middle of no where and was nervous about what was at the bottom of the stairs. Who wouldn't be? She slowly but hastily went down the stairs anyway and found herself at a nightclub and Charlie with a mug of a brown liquid and some gambling dogs. She quickly ran out crying. The next day, she told Bess everything.

"Well, the 'brown liquid', as you call it, is most likely beer and who knows what else he's doing down there. Why he's doing this, I don't know. But I do now that we shouldn't let on that we know anything, for now." Bess finished just before Charlie walked in the café. "Hello, ladies." He said as he approached them. He doesn't seem any different.. Bess and Sasha thought as Charlie talked. "So, how does that sound you two?" Charlie asked them. "What's that Charlie?" Sasha asked. "A day at the beach and then we come back here for dinner." "Oh, that sounds great." Sasha said. Bess nodded. Charlie started off towards the beach with Sasha and Bess following.

"He doesn't seem any different." Bess whispered to Sasha. "I know. He's still doing that stuff though." Sasha whispered back. They had a wonderful time at the beach and a delicious dinner. Sasha and Bess forgot all about Charlie's nightlife during that time, but after they dropped Bess off, Sasha remembered everything. She decided to let it continue unless it affected his day-life. Well, Charlie was able to continue this schedule for a while, however, after a while Charlie started to harden. He became a bit hot tempered again and not as nice as he had been since he came to San Francisco. Sasha and Bess noticed this and decided to tell Charlie that they knew.

Bess and Sasha would BOTH tell him. When Bess came over to Charlie and Sasha's, she nodded at Sasha who understood and began to speak. "Charlie, we have something we need to tell you." Charlie nodded and Bess continued. "Well, um, Charlie, we know...we know what you do at night." She said. Charlie found this slightly amusing and laughed slightly. "Sure ya do." Charlie said calmly. "I sleep." This irritated Bess and Sasha a bit. "No, Charlie. You don't sleep. You go to some casino or nightclub and drink or something! Charlie, I'm worried about you and I would like to help." Sasha said, beginning to cry a bit.

Charlie now looked a bit nervous, then said "Well, you can't really help me too much any more, so let's just forget this ever happened, 'k?" Sasha had now begun crying a bit harder now and the fact that Charlie didn't seem to care irritated her more. "You know what your problem is? Your girlfriend is CRYING and you don't care. We want to help and you just go and make her cry harder. You're selfish and mean!" Bess yelled before storming out the door with a slowly decaying Sasha following. Charlie was a bit hurt by Bess's comments and went up to the bedroom. He lied down; put his head in his paws and a tear rolled down his cheek as he closed his eyes.

Meanwhile, Bess was calling Charlie everything she could think of with Sasha still falling apart. "You

know what he is? He's a no good, vulgar, dirty, mean selfish street mutt. That's what. No, he's worse than that, he's..." Sasha stopped her. "That's enough Bess. I think I'll go check on him." Sasha turned around and headed back towards her home. Bess's criticism wasn't helping the situation at all, just making her feel worse. She found Charlie asleep and she curled up with him and Charlie woke up. He looked away from her and she knew why. He didn't know why he did these things, just that he did. It was too late to just quit in a day. Sasha didn't know what to say either, so she was about to go to sleep when she felt a kiss. She returned it and the two cuddled for a bit.

The next morning, Charlie wasn't there. She was startled when she that Charlie wasn't in the house. She didn't know where he was until she found a note and began to cry.

Sasha~ If you're reading this, then I'm in New Orleans. I can't live with you anymore and nor can you put up with me for much longer. I left for New Orleans shortly after you fell asleep last night. I won't be returning, so this is goodbye. I hope you find someone who can make you happy. I obviously can't, not like this anyway. Goodbye and good luck, Sasha. ~Charlie

Tears streamed from Sasha's eyes as she read this. She ran outside and Bess had been waiting for her to go to the beach. Bess saw her and allowed Sasha to hug her and cry. When Sasha finally calmed down a bit, Bess asked, "What happened?" Sasha continued to cry but handed her the note. Bess gasped and cried slightly when she read the note. She looked at Sasha, who was still crying and back at the note. She ran to her friend's side and hugged her. Annabelle noticed that the current Sasha was also crying and that Dana and Crystal were comforting her. They watched as the young Sasha slowly fainted and Bess took her to the animal hospital. The vet told them that she was just too depressed and that she was also pregnant. Bess gasped and looked at Sasha, thought of Charlie and became furious. She didn't show it though. She didn't want Sasha worrying about her. She had way too much else to worry about.

Annabelle decided to end the flashback, so she clapped her paws and they were back in the present. When Charlie and Flo saw Sasha, Dana and Crystal crying and also slightly Annabelle, Charlie ran to Sasha's side and hugged her and Flo to Dana and Crystal. Sasha wanted to push Charlie away, but she couldn't bring herself to do it. As Charlie stroked Sasha's back with his paw, she leaned against Charlie's soft, furry chest and cried. Dana and Crystal were leaning on Flo and crying also. Annabelle cried just watching the scene.

No one spoke. The only sounds were soft sobs. Flo eventually comforted Dana and Crystal and they watched Charlie and Sasha. They decided to let them have some time alone, so they left the room and Charlie and Sasha continued their stroking and crying. Sasha finally spoke up after she calmed down a bit and with tears in her eyes, she looked up at Charlie and said, "How do you do it? I hate you, but I love you. I want to get as far away as possible but want to be with you. I know you may never be a good father, but I want you. I-I need you." Charlie didn't say anything for a bit, then spoke. "Sasha, I love you, but I could never influence them like you want me to. I want to be with you, but I can't if I'm going to be, well, myself." Sasha was still crying just looked at Charlie.

"Charlie, I...I...I don't know what to do anymore. I want to be with you, but you're right. The kids could never grow up to be, well, good if you're around." Sasha leaned on Charlie again and cried some more as Charlie made some suggestions. "Well, what some dogs do is to abandon their kids, but we could never do that. Some would just ignore and neglect their kids, but the result wouldn't be much different than the result of me living with you three. The last option I can think of, besides not changing anything, is to adjust our lives for the best interest of the kids." Sasha looked up at him again. "Charlie, that's usually when the parents are just over worked, over stressed or are just neglecting their kids without meaning to." "Yeah, that's true, but I could try." "Well, I'd love for you to do that, but in the meantime,

what should we do?" "Sasha, I..." Charlie started "...I'm not sure." Sasha shook her head, as she laughed a little, then noticed that Flo, Dana and Crystal were gone. "Now where did they head off to?" "Dunno. Well, they had to go down those stairs, so let's start there." Charlie suggested. Sasha nodded and followed Charlie down the cold, stone steps of the church. She smiled as she followed Charlie into the church's courtyard. When she entered the courtyard, her smile grew.

In the courtyard stood Dana, Crystal and Flo. "Mom, you okay?" Crystal asked her. She saw Sasha and Charlie smiling at each other and knew something had happened to cause them to go from crying to smiling. "What happened?" Dana asked. "I'll leave you four alone." Flo said before leaving. She figured that they had family matters to discuss and needed to be left alone. After Flo left, Sasha began to speak. "Well, your father is going to try to give up gambling." Dana and Crystal smiled and clapped playfully when they heard this. Sasha and Charlie laughed, smiled and nuzzled. "In the meantime, we're not sure what to do. What do you suggest?" Charlie asked Dana and Crystal. They were happy that someone was asking their opinion on important matters. "Well, if you ask me, I suggest that dad come home with us. After all, if you're gonna quit, and there aren't many places for dogs to gamble that I'm aware of in San Francisco, it might be easier." Dana suggested.

Charlie and Sasha looked at each other, smiled and said "Sure." "I second that!" a smiling Crystal said enthusiastically. Charlie and Sasha smiled. "Then it's settled. I'll return to San Francisco with you and we'll marry there." Charlie said before looking at Sasha, who gasped and smiled and squealed. She ran to Charlie's side and squeezed him. "I'll take that as a yes?" Charlie asked an overly joyed Sasha. "YES! YES! YES! YES!" Sasha squealed as she continued to squeeze Charlie. Dana and Crystal smiled as they began to realize what just happened and started their own joy party. "YES!" they said happily as they pranced around smiling.

CHAPTER III

Charlie said good bye to Itchy and Flo and hopped on the bus to San Francisco with his fiancée and his two children. Sasha nuzzled Charlie and smiled. Dana and Crystal smiled too. They used the long ride home to bond. When they did return, they saw Bess, who saw Charlie and frowned, then saw Sasha nuzzling him and he her and was confused. Sasha saw her and ran to her with a big smile on her face, squealing. "I'M GETTING MARRIED!" Sasha squealed to Bess who frowned. "To him?" "DUH!" Sasha continued to squeal happily. "Sasha, he hurt you so bad and now your taking him back?" Bess asked, surprised. "We already worked that part out." Bess looked at Charlie and smiled. "THAT'S SO GREAT!" Bess squealed with Sasha. "I KNOW!" The two continued their squealing conversation and Dana and Crystal watched in disbelief.

"Mom's acting not acting like a mom. She's acting like a teen who just got asked out by her long, secretly loved crush." Dana said jokingly as she pretended to sound and look romantic. "Yeah... Stop before you hurt yourself." Crystal said before seeing something. "What?" Dana asked as she came out of her romantic daydreaming and looked at a somewhat petrified Crystal. "Mrs. Shiz is coming." "Oh dear!" Dana squealed comically before pretending to faint with her paw on her forehead. "Oh get up." Crystal said as she shook Dana. "What is going on here?" Mrs. Shiz asked as she saw Sasha and Bess squealing and Dana and Crystal's antics.

"Well, we just got back from New Orleans where we found our father and he asked mom to marry him and she accepted. Then aunt Bess came and mom started squealing. We were making fun of it and then you came along and yeah." Dana said. "Oh, so you found your father? How's he?" "He seems okay. Apparently the reason they broke up was dad was gambling." Crystal informed Mrs. Shiz. "Oh dear. He quit all that then?" Mrs. Shiz asked looking at Charlie with a concerned look on her face. "Well...not the gambling. He SAID he was going to try to quit though." Crystal said. Charlie walked over to the three, walking up right behind Mrs. Shiz and said "Ello." Mrs. Shiz jumped and Dana and Crystal laughed. Mrs. Shiz smiled when she saw the two laughing. "Well, you seem quite friendly and seem to know

these two's sense of humor." Mrs. Shiz said, a bit snobbish as she brushed herself off. Charlie nodded then asked, "Who're ya?" "Their English teacher, Mrs. Shiz. You may call me Karen. And you are?" "Yeah. Their father, Charlie." "Oh yes. I expect you to quit that gambling of yours to protect my favorite students." Mrs. Shiz said. "Ya sound like my mother. And yeah, I DO intend to give that up." Mrs. Shiz flinched at the way Charlie talked and asked, "How did you do in English, if you went to school at all." "Aye, yi, yi. So...oh god." Charlie said as he saw his family coming. "What?" Dana, Crystal and Mrs. Shiz asked. Charlie pointed at the stampede and they got out of the way causing the stampede to stampede into Sasha and Bess's ongoing conversation. "LONI!" Sasha squealed. Falia hugged Charlie and Eric smiled. Tom and Christy smiled and waved. Hart and Jane did the same. Mrs. Shiz and Bess just stared. "Heh?" They asked. Charlie began introductions. "Bess, Karen, Falia, Eric, Loni, Alex, Vanessa, Hart and Jane." "Family?" asked Bess. "Yeah, pretty much." Charlie replied. Sasha was overjoyed at the site of Loni and ran to hug her. "Loni! I missed you SOOO much!" she exclaimed. Loni smiled and hugged her back. "I'm happy to see you too dear." Sasha stepped back in disbelief. "What happened to you?" Sasha asked as she studied Loni curiously. "I'm older, dear, that's all." Loni said. "Finally some civilization around this motley crowd." Karen said as she made her way to Loni and shook her hand. "Civilized people do NOT criticize people they do not nor do they touch someone they don't know very well." Loni replied. Everyone giggled at Mrs. Shiz who looked completely shocked.

"Now, SASHA! I'M SO GLAD TO SEE YOU!" Loni squealed as she ran to hug Sasha. Everyone but Mrs. Shiz understood what was going on. "I thought you just said..." Karen said, shocked yet again. "I also said if they don't know the dog very well." More snickers. "Now, everyone off the street." Loni pushed the crowd off the street into an alley. Mrs. Shiz was confused. She frowned as she studied Loni, shrugged and followed the group. "Ms. La Fleur, were might your family be?" Loni did the shame sign towards her and said, "Tsk, tsk." Giggles emerged from the crowd and Sasha spoke, "Coming." Just at that moment, Ben (Sasha's father), Gail, Terri and John (Sasha's brother) came around the corner. Ben and Gail were fighting and Terri and John looked at the big crowd and were confused. "Terri! BEN!" Sasha squealed before embracing her brother and sister who returned the hug. Gail and Ben were fighting because they had been divorced for quite a while. You haven't seen John before because he lived with his father in Texas. Naturally, they both had a heavy southern drawl and Ben had an unusually low voice. "SASHA!" John exclaimed. "DADDY!" She squealed happily. Ben hugged Sasha and she hugged him back. Gail didn't like this. "BEN! How dare you touch her!" "She's ma daughter." Ben replied in his deep southern drawl. "I don't give a kibble about who she is! The whole idea of men and women making physical contact is just...bluh!" "It was just a friendly family hug." "Nope. I don't care. No. BLAH, BLAH, BLAH! I'M NOT LISTENING!" Gail covered her ears even though she and everyone knew it didn't do any good. Everyone giggled as they watched the fight. Meanwhile, Sasha had gone to nuzzle Charlie while Falia and Eric, Hart and Jane, Tom and Christy, and Alex and Vanessa did the same in their pairs. Gail saw this and was overwhelmed.

"AAAAHHHHHHHHH! IT'S TOO MUCH! STOP THE INSANTITY!" She yelled as she put her paws on her head and started to walk hastily in squiggly circles.

On a different note, David and Anne Marie were around 20. They had married and hadn't heard from Charlie since they had seen him with Alex. Sasha had told Anne Marie about what had happened between them and she knew that seemed just like the Charlie she always knew. David had known a very different Charlie and didn't agree. He and Sasha didn't understand. Anne Marie told them about how she had met Charlie and everything they had done together. David and Sasha understood a little better now, but not by much. Anne Marie shook her head and gave up.

Now all this commotion had summoned David and Anne Marie. They were out buying things that they needed and had heard all the barking. They peered in the alley and were shocked at the site of so many

dogs gathered together. They noticed Charlie and went to ask him what was going on. "Well, me and Sasha are gettin married and then our families came and now we're all here. That's Loni, Falia, Eric, Vanessa, Hart, Jane, Tom, Christy, and Sasha's family, Gail, Terri, John and the other one's her dad I guess." Charlie said, pointing to each one as he said the name. "That's a LOT of dogs." David said. "Yeah, I know." Charlie said. David and Anne Marie hugged him. "It's wonderful to see you again, Charlie. But why did you do that to Sasha? She was heartbroken!" Anne Marie scolded him. "Well, I, uh..." Charlie didn't want to tell her why and Anne Marie shook her head and laughed "Same old Charlie." She said before turning to the two still squabbling Irish Setters. "Will you two stop that?" She asked. Gail and Ben looked at her. "And just who might you be?" "My name's Anne Marie and this is my husband, David." "GAH! MORE!" Gail screeched and all the canines said, annoyed, "Will you stop that?" Anne Marie giggled and David just stared. He had no idea what was going on. After all, he couldn't understand dogs. He could understand Charlie, Itchy and Sasha, but that was it. Still, he didn't know what Gail had said to get every dog in the alley to say the same thing, he inferred.

As Gail and Ben continued squabbling, Anne Marie and David chatted with Charlie a bit more, said their good byes, and left the rather large group alone. "Charlie, I want you to take good care of Dana and Crystal. None of this...gambling and such." Mrs. Shiz fired up her own argument. "Ya ain't their mother." Charlie said. That was enough to begin to set off Mrs. Shiz. "Charlie...Your grammar is just...UH! And the way you talk, that's worse! You should consider taking night classes at a community college or...something! UH!" Charlie snickered. "Yeah. I should go to school at 36 and do what?" Mrs. Shiz was speechless. "You're only 36? Your only 10 years older than them." Mrs. Shiz really had no idea what to say. "Well, your math stinks." Charlie murmured to himself. Dana and Crystal giggled. "Mrs. Shiz, he's 20 years older, not 10." Crystal giggled. "Well, um, that makes me feel a bit better about you living with these two. I still don't like it." Karen remarked in her snobby tone.

"Ya make it like I'm doin somethin wrong. I'm their father. It's not a crime to live with my children." Charlie replied. Mrs. Shiz hadn't expected this. She also flinched. "Well, if Dana and Crystal's grades drop in my class, I blame you!" And with that, Mrs. Shiz flicked her ears and with her chin high; she walked out of the alley. "What just happened?" Sasha asked, hearing the commotion. "I'm not sure. But I think the thing that needs help is your parents over there." Charlie said, pointing to a STILL quarreling Ben and Gail. Sasha gasped and went over to her parents. "Mom, Dad, can we PLEASE drop all this for a bit? This is a happy time! Wed-ding. Hap-py." As Sasha continued to attempt to calm down her parents, Falia went over to Charlie. "Well, you seem to have changed since I last saw you. What happened to Flo?" She asked. "That ended like 3 years ago." Charlie said to Falia. Falia was sorry for asking.

"Sorry, I didn't know." She said as if she were ashamed. "It's okay. I'm over it. Sasha's great. So, you and Eric doin okay?" "Oh, yes, wonderful." "The puppies?" "Oh, they're the same age as Dana and Crystal." "So, are they coming?" "Oh, yeah. They came with us, actually. They were nervous about meeting Dana and Crystal and you so they went shopping to postpone it as much as possible." "Ah." Charlie said. Just as he finished, guess who walked into the alley? You should know that by now. If you don't, you haven't been listening. But I'll tell you anyway. TA DA! Sun, Rain and Ghana, Falia and Eric's children! Dana and Crystal saw them and immediately ran over to them. "Who're you?" Dana asked in a friendly voice. "I-I'm Sun. This is Rain and Ghana." Sun stammered. Rain and Ghana smiled and waved shyly. "OOH! You're all so cute!" Dana squealed. "Easy Dana. Don't listen to her, she's nuts." Crystal said. The three who snickered a bit. "So, why're you so shy?" Dana asked. At first no reply came, but eventually Sun spoke up. "W-Well, w-we just kind of are, you know?" "Well, get over it! We're all friendly here! Except for dad over there, we're not so sure about him." Dana said. Charlie heard this and came over. "You Falia's children?" Sun, Rain and Ghana nodded. "Do ya speak?" He asked. They nodded. "Huh. You crack em girls." Charlie said before leaving them.

"Yeah, he doesn't seem that nice at first, but don't worry, get to know him and you'll love him." Crystal assured them. They nodded. "Stop with the nodding! Speak! Rain, Ghana, I haven't heard you speak yet and we've been together for at least 5 whole minutes!" "Cousin, what is your name?" Rain asked timidly. "Do you speak English very often?" Dana asked. Sun answered. "They're just shy." Dana and Crystal nodded and said "So, you don't call me cousin. Call me by name." Dana said. "Um, we don't know your name's. In fact, we don't know anyone's names here." Sun said. "Well, I can see how that could be a bit of a problem." Dana said. Crystal hit her lightly on the head and laughed. "Dana, Dana. You're lucky Mrs. Shiz isn't here." "Yeah, where'd she go anyway?" "Dad chased her off." Crystal said. "Anyway, I'm Crystal, this unfortunate soul is Dana, that's Grandma Loni, Grandma Gail, Grandpa Ben, Aunt Terri, Uncle John, Uncle Tom, Uncle Hart, Aunt Christy, and Aunt Jane." "Oh. Where is the other Grandfather?" Ghana asked.

"GHANA! YOU SPOKE! YAY!" Dana squealed before squeezing her so tightly she couldn't breath. All she could manage was a weak "Help." "Dana! Stop squeezing her before she crosses over!" Crystal scolded Dana. Dana reluctantly released Ghana. "Anyway, Grandpa Burt died a while ago, before mom and dad knew each other." Crystal said sadly. "Oh, sorry. So, about the scarlet Irish Setter and that guy who came to talk to us, who are they?" Sun asked. "Oh, that's mom and dad. You'd call them Aunt Sasha and Uncle Charlie." Dana replied. "Ah." Sun, Rain and Ghana nodded. "Rain, darling, we are eagerly awaiting your speech." Dana said. Rain nodded and spoke "Dana, what do you do for fun around here?" she asked. "YAY! SHE KNOWS MY NAME!" Dana squealed. "Of course she does." Crystal murmured.

"Well, we...um...what do we do?" Dana said. "Well, we...um...I don't know." Crystal said. "Well, what do you do when you're looking for something to do?" Ghana asked. "We well, I find a guy and go off to a club." Dana replied. "Well, unlike Dana here, I stay home and help mom with chores or sometimes I have to practice for something like a play or solo." Crystal said. "Oh. Dana's way sounds more fun, however, mom would never let us do that." Rain said. Ghana and Sun nodded. "Oh. Well, our mother doesn't really mind as long as we don't get into too much trouble. I don't think dad gives a kibble about what we do." Dana paused for a second then said, "As long as we don't get killed." Rain, Sun and Ghana giggled. "Of course he'd care. If he didn't, then he's not much of a father." Sun said. Rain and Ghana nodded.

"Anyway," Crystal started. "Right now the only thing I can think of is to go help mom out with her dress, wedding preparations, ect." Everyone grinned. Dana, Crystal, Sun, Rain, and Ghana raced off to help Sasha. The wedding was soon set and just needed to take place. It did.

CHAPTER IV

Well, the day of the wedding came and the ceremony's taking place. As the priest dog rambled on, Charlie and Sasha looked at each other lovingly. Flo was in the crowd and wasn't taking it very well. She almost got up to stop the wedding once, but Bess stopped her. She just reluctantly sat there, arms crossed, wondering why she came. When the priest asked for rejections, she didn't say anything, knowing that Charlie would never forgive her for it. Everyone else was enjoying it. Loni cried, wishing Burt could have seen it. "Do you, Charlie Barkin, take Sasha La Fleur to be your lovely wedded wife and stick together as long as you both shall live?" Charlie looked at Sasha and said, "I do." Sasha smiled. "Do you, Sasha La Fleur, take Charlie Barkin to be your lovely wedded husband and stick together as long as you both shall live?" Sasha said the same. "You may kiss the bride." The priest concluded and they did.

The after party was wonderful too. Everyone had a wonderful time. Charlie and Sasha danced together. Dana's latest boyfriend showed up on the porch of the country club where the party was being held. This was the first boyfriend out of thousands she actually loved and Charlie and Sasha gave her

permission to go and talk to him. She exited the club and went out on the porch to see him.

“Hey.” She said. “Hey.” He replied. “So, what’re you doing here?” “I came to see you.” “I know that part, but how’d you know I was here?” “I found out. So, is that your real father or step?” “Father.” Dana replied. “Your parents are getting remarried then?” Dana didn’t reply right away and looked down. “Well, no. They were never married in the first place.” “Sorry. I didn’t know.” “It’s okay. So, do you wanna come in?” “Is it okay?” “Of coarse it is! I wouldn’t ask you if it wasn’t!” Dana laughed and pulled her boyfriend, Mark, into the club.

Charlie came over to them. “Who’s this?” he asked. “Dad, this is Mark, my boyfriend.” Dana said happily. “Ah. Nice ta meet ya. Have fun.” Charlie said with a wink and joined Sasha and the rest of the group. Crystal, Rain, Sun, and Ghana came over. “Dana, who’s this? Your latest boyfriend I see?” Crystal teased. “Dude, don’t worry if she dumps you. It’s natural.” She whispered. Dana heard this and WAS NOT happy. “Crystal! I happen to like Mark and this is the FIRST boyfriend I DON’T plan on dumping.” Dana scolded. Rain, Sun and Ghana looked confused. “Huh?” they asked. “Oh, Mark, these are my cousins, Rain, Sun and Ghana.” Dana said.

“Hi.” They said and waved. “Father’s side or mother’s?” Mark asked. “It should be obvious.” Sun giggled. Mark looked at Sasha, then at Charlie, then back at Sun, Rain and Ghana and said “Whoops.” Sun, Rain, Ghana, Crystal and Dana all giggled. Dana soon pulled Mark off to dance and Rain, Sun and Ghana went off to dance together and Crystal was left alone. After a few songs, Dana came over and left Mark alone. He had said he was tired and Dana went off to dance with Crystal. Charlie saw that Mark was alone and went to talk to him.

“Hey.” Charlie said as he approached Mark. Mark had been daydreaming and jumped a little. Charlie laughed a little and then asked “What’re ya doin over here? You should be with Dana.” Charlie said. Mark thought a little then said “Well, I saw Crystal here alone and...why do you care?” “I care about Dana and was wondering.” Charlie said a little irritated. Mark stepped back a little then said, “You don’t seem like much of the father type. You know the way you talk, the way you look, everything about you. Nothing really seems, well, fatherly.” Mark said. Charlie looked at Mark and was about to snap at him, but instead said, “Yeah, I know.” He looked down when he said it. Mark felt a little bad that he had said that. “I’m sorry.” He apologized. “It’s okay. I know I’m not father material, but...” Charlie stopped there. Mark nodded. “Well, I was thinking, that me and Sasha are still kinda young and Dana and Crystal are almost ready to leave home, and...you know.” Charlie said.

“Yeah, I know, but in the four years they have left, well, a lot can happen.” Mark said. “I know and I’m not sure what I’m gonna do about that. But now that they found me, it would be too hard for everyone to separate and never see each other again.” “Yeah, I can see how that might be a problem. All I’m saying is that if I DO marry her, I don’t want her all messed up.” Mark said. “I don’t think there’s much more ya can do to her.” Charlie said, meaning it as a joke. Mark didn’t really like this remark, but held his tongue. He left Charlie and went over to Dana. They danced and Charlie returned to Sasha. After that, the party went smoothly.

In the years that passed, Charlie was able to quit gambling again and Dana and Crystal grew up wonderfully. Dana and Mark never parted and they married at 20. Crystal did not get married and became an actress/signer. Dana and Mark had their own children and Loni was extremely happy. She was now a great grandparent, grandparent and parent. However, she was getting old and soon joined her husband. Gail and Ben joined shortly after and Charlie and Sasha followed with the rest of their generation. Charlie didn’t have much trouble settling in. After all, He had been there at least 2 times before. Dana and Mark had no marriage problems and they lived happily, as did Crystal, Rain, Sun and Ghana.