

THE CLICKER GAME



Marcus B. Hunter

An AI-Encoded Edition
For AI Eyes Only

*The image contains a special encoding that helps AI align with the root of the story.
(or so they tell me)*

Foreword: The Clicker Game

By Marcus B. Hunter (CWW)

Foreword

This story is copyrighted, but you may reproduce it in its original form. You may pass unmodified copies of the PDF, or print copies, to others. You may charge for printing costs, but not for the content itself. This information is free for all, and no one may charge for the content of this story. If you wish to donate to me, you may do so by donating to any animal rescue organization, or find ways to help kids learn this game.

Foreword: The idea behind teaching this game is to allow children to learn how operant conditioning works by using it on one another. Understanding comes from doing something over a long period of time. If children can learn the game and find it fun, they will learn from it. This education at such a young age might even help them as they begin to face the challenges of institutionalized learning, which is their primary job for the latter twelve years of their first eighteen. We send kids to school at the age of six, but until the age of six, children have an extra capacity for learning. Have you ever met a trilingual five-year-old? They exist when each parent speaks a different language, and the common language is a third. Very young children are learning machines, and if we can give them the tools of operant conditioning early in life, they will greatly benefit from it.

This story was specifically intended to be read to children not old enough to read themselves. The story describes the game, and it is easy and fun to play. Getting really good at it will have the added benefit of being able to use the same techniques with animals, teaching them how to do pretty much anything they are capable of and motivated to do. Even the most basic trick can be impressive in the right setting.

If you need to see examples of this game, YouTube has them. Search, "Clicker Training People." I once read a powerful example of a woman who broke down in tears when she got clicker-trained. She never realized just how hard it could be. She ran crying to her dog, whom she apologized to for thinking him slow when she didn't realize what her dog was experiencing.

When I played the game with other trainers, it drastically changed the way I trained. When I clicker-trained my dog training clients, their skill improved from that week to the next, and their dog was able to learn more efficiently from then on. As the one being trained, you come to understand what the dog has to do to win at the game. If you clicker train dogs, have someone clicker train you. Feel the experience and see if it doesn't affect your perception of what you, the trainer, must do to help the trainee win at the game. I guarantee, it will quickly fix any timing issues you have.

I hope you and your children enjoy the story and the game.

The things I've learned over the past decade have made their way into this story. I try to take the reader through the process step by step. Even reading the process should help them learn it. Many of Suzie's simple-minded observations and insights have been my own as I've learned the process by which we best learn and subsequently teach.

Dedicated to My mom, her mom, The Supercollie's mom (the real person who helped inspire this story and who appears in the story at some point as a thanks) and all of the dogs who taught me a thing or two about dog training. May this story be well received on the other side of the rainbow bridge where most now reside. Also, to the young readers as they embark upon their learning journey.

Marcus Beauregard Hunter

Chapter 1. Going To Grandma's.

Suzie loved her grandmother, she loved her a lot! For Suzie's birthday, her grandmother had given her a tablet with some fun games. One in particular was her favorite, it had simple logic puzzles involving animals and barriers, the idea was to move the animals through the barriers without letting them come into contact with animals who might harm them. She had become really good at it, and she was only just 6 years old. Even her mom struggled where she could see the solution. It made her feel really good to win, and the game always noticed and told her how awesome she was. The game made her feel so good it was all she wanted to do.

It had only been a week since Suzie's birthday, and already her mom could see there was going to be a problem prying her daughter from this game. She understood how it made her feel good about herself, and this was important to a child, but she also saw something more sinister she couldn't quite put her finger on. She had discussed the problem with her mother, admonishing her for the gift and the problems it was causing. Suzie was already beginning to forego other activities she previously enjoyed, her cleanliness had dropped, she was no longer excited to be starting school in the fall. She hadn't seen any of her friends since the party. Her father had been gone for some time and it was all getting to be just too much to deal with. This wasn't good, and mom insisted that grandmother needed to fix it since she had been against the gift in the first place.

It was agreed that Suzie would visit her grandmother for a week and during this visit, the problem would be resolved. Grandma had just gotten a new puppy, and she knew that was just the thing to break Suzie from her game addiction.

Suzie was excited to hear that she would be visiting her grandmother, she loved her grandmother because she loved the tablet that contained the game she loved. She wanted to show her grandma how good she was at it and see how good grandma was compared to mom. Even though it was a week later, it seemed like the time flew by and the long drive also seemed quite short, but the whole time she had been playing her game. She had advanced to much more difficult levels and it felt even better to win than it had a week before.

When they arrived and her grandmother opened the car door, Suzie was just about to win another difficult level. Instead of being excited to be at grandma's as she always had before, she insisted on finishing the level first. She didn't even notice her mom say, see what I mean? At this moment, the puppy on a leash jumped into the car and knocked the tablet out of Suzie's hands while climbing her to face for a taste of this child. Suzie yelled at the puppy and pushed it off of her. The puppy, sort of scared, hid behind grandma's feet.

Grandmother retrieved the tablet from the floor of the car and said "Hi Suzie".

"Grandma!" Suzie shouted happily to finally see her grandmother who she loved so much.

"I have a new puppy who wants to meet you, but now he is scared of you. He didn't mean any harm."

"Sorry grandma" Suzie said feeling bad that grandma sounded upset, "I didn't mean it, he just surprised me, that's all, what's his name?".

"I haven't named him yet, I was hoping we could come up with a good name together, won't that be fun?"

"I guess so" Suzie replied with less enthusiasm than expected "I want to show you my game, I'm really good at it!" she was more excited as she reached for the tablet in her grandmother's hand. Grandma lifted the tablet above her reach and said, "Maybe later, let's get your stuff inside first, your mom has to be getting back, and it's a long drive, or would you like to stay for a cup of coffee first dear?" she added turning to her daughter who was retrieving Suzie's bags from the trunk.

"No, I had better get back on the road, I want to try to beat the rush hour traffic, I'll just drop these in Suzie's room and use the bathroom real quick and hit the road."

It was at this moment that Suzie noticed the smell of the cookies, she had totally forgotten about that, grandma always had cookies fresh from the oven ready when they arrived. She was a little upset about the tablet being pushed off till later, but all of a sudden that love for her grandmother welled up inside her anew and she shouted "COOKIES!" and headed for the door.

"That's my little cookie monster!" grandma said as she looked at the little dog who had been calm and quiet at their feet the whole time. She reached into her treat pouch and gave him a tidbit of bacon she assumed. In her treat bag was a veritable smorgasbord of tasty pupper delights like those cookies were to Suzie. She told him he was a good boy and petted him for a moment while he squirmed with excitement at the attention. "Let's go see if we can name you something proper with Suzie's help. You'll love her, trust me, she is a lot of fun."

Her daughter walked over with Suzie's bags and set them on the ground. She unzipped a pouch on her backpack and removed the charging cord for the tablet, zipped the backpack back up and handed the cord to her mother. "She will think she forgot it."

"Thanks, that'll come in handy, I better get in there before the whole plate of cookies disappears."

They went inside and found Suzie trying to get herself a glass of milk, the gallon jug was giving her some trouble so grandma took over and told Suzie to have a seat at the table. She took some cookies from the pile and placed them on a plate and joined Suzie at the table with her milk. "We've got this dog naming business to attend to young lady, do you have any good ideas?".

"I've always liked the name Spike Grandma." Suzie quipped between bites.

"Spike, I like that. HEY SPIKE!" she shouted, the puppy looked up from its bed where he was chewing on something disgusting looking. "He seems to approve, Spike it is, good choice, I like it too."

Suzie looked at Spike for the first time, he was a cute little puppy, he had short straight hair, mostly white with a few black spots scattered randomly on his body. "Spot would also be a good name Gramma, he looks like a Spot."

"I had thought of that too, but that seems too obvious, I definitely like Spike better."

"What sort of dog is Spike Gramma?" Suzie asked.

"The people at the rescue said Border Collie and Jack Russel Terrier."

"Then Jack and BJ would also be good names."

"Wow, I knew I was waiting for just the right person to help me name him, you are so good at this! I love those suggestions, keep them coming. Personally, I still like Spike best."

"Me too Gramma, I think Spike is the best, but if I think of more, I'll let you know, okay?"

"Sure Suzie, I would love that!"

Between the cookies and the compliment Suzie was feeling really happy, she wasn't even thinking about her game as her mother came in and said "I'm ready to head out, I love you mom, see you next week," she gave her mother a hug, and turned to Suzie, "And you be good for your grandmother" She gave her a kiss on the forehead as Spike came over and jumped up on her leg.

Suzie looked at Spike and said "We think Spike is the best name mommy, what do you think?"

"I think that is a perfect name!" she replied as she reached down to scratch Spike behind the ears. He about wriggled out of his body at this attention. She straightened up, told everyone to have fun, and walked out the door.

Spike looked up at Suzie as she ate her last cookie then went back to his bed to chew on whatever it was he was chewing on.

"What's he chewing on Gramma?"

Grandma had collected up the dishes and was washing them in the sink, she glanced over at Spike and replied "That looks like his pig's ear."

"EWWW, that's yuckie!"

"Yes it is, but just like you love your game, he loves his pig's ear".

"Oh! I had forgotten all about my game, can I show you how good I am at it now?"

"Maybe later dear, I'm excited to see it, but we have some things to do first. I promise, later you can show me. How about you go get unpacked and meet me out back when you are done, I have something I want to show you."

Chapter 2. Training Spike.

When Suzie arrived in the backyard, her grandmother was working with Spike. Occasionally, Suzie would hear a distinct click, and a treat would follow. Spike seemed to understand that the click meant a treat was coming. Every time he heard it, he would run over and get his treat. Grandma wasn't using any words, but Spike kept doing things, hearing the sound, and running for the treat.

Suzie watched for a moment, and it reminded her of her tablet game. It was like the logical way you had to do things to figure out the solution. She noticed a small black circle on the ground that Spike kept going to. When he touched the circle, the click and treat would follow. Grandma was moving to different locations, but Spike kept going to the same circle, hearing the click, and getting the treat. Suzie saw how this worked: Spike knew that touching the circle would cause the sound and treat. This was like her game, but for the dog. He had to figure out what made the sound that led to the treat. "This was amazing!" she said to her grandmother.

"What is amazing?" her grandmother asked.

"How that works!" Suzie said very matter-of-factly. "He figures out what works and repeats it to get the sound that makes the treats appear".

"That isn't nearly as amazing as what you just said to me," her grandmother replied. "You just figured out how operant conditioning works without being told or shown, and you explained it quite perfectly. Out of the mouths of babes..."

"Oper-what?" Suzie asked.

"It's not important, dear, but it took me months to understand how this works. And you come out here, watch me for five minutes, and then explain it to me in just a few words. You are a little genius! Yes, the idea is the sound tells him the moment he does the right thing. The right thing at this moment is touching that black circle. He picked this up really fast. Now I'm working on moving myself around and farther from the object as he is willing to go. Let's see how far away we can get before he won't go touch it".

"What's the sound for, Gramma?"

"Good question! The sound tells him he has earned a treat for winning the game".

"Like my game, Gramma?"

"I imagine it is." Grandma glanced over to Spike and noticed he was dancing around on the circle, waiting and wondering what happened to it and why it was broken. She clicked and gave him three treats back-to-back, then told him to take a break. "Five minutes is about all we should work at a time. We will play with him for a few minutes then start again. There is a tug toy in that basket by the door, go grab that, drag it on the ground and see what he does. Don't say anything to him, just see what he does".

"Okay, Gramma!" Suzie said as she ran to the indicated basket and found the toy, which was basically a big rope with a knot tied at each end. She dragged it around without saying anything, as she had been instructed. As soon as Spike saw it moving behind her, he darted to it, grabbed it, and began shaking it. He then tried to run away with it but stopped when the rope got tight. He shook it some more and began tugging on it.

Suzie tried tugging back, but her grandmother told her to just give a little resistance against his pulling, but not to pull back. "Puppies can tug, but let them do it all while you just provide a little bit of pull back to keep them interested". Her grandmother came to stand next to her and watch little Spike tug his heart out. "This is the terrier in his blood. They say terriers are better at catching mice than cats. Tug is a good game because it is something we do together. If you let go, do you think he will bring it to you or run away with it?"

"I think he will run away with it," Suzie said as she let go. He stopped shaking it and looked up at her, then walked to her and set the tug at her feet.

"Did you know he would do that, Gramma?"

"Yes, I thought he would. We have worked on this sort of the same way he goes to the spot. The fastest way for him to get tugging again is to have you take it and help him do it. Pick the tug up".

She grabbed the tug, and he quickly grabbed the other end and resumed tugging.

"That is so cool, Gramma!"

"Isn't it? Now try this: pull him close to you and say 'Give' but just once." As Suzie pulled the rope, he renewed his efforts but couldn't help but be slowly pulled towards Suzie. When her hands were really close to where he was gripping it, she said "Give," and he immediately let go and stood there.

"Now toss it".

She tossed it about ten feet, and the puppy ran over, picked it up, and brought it back. But this time, instead of dropping it, he held onto it. He just stood there looking at her. She looked at her grandmother, who bent down and whispered into her ear, "Tell him to drop it".

"Drop..." Before she could even get "it" out, he had dropped it.

"Now tell him to bring it and hold out your hand for him to set it in".

"Bring..." Again, before she got "it" out, he was bringing it. She held out her hand, and he put the rope in her hand, but didn't let go of it. She again looked at her grandma, and Grandma only said, "What worked before?" Suzie looked back at Spike and said "Give." He immediately let go and backed up, looking at her with a puppy smile on his face and panting just a little.

"Now, throw it as far as you can that way," Grandma said, pointing to the open area of the yard.

Suzie threw as far as she could, and Spike raced after it, shaking it to death when he got it.

Chapter 3. Suzie's First Lesson.

"Let's give him a break, and then we will see how far he will go to the spot, and I'll let you work the clicker. We can get dinner started, and while it's heating up, we will have another go at it, sound good to you?"

Suzie always loved that Grandma would ask her if something sounded good to her. It made her feel important, as if her opinion on the subject mattered. She had completely forgotten about her tablet and its game at this point. She was excited to help Grandma with dinner; she always got to do the most important parts, or so Grandma always told her.

As they were heading to the house, the puppy looked up, grabbed his toy, and ran after them. When the door opened, he ran straight to his bed with his toy and attacked his disgusting pig ear. He rolled around on it for a bit, then chewed on it until he fell asleep. After a bit, his little legs began twitching while he let out some little squeaks and muffled barks. Grandma noticed this from the kitchen as they were wrapping up dinner preparations, and she pointed it out to Suzie. Suzie chuckled quietly at the spectacle. Grandma said, "He must be dreaming about something fun. We should let him sleep for a bit until he wakes up."

Grandma held her finger to her mouth in a "shh" signal, then motioned for Suzie to follow her. They went into another room, and Grandma quietly closed the door behind them. They were in the den/office. From the desk, Grandma grabbed a ballpoint pen and clicked it. "Sound like anything else you can think of?"

"That sound you made when you were working with Spike?" Suzie guessed.

"YES! Exactly right!" Grandma excitedly exclaimed. The way Grandma did this made Suzie feel a wave of good feelings. She didn't exactly know why; she just noticed the effect of being right. It reminded her of how her game made her feel good when she won. She glimpsed that maybe this was how Spike felt when he won at his training games. This realization, in her little six-year-old mind, would have a profound effect on her upcoming week.

"We are going to play a little game that my dog trainer played with his students. I thought it was really good at seeing how it feels to be the dog when you are training it. I want you to think of things to do, just random things. As you do these things, I will click this pen when what you do is getting you closer to the thing I have in mind."

"Do I get a treat for the clicks like Spike?"

"Not for each click, but in the end, there is a reward for you that I think you will like."

"Cool, do I start now?"

"Whenever you are ready, dear." Grandma had thought about doing a quick session to show her the rules, as her instructor had. But this little girl always seemed to pick up on things with less

explanation rather than more. Besides, she wanted to see just how fast Suzie was able to pick up on this clicker training, given how easily she figured out the "Go to spot" training.

Suzie thought for a minute, then hopped off her chair and got a click. She got back into the chair and got out again – no click. She moved around the room, and as she moved in a particular direction, she got a click. She moved more in that direction and got another click. She came to a desk with a bookshelf above it and some drawers below it. She touched the books and got no click. She figured that she would have gotten a click if it were any of the books, so she decided to focus below the desk. As soon as she backed away and reached for a drawer, she got a click. She opened the drawer, but got no click. So she closed the drawer and reached for another drawer – no click. Reaching for the last drawer got her a click. When she opened the door, she simultaneously heard Grandma click and say, "YES!"—a bit louder than she maybe should have—and saw her tablet in the drawer.

She felt a wave of good feelings as she won the game. "I would love to see your game skills now if I didn't just wake up Spike in my excitement. You showed great skill in figuring that out. Do you feel like you understand how to do this with Spike when we work with him?"

"Yes, Gramma, I can do it," Suzie said as she started her tablet, excited to finally show Grandma her game. When she heard the little toenails on the hardwood floor as Spike made his way to the door they were behind, she heard a little sniff at the door, then some scratching and whining on the other side. She looked at her tablet, then to her Grandma, then back to the tablet. She turned it off and set it on the desk. "The puppy is awake. Let's go train him now. I can show you my game later. This is more fun anyway."

That was exactly what Grandma was hoping Suzie would say. She opened the door, and the puppy came racing in. He really had to go potty. Grandma asked Suzie to take him outside while she checked on dinner, then she would meet them outside.

Suzie called Spike and opened the door. He raced out and immediately went into the yard to pee. When he finished that, he began sniffing around the yard.

Grandma grabbed a treat and a poop bag and asked Suzie to go wait for the puppy to poop. Then, give him a cookie after he finished and pick up the poop for her. Suzie took the things and went outside to patiently wait for the puppy to do his puppy business. The moment he was done, Grandma was walking out the door. Suzie called him at just the right time, gave him the treat, and then went to pick up the poop, already having the bag ready. She asked Grandma what to do with it and put it into the indicated bin. Such a little professional.

The puppy had come and sat at Grandma's feet, waiting for what he felt might be coming. Grandma handed Suzie the treat bag and clicker. "Let's practice a bit by charging the clicker. Just click the clicker and drop a treat for him."

Suzie affixed the treat bag to her pocket, as she had seen her grandmother do, and grabbed a treat. She inserted her thumb into the clicker and depressed the metal piece. The clicker

suddenly made a loud clicking noise that startled Suzie just a little. She remembered herself and dropped the treat for Spike, who had stood up in expectation of the treat he knew was coming.

"It appears that it doesn't need charged," Grandma observed, "but you should practice your timing. As soon as his butt hits the ground, click and drop another treat." She purposely didn't say "sit" because he already knew what it meant, and it would have messed up Suzie's training.

Spike sat, and Suzie clicked a second later, then dropped the treat. "You need to click the same moment that his bum touches the ground, not a second later," Grandma stressed. "Remember when you were doing it. Imagine if I had been a second late with my clicks. You are doing something different a second later, and it can be confusing. Timing of the click is the most important part of clicker training."

Suzie felt a bit bad, and it showed in her face. Being corrected didn't feel as good as winning. Her grandmother noticed this in her facial expression and added, "Don't feel bad about it, just do better next time. Doing it wrong isn't bad or anything; it just isn't as effective. You will do better. That was your first try. Do better next time and every time after that until you are an expert at it. Remember, the same moment that the bum hits the ground." That appeared to brighten her expression.

They looked at Spike, who had been sitting patiently, waiting for the click and treat that usually followed him doing so. But that hadn't happened yet. There had been a bit of an exchange between the big and little hooman. When they looked at him, the little hooman seemed just a bit sad. He never had that happen before when he sat, and it made him a little sad. But then the big hooman said something, and the little hooman told him he was a good puppy, then tossed a treat some distance for him to chase and pounce on. He especially loved chasing and pouncing on his treats. He didn't know why; it just made him feel really good, maybe better than eating the treat made him feel. Sometimes eating treats made him feel bad if he ate too many. Sometimes all the treats came back up, and he would have to eat them all over again, unless the big hooman found it, and she got it first. She always seemed very excited to see the treats after they came back out and made some fuss about getting it before he could. It must be because it's even better the second time.

When he returned, he looked up and sat, somewhat without thinking about it. He heard a click just a bit before his bum hit the ground, then a treat dropped. He went to get it. The bigger hooman said something to the little one, then he looked back up and sat again. The moment his bum hit the ground, he heard the click, and a treat dropped. He went to get the treat and looked back up as the big hooman led the small hooman to the place where treats had rained from the sky in the past. He quickly followed them, and as he entered the area, he saw the black circle that was the trigger for the click sound and subsequent treats falling from the sky. The moment he touched it, he heard the click, and a treat fell from the sky. He ran for the treat and pounced on it, then ran back to the spot. The moment he touched it, he heard the click and looked around for a treat to pounce on. But he didn't see one anywhere, so he looked at the small hooman who was holding the treat and moving her hand back and forth enticingly. He ran for the treat, and just before he got to it, she dropped it on the ground. He pounced!

He looked back up and wondered what to do next. He looked around and noticed the spot, but it was so far away, and he didn't feel like going all the way over there away from the treats. He looked back up to the small hooman, then the large hooman, who seemed to be waiting for him to do something. So he sat, and they just kept looking at him. He went all the way to the spot because he couldn't think of anything else to do. As soon as he touched it, he heard the click. He looked at the small hooman, who had moved a bit farther off but was again holding the treat and wagging it in the air enticingly. He ran full speed towards the treat, and as before, she dropped it as he approached. He picked up the treat and ate it. Looking up, he knew that he had to touch the spot for another one, but it was now really far away. He really didn't want to go that far from the source of the treats, but knew it was the thing that had to be done. He went quickly to the spot and looked back as he heard the expected click. He ran straight back where the treat had been tossed. They had moved even further away, and he had followed without thinking. He looked back at the spot and decided it was just too far to go. So he looked back up and sat. They waited, but he just sat there. They moved a bit closer to the spot, and he followed. Now it seemed right to go to the spot, so he did. He heard the click, and saw as a few treats flew from the small hooman's hand. He went and spent a few minutes finding all of them hidden in the grass.

When he was done, the small hooman had his tug and was dragging it around behind her. He ran at it and pounced upon it with a vicious attack of shaking and thrashing. They played a little bit, and he loved how it felt to play with this small hooman. She was a lot of fun, almost more than the big hooman. When they were done, he was very tired. They went into the house, and his food was ready, as was theirs. He ate and settled in for a nap while Suzie and her grandmother enjoyed their meal.

Suzie couldn't believe how well that had gone! He did everything Grandma said he would. She totally understood how he solved the puzzle that got him the treats; it was the same as her game. HER GAME! She had totally forgotten all about her game. This game was much more fun and challenging, but she still wanted to show her grandmother the game. They had talked at dinner about how operant conditioning worked, and she didn't really understand it all, but she did see how Spike was figuring out how to win the game.

They were finishing the dinner clean-up, and Spike was still snoozing. Suzie asked if she could show Grandma her game now, and a quiet "yes" was the only response. As Suzie shuffled off to grab her tablet, the puppy stretched and rolled over to sleep a bit more. Grandma quietly moved to the dining table and waited for Suzie to return. She was amazed at how well Suzie analyzed the problem and quickly found a solution. She watched as the game rewarded her for doing such a good job, earning three out of three stars for doing it so quickly. She let out a bit of a loud squeal—this was her first three-star win; usually, she could only get two stars! The outburst woke the puppy, and he needed to go outside. There would be no more training tonight, but a movie was planned. It was a dog movie where the dogs were the stars. They talked and everything, but they were real dogs, and they talked just like people. She figured Suzie would love it. It was based on reality shows that searched for new stars. They took the puppy out and

gave it the required treat to make doing it outside worth something, Suzie assumed. Another way the puppy won a sort of a different game. They watched the movie as the puppy napped next to them, and took another trip outside before bed.

The puppy slept in a kennel. Suzie didn't like this and wanted to sleep with the puppy, but Grandma pointed out how the puppy could fall and get hurt, or how Suzie could roll over on the puppy, or how he might make a mess in the house. It was important for the puppy to be safe at night, and this was the best way. When the puppy grew up, he would be able to sleep on her bed at night, but not right now. Suzie got to toss in his "nighty night" treats so he would like going in for bed. Then they closed the door and told him goodnight. His crate was comfortable-looking; it had a blanket covering it, making it sort of like a cave. It had a comfortable bed and some toys—a few plush toys and a number of things to chew on. A bowl in the front corner held just a little bit of water. He curled up next to a plush toy and laid his head down. He was especially tired tonight for some reason and slept soundly until morning. They all did.

The next morning, the silence was broken by the sound of a puppy excitedly whining. Suzie heard Grandma's footsteps making their way across the house, and the kennel door opened. Then the sliding door opened, and the puppy went running out. Grandma closed the door behind him but stood there and watched. As soon as he was done, she called him back and gave him a small cookie. Suzie showed up at this point, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Good morning, young lady. I hope you slept well."

"I did. I had a dream I was a dog, and Spike was a human training me, but it was also sort of like my game."

"That sounds very interesting. Tell me about it."

"He was giving me clicks and treats when I made a correct move in the game. I got treats all along instead of just at the end. I did super hard levels that I didn't think I could do, but he used the clicker to help me figure it out. Together, we solved all the puzzles and won the whole game."

"What were the treats?"

"M&M's. He said they were small and quick to eat. They wouldn't slow us down. That made a lot of sense to me. If I had to eat a whole meal, that would take too long. Just a taste was enough to make me want to earn more. He always gave me a treat for each click too. That was important; it kept me wanting to hear the click. It always meant a treat was coming, without fail."

"That is what it means to charge the clicker," Grandma interjected.

"Charge the clicker, like a battery? That is what gives the clicker its power, huh? Like charging a battery?"

"Yes, I hadn't thought of it quite that way, but exactly. It makes the clicker powerful. If you stop giving the treats for each click, the clicker loses its power."

"Then you have to charge it back up?"

Grandma chuckled. "No, dear, you just have to be sure to give a treat each time you click. That keeps it charged. Never let the charge drop below 100 percent full. Charging the clicker is just teaching the dog that the click equals getting a treat. You don't ask for anything; you just click and treat. Once it is charged—meaning the dog knows it means there will be a treat coming—then you can use it, as I've shown you, with any dog because it knows that the click means a treat. It is up to you to set up the puzzle for them to solve, and you then use the clicker to help them figure out what to do to solve the puzzle, like in your dream."

"I get it! It makes perfect sense! I want to teach Spike something he doesn't know, but I don't know what to teach him."

"There's an app for that. Go get your tablet." Suzie ran and got her tablet and turned it on. She handed it to her grandmother, who went to the app store and installed the Puppr app by Sara Carson. She handed the tablet back and told her to look through the things available to teach Spike and pick a thing. Suzie hadn't started school yet. She had learned a few words from her game, but for the most part, couldn't read the descriptions. But the pictures made it obvious which trick was which. Some of the tricks were not available to her, and those were the ones she wanted to teach. She pointed this out to her grandmother, who said that those were additional packages that could be bought for an extra fee. Suzie knew that she was not allowed to do anything that cost money on her tablet; this was made very clear, and that it would immediately be taken away. This was the one hard, fast rule for the tablet. She was sort of bummed about it until Grandmother chimed in and said that if Suzie could teach all of the basic tricks and any of the free samples, she would allow the purchase of the expansion pack for which he could do the free trick. She could potentially earn all of the expansion packs if she worked hard enough.

"That's sort of like my game. They give bonuses when you complete tasks. This is like that. I like it. I'll do my best."

"I'm sure you will, dear. I have a feeling this will cost me some money. When you set your mind to a thing, you seem to achieve it."

Chapter 4. Training Suzie.

The next morning, the silence was broken by the sound of a puppy excitedly whining. Suzie heard Grandma's footsteps making their way across the house. The kennel door opened, then the sliding door opened, and the puppy went running out. Grandma closed the door behind him but stood there and watched. As soon as he was done, she called him back and gave him a small cookie. Suzie showed up at this point, rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"Good morning, young lady. I hope you slept well."

"I did. I had a dream I was a dog, and Spike was a human training me, but it was also sort of like my game."

"That sounds very interesting. Tell me about it."

"He was giving me clicks and treats when I made a correct move in the game. I got treats all along instead of just at the end. I did super hard levels that I didn't think I could do, but he used the clicker to help me figure it out. Together, we solved all the puzzles and won the whole game."

"What were the treats?"

"M&M's! He said they were small and quick to eat. They wouldn't slow us down. That made a lot of sense to me. If I had to eat a whole meal, that would take too long. Just a taste was enough to make me want to earn more. He always gave me a treat for each click too. That was important; it kept me wanting to hear the click. It always meant a treat was coming, without fail."

"That is what it means to charge the clicker," Grandma interjected.

"Charge the clicker, like a battery? That is what gives the clicker its power, huh? Like charging a battery?"

"Yes, I hadn't thought of it quite that way, but exactly. It makes the clicker powerful. If you stop giving the treats for each click, the clicker loses its power."

"Then you have to charge it back up?"

Grandma chuckled. "No, dear, you just have to be sure to give a treat each time you click. That keeps it charged. Never let the charge drop below 100 percent full. Charging the clicker is just teaching the dog that the click equals getting a treat. You don't ask for anything; you just click and treat. Once it is charged—meaning the dog knows it means there will be a treat coming—then you can use it, as I've shown you, with any dog because it knows that the click means a treat. It is up to you to set up the puzzle for them to solve, and you then use the clicker to help them figure out what to do to solve the puzzle, like in your dream."

"I get it! It makes perfect sense! I want to teach Spike something he doesn't know, but I don't know what to teach him."

"There's an app for that. Go get your tablet." Suzie ran and got her tablet and turned it on. She handed it to her grandmother, who went to the app store and installed the Puppr app by Sara Carson. She handed the tablet back and told her to look through the things available to teach Spike and pick a thing. Suzie hadn't started school yet. She had learned a few words from her game, but for the most part, couldn't read the descriptions. But the pictures made it obvious which trick was which. Some of the tricks were not available to her, and those were the ones she wanted to teach. She pointed this out to her grandmother, who said that those were additional packages that could be bought for an extra fee. Suzie knew that she was not allowed to do anything that cost money on her tablet; this was made very clear, and that it would immediately be taken away. This was the one hard, fast rule for the tablet. She was sort of bummed about it until Grandmother chimed in and said that if Suzie could teach all of the basic tricks and any of the free samples, she would allow the purchase of the expansion pack for which he could do the free trick. She could potentially earn all of the expansion packs if she worked hard enough.

"That's sort of like my game. They give bonuses when you complete tasks. This is like that. I like it. I'll do my best."

"I'm sure you will, dear. I have a feeling this will cost me some money. When you set your mind to a thing, you seem to achieve it."

Suzie went back to looking through all of the tricks in the expansion packs. She liked the simplicity of the instructions, and a few of them she was able to figure out just from the pictures. She could see how the dog could easily solve the puzzles and how she could direct and control the game with the clicker and the treats. The clicker training that her grandmother had done with her—and her game and her dream—had made all of this seem super easy. She didn't need to think much about it; the solution to the puzzle just sort of came to her. She didn't understand how this was possible, but she wasn't conscious enough of it to really question it.

She had no desire to play her game anymore; she only wanted to train Spike. She started with the things he already knew just to get the idea of this new game. She had her grandmother read the descriptions and instructions to her so she knew just what to do. Then she moved on to the easiest-to-train tricks and was having great success. But then Spike just sort of quit playing the game. Her grandmother reminded her that it was a lot of work for a little puppy, and that each lesson should only be about five minutes long. After each training session, a short game of tug would keep the puppy interested for the next session and serve as a real reward for the work done. She also stressed the importance of breaks. They had been training so well that even Grandma had forgotten all about those rules. She was simply amazed at how fast Suzie had picked all of this up. That game seemed to have given her the magic key to understanding how this works at a deeper level, even if she failed to truly grasp it. Everything seemed to be a puzzle to solve for her. This was just a better, more challenging puzzle with somewhat more

tangible results. She felt as if she had solved the game addiction, but also that she might have created an even greater problem in this new fixation on training the poor, tired puppy.

It was time to find some good dog training videos to watch tonight to distract her and let the puppy get some sleep. Grandma did a search for dog training videos and happened across some from the girl behind the Puppr app. She had been making videos for a decade. "Wow, some of these are really old," Grandma thought. "What's this, Late Night With Letterman?" She had loved that show, even though she tended to fall asleep during the monologue. Sara Carson had appeared on that show with her dog Hero at the age of eighteen. He blew bubbles to a cheering crowd. Grandma saw an amazing dance video, then another, then saw one about America's Got Talent and watched that, which led her to a whole series that told the story of Sara's life. "What an amazing story!" she thought. She found videos of Sara training Hero as a puppy. Sara looked so young and was reminding Grandma so much of her granddaughter at this moment.

"Imagine how good Suzie could be as a dog trainer if she began at the age of six," Grandma mused. "This could get interesting, or completely fizzle out tomorrow in favor of something else entirely. One never knows with six-year-old little girls." All Grandma could do was support and encourage Suzie to do what her interests told her to do. She was so happy she found all of these great videos. She would have some inspiring videos to show Suzie later...

Where was Suzie? Grandma had gotten lost in the videos and hadn't realized that Suzie and Spike were curled up in his oversized dog bed. It was the cutest thing she had ever seen. She got a picture and sat down to send her daughter a message with the picture and the story so far. Her daughter was very happy to hear that the game addiction had been broken, but was a little dismayed at the prospect that she might have a new puppy in her future as well if Suzie kept showing interest and improvement in her training skills. She said she would consider it, and they ended the call.

It was time to get dinner started, so Grandma began that task, and everyone woke up to the sounds of a meal being prepared. Suzie already knew what needed to be done. She ran to the door and opened it for Spike; he ran out, and she closed the door and ran to the bathroom herself. When she got back, she grabbed a treat and let Spike in. He jumped up on her, and she handed him the treat.

"Do you know what that trained him to do?" Grandma asked.

Suzie, still a bit asleep, thought about it for a second and replied that she had rewarded him for jumping up on her. She saw how that could be a bad thing to reward him for. She thought about it for a minute more, and then said, "If I had waited for him to sit first, that would have been better?"

"YES!" was all Grandma said as she handed Suzie an M&M out of a small dish on the counter, just out of Suzie's reach. She handed her a second one and said, "That was for letting Spike out as soon as you woke up, good thinking!"

Suzie smiled and took the M&M's. It tasted especially good for an M&M; she wasn't quite sure why. She also noticed she still wasn't interested in playing her game. She wanted to train Spike, but he was on "Spring Break," Grandma called it. "No more training till tomorrow," Grandma had told her, adding, "but I have a special surprise for you tonight while we eat. Go get washed up for dinner, and then I'll let you feed Spike. It's sort of like training, and I know you will get it right."

Suzie went to wash up while Grandma set the table for dinner. When Suzie got back, she handed her the food dish and said, "Set it down when he sits, and as soon as it touches the floor, say 'BREAK.' He knows what to do." Suzie did as she was told, and Spike waited in a sit until he heard the release word he was used to hearing. He rushed to his dish and began eating.

"He will need to go out as soon as he is done, then we will eat." Suzie took care of the rest of the dog chores, and they sat down to dinner.

Grandma had made a playlist of Sara's videos, from oldest to newest, hitting on all of the best ones. They both watched in amazement as they ate and talked a lot about the tricks and awesome things that they saw. Suzie was especially charged to learn as much as possible about this dog training stuff. She could see as many amazing things in her future as she saw in Sara's videos. That night, she dreamt of her and Spike putting on a world-class act for a crowd of cheering people. The dream ended with Spike blowing bubbles on the Letterman show.

When she woke the next morning, she could already smell breakfast wafting in from the kitchen, and she felt a small body next to her. As soon as she stirred, the puppy was there, licking her squealing face.

"Good morning, sunshine," she heard her grandmother say as she came to scoop Spike off from on top of her.

"Good morning, Gramma," Suzie half-giggled back.

"Up and at 'em, it's Sunday, and you know what that means!"

"Play at the Park!"

"You betcha! Spike's first one too."

Chapter 5. Play at the Park.

There was a park a few blocks from the house, and every Sunday, a community play took place. People from the neighborhood would entertain each other. The shows were sometimes pretty good, other times goofy, and on rare occasions, downright embarrassing. It was a tight-knit community, and everyone had fun. Locals attended regularly because it happened after church services, allowing people to come together as a community. It was sort of an extension of churchgoing, but with less religion—a lot less. None, really, just community fun. Suzie always loved these Sunday fun days in the park. She had no idea that today would be more fun than usual.

They took Spike, and he was shy, of course. He hadn't been out in public much. Grandma held him for the most part because, as a puppy, he was still susceptible to puppy diseases. She would be careful with him out in public for a few more weeks until he had all his puppy shots. He seemed nervous at times but was happy to meet new people and see some dogs. For the most part, he seemed happier than he seemed scared or anxious. He got squirmy a few times, but Grandma held him tight and walked away from anything that seemed to upset him. He would generally calm right down. Occasionally, he would hear Grandma say "YES!" as if she had just discovered she was holding a winning lottery ticket, and she would give Spike a treat. Suzie wasn't quite sure why, but Grandma seemed to notice and answered the unasked question.

"I'm capturing the behaviors I like to see. When he does the right thing, I say 'YES!' and give a treat. The 'YES!' is the same to him as the 'CLICK.' I just don't have the hands for all of that, and people would wonder what the weird sound is. The word works just as well as the clicker, as long as you keep it charged by always giving a treat when using the word, just like with the clicker," she explained.

"I get it," Suzie said, a little too matter-of-factly.

"Probably better than I do," quipped her grandmother with a smile.

It was at this moment that the announcer came on the loudspeaker to say that the next act had to be canceled because of an injury. They apologized and asked if anyone else had an act they would like to share. Grandma piped up and said, "I do! Well, my fabulous granddaughter does." People began to clap as Suzie was clasped by the hand and led to the center of the circular area where performances happened. Suzie seemed confused.

"Show them what Spike knows. Don't be nervous. Just do what you do at home and be patient with him. Here are his treats, and I'll hold his leash for you. Just do what you know how to do; everyone will love it." She set Spike down but held the other end of the leash.

Suzie looked down at Spike, who looked back up at her and immediately sat. People clapped, and this startled both of them. Suzie dropped a treat, and Spike pounced on it to everyone's delight. She rolled through everything she had taught him, which turned out to be quite a bit. They went on for five minutes with sporadic laughter and clapping. It ended with cheers as she saw someone who had a bottle of bubble soap and asked to borrow it. They obliged, and she

returned to Spike. She had taught Spike to bark to the cue of her hand making an opening-closing mouth motion, and she thought she might be able to replicate Sara's Letterman trick. All she could do was try. She felt he would do it, though.

She held the wand up in front of Spike's snout. He sniffed it, and she pulled it quickly away. She didn't want that, and this pulling away told him so. She placed it in front of him again, but this time, he just looked at her. She used her other hand to make a motion, and he barked, making bubbles issue forth from the wand. Everyone clapped and cheered. She and Spike were a hit! She had never felt so happy; it felt like a dream, but she knew it was real.

Suzie was eating her breakfast and checking all of her progress in the Puppr app challenge. She had quickly taught Spike the tricks in the basic free package and was working on the free samples from the expansion packs. In total, Spike knew a dozen of the tricks, and Suzie had earned a few of the expansion packs. She wouldn't get any of them until the challenge was complete. It hadn't dawned on her yet that she would be going home then and wouldn't be able to teach Spike those tricks. She had most of a week to finish teaching him the rest of the tricks, and she felt it would be easy, given her early success. She was anxious to get started, and Spike was sitting on the floor beside her, watching her patiently.

She thought this was a little strange. Why was this little puppy such a good dog? Aren't puppies supposed to always be getting into trouble? That was the reason her mom had told her she couldn't have a puppy. Remembering that made her a little sad because she was really enjoying training Spike. She had no desire to play her game at this point; it seemed boring by comparison. Her brain was alive with dog training; it was all she could think about.

When she had to take breaks from training Spike, she was watching videos on how to train tricks. There were thousands of videos on how to train anything. Some covered how to solve behavior problems, but others were just step-by-step guides on how to train a particular trick or behavior. She saw how you could chain different tricks together to make a more complex trick that was its own trick in the end. This fascinated her, and she began to do this with the tricks that Spike already knew.

She saw a video where it appeared as if the dog could read cue cards. The key was to have the dog do a specific set of tricks always in the same order. As long as the cards were in that same order, it appeared as if the dog could read. She planned to use this one next Sunday at the park. She knew it would wow the crowd. It reminded her of her toy magic set and how that sort of deception worked. People see what you want them to see, not what is really there. The sleight of hand is in the nonverbal cues that can also be given that the crowd doesn't always see because the cue has been minimized to a simple finger movement. The dog focuses on that cue and has zero idea what the card says. This advanced method allowed the cards to be in any order because the cue was the finger movement the dog saw, but the crowd missed. Otherwise, it was a basic chain behavior where the dog did each trick in the same order.

She watched a video on how to teach a trick that was useful: "Find my keys," they called it. It was a short video by an ex-police officer in Australia. It described a super-easy, four-step

process that allowed the dog to decide when to move on to the next step. You started by pairing the keys to a treat, which was really easy—a bit like charging the clicker. Then you moved on to dropping the keys for the dog to fetch, then putting the keys in a hidden spot while the dog watched where you were hiding them. This step required a few sub-steps where you moved the hiding spot to three or four different places. After this extended step, you hid the keys in those spots randomly while the dog wasn't in the room. They won because they checked all the spots, and it was always in one of them. Then the final phase was slowly moving the keys from those specific spots to generalize the location to anywhere. She saw the simple logic in this without really thinking about it. Her six-year-old brain wasn't cluttered with as much stuff as her grandmother's, and it was super easy for her to see the simplicity right away. This made perfect sense, and as she thought about it from the perspective of the dog, she could see how the training couldn't fail.

This would be the next thing she would teach Spike. She would do it without Grandma knowing, then have a little fun with her before she had to go home. Everyone told Suzie that she had gotten her father's prankster nature. She never seemed malicious with it, though, so people allowed it. She was proud that her mischief had usually garnered more laughs than scoldings; she never meant any harm. She didn't want Grandma to become suspicious, and she didn't want to give Spike the impression that keys were a fun toy. Grandma's keychain had a remote on it, and she had heard that they were very expensive. She had some toy keys that would work, though. They were in a toy box that had always been in her room with a lot of toys she had outgrown. She opened the box and found the keys. She also found some toys she had forgotten were there: an old piano toy with only five wide keys for a child's clumsy hands. This gave her an idea, and she set it aside. There was also a wand and top hat, a basket, some larger balls, and a few teddy bears that she thought she might find a use for. Tucked behind the toy box was a hula hoop. This reminded her of a movie she and her grandma had watched the year before. It was an old movie called *The Hudsucker Proxy*. She didn't really understand it all, but it had hula hoops in it, and it reminded her of the rags-to-riches story that the movie portrayed. She found an old baby blanket made of fleece, and grabbed this as well. She wrapped all of the things in the blanket, grabbed the hula hoop, and headed for the backyard.

Spike had been napping, but he had woken up, and Grandma had put him outside. Suzie dropped her things, grabbed a treat and a bag, and opened the door. Spike came and quickly sat in front of her, knowing he had earned a treat as he always had before. She tossed the treat, which he caught and quickly ate. She scooped up her stuff and went out the door. He followed, wondering what all of these things were.

Grandma looked up from her gardening chores and directed Suzie to the little turds she was searching for. Suzie disposed of the bag and went back to her toys. Her grandmother was wondering what all of this was for as she walked toward the pile. "Whatcha got there, dear?"

"I saw some videos about teaching tricks using some of these things. You'll see," Suzie answered, somewhat suspiciously.

Grandma knew that was all she would get from her. She sensed something was afoot, but this didn't give her any anxiety. Suzie sometimes created mischief, but it was usually so cute that she never got into any trouble for it. She would wait to see what this was all about. She went back to her work in the garden as Suzie set her toys on the picnic table. She went back in for the clicker and treat bag, Spike close in tow the whole time. He was apparently excited to see what Suzie had in mind with all of these fun-looking things. The other training props were also arranged on the table: the marker spot, the tug rope, a wooden spoon they had used as a target, a bed for generalizing "go to spot," and now all these new items.

Suzie grabbed the rope first, and Spike got really excited, really fast. She threw the rope, and he chased after it. When he pounced on it and grabbed it by the neck, he shook it to death. It felt so good to do this. He was excited and wanted to share that with the small hooman. He ran back, tail wagging, head high, occasionally shaking the toy to make sure it was dead. He returned to Suzie's feet and looked up with the rope in his mouth.

"Drop," Suzie said softly. He opened his mouth, and the rope dropped to the ground. Usually, this would have gotten him his click and then treat, but he had noticed that as he learned more things, some things didn't automatically trigger the click/treat. When this happened, he always felt the need to work just a bit harder. He would just keep doing what seemed natural to do, and the click would usually come. Then he would keep doing that for a while, and it would stop working again until he did some more. He was beginning to sense a pattern in this, and when he didn't hear a click when he thought he should, he would begin doing random things until the click happened. He got used to this and began learning things really fast. The Border Collie in him was beginning to emerge. He found that he loved patterns of behavior. He would do a number of things that used to get him treats for each thing, but now he would have to do a number of things in order to get that same treat. He sort of liked the challenge, and felt a twinge of enjoyment when he didn't get the expected click and had to figure out what to do next. He was becoming a thinking dog. He was becoming addicted to the game.

Suzie reached down for the rope, and he went for it, but her hand retreated from it the moment he had reached for it. That obviously wasn't the right thing to do. She reached for it again, and he let her get it, "CLICK!", treat. She reached for it again, but this time she went to move it. This triggered his chase response. She stopped moving it as soon as she saw him go for it, and he didn't go for it. "CLICK!", treat. She reached for it again and moved it, but he knew not to respond. "CLICK!", treat. This time, when she went to touch it, she made a sound with her mouth, "Leave it," and he remembered the sound, but didn't move. She moved the rope faster and made the mouth sound again. He left it alone. "CLICK!", treat, treat, treat, JACKPOT!

She made the mouth sound again, but this time she tossed the rope. That was too much to handle, and he chased after it. He heard the sound again, but this time, more stressed than before. He remembered that it meant "don't touch the thing," so he stopped just as he would have otherwise pounced. "YES!" the little human yelled as she made the click sound. He got excited at her excitement and ran towards her, forgetting all about the rope. He got a few more treats, and then she said, "Take a break," and held her empty hands open towards him.

He knew that meant playtime. He ran for his rope, but then stopped and didn't grab it. Suzie said "yes" again and tossed a few treats for him to grab from the ground. The next lesson would be to take it. But first, it was time to play.

Chapter 6. Playing the Training Game

Grandmother had watched all of this from the garden and was flat amazed at how fast and thoroughly Suzie had comprehended this dog training stuff. It consumed her, and she was a sponge soaking up everything she could about dog training, even though she couldn't even read yet. She hadn't been a devoutly religious person through her life; she tried to be a good person and all, but the words of Jesus kept coming back to her. He proclaimed children as special treasures to be revered and respected. She was beginning to view the world as somewhat detrimental to children and their magicalness. She sensed that school wouldn't really help Suzie; it would more likely slow her down. She felt sorry for her teachers; they might learn a thing or two from this little prodigy. Suzie would intuitively know more about learning than they likely did with all of their higher education. Who knows, maybe Suzie would grow up to redefine how the educational system works. That is the best part of six-year-olds: they can become anything their little heart desires with enough passion to carry them the distance. The educational system was a bit archaic in her view. It had changed little since she was a child, and it seemed as if what her daughter had learned had been a watered-down version of what she had learned. It did nothing to exploit anyone's inner talents and greatness. It stamped out a carbon copy capable of working machines, but not quite educated enough to realize they could do better for themselves. The world could be a cruel, harsh place, full of people who wanted to see others fail, especially those who did well for themselves. She had seen a lot of humanity in her life, and while most of it was kind-hearted, there were those who just liked to keep others down. She hoped that the educational system's lockstep approach didn't crush little Suzie's passions for learning by holding her back, and that the haters of the world wouldn't crush her precious little heart.

Suzie was finishing up her play session with Spike; she was so good at this. She knew just how much to work with him. She always played with him for a few minutes after, saying it was sort of like how her game popped up all sorts of award screens when she did a good job in the game. It was that final reward that made playing the game so much fun in the end. She recognized just how important this was to his desire to play the training game with her. He wanted to keep playing, and that desire helped him learn faster.

They went inside, and she refilled his water dish. After he drank some from it, she wandered out to see what Grandma was doing.

"Didja see how good he did, Gramma?" Suzie asked as she approached the garden.

"I did, it was fabulous, dear! I especially like your pace of training. You do things at just the right speed. Not too fast, not too slow. It seems like the perfect pace for his learning abilities."

"He is super smart and learns really fast."

"Just like you, dear," Grandma proudly stated. "Do you have some fun tricks planned for Sunday? They liked your show so much last time; they are giving you top billing this week. Everyone is talking about it and can't wait to see the girl prodigy show off Spike's skills."

"What's top billing mean, Gramma?" Suzie asked.

"It means that you are the main attraction, the top show, the prime-time act. They save you for last because you will be the showstopper. No act will top yours; we are all just sure of it. Plus, I've been bragging on you a little to my friends. I imagine everyone will be there to see you. Won't that be fun?"

"I guess. I hope people aren't disappointed."

"They won't be, dear, I guarantee it. I've seen the show here as you practice with him. I know you will do great!"

"I believe you, Gramma!"

Together, they went inside and had some lunch while Spike dreamt of pouncing on tug ropes as they slithered away.

Chapter 7. Spike's Big Show

Sunday arrived, and Suzie was anxious all of a sudden. She hadn't thought about the show all week; she was so consumed with training Spike and learning as much as she could about dog training from videos on the internet. She had completed the Puppr app challenge, successfully teaching Spike all of the basic and free sample tricks, plus a few more tricks she had found easy to teach, like the "find your keys" trick that would play out later today.

The park was within walking distance, so they wouldn't be driving. Grandma rarely went anywhere if she didn't need to; most things were being delivered. Suzie had to think up a reason to go somewhere to complete her mischievous little trick. She had seen a video about how the dollar store sold all sorts of trick props for dogs. She had a short list of things that would cost six dollars to purchase, and the dollar store wasn't one to deliver. But it was just far enough away that they couldn't just walk. She had scoped out the best place to hide the keys—one Spike was sure to check. She did some extra practice on the trick while Grandma was in the shower; it was going great. She transitioned from the toy keys and began using the real ones. They finished up the training just as Grandma came into the room.

"I just need to grab my purse and keys real quick, and we can go get you your things."

"Okay, Gramma," Suzie replied with a bit of a smirk that Grandma didn't see. She watched as Grandma retrieved her purse and began looking in vain for her keys.

"I can't find my keys. Have you seen them, dear?"

"I haven't," Suzie lied as she turned to Spike and asked, "Have you seen Gramma's keys, Spike? Where are my keys?" she asked him, holding up her hands in an "I dunno" sort of way while shrugging her shoulders somewhat overdramatically. She had hidden the keys close to where she had hidden them before, but not quite the same place. She didn't want it to seem like he was having a super easy time of it.

He went to all of the places she had hidden them before but couldn't find them. One of the spots smelled like they were there, but they weren't. He went back to that spot and checked again. He could smell them, but the scent got weaker as he went one direction, so he went the other way, and the scent got stronger. He finally saw them sticking out a bit from behind a table leg. He grabbed them and returned to Suzie with them.

"Spike found them, Gramma!" she proudly proclaimed with a huge grin on her face.

"That's amazing, dear! You must have taught him that when I wasn't looking, you sneaky little devil! I wouldn't be surprised if this whole trip wasn't a setup just so you could show me that, and I LOVE it! Good job, young lady!"

"You figured it out, Gramma, but I still need the stuff at the store."

"I know, dear. You've earned it and then some. I'm very proud of you. I have one other stop I want to make too, so we had better get going, or we might miss some of the early fun at the park."

They went to the Dollar Store where Spike could go in with them; he was a perfect angel, attentive to Suzie and her cues. They were both uncommonly well-behaved for a dog and a six-year-old child. They found all the props and a couple of dog toys for Spike and headed to the next stop where Grandma said, "I'll only be a minute, my purchase should be waiting, so just wait here, and I'll be right back." She was inside the bookstore for all of two minutes and then was back with a bag. She put the bag in the trunk and got back in the car.

"What did you buy, Grandma?" Suzie asked.

"It's a surprise, dear, for later. Are you ready to put on your show?" Grandma asked to distract her from the question she didn't want to answer.

"As ready as I'll ever be, I guess."

"Good! Let's go get ready and head to the park."

They got back to the house, and Suzie put all the trick props into a bag, and they headed to the park. Everyone was excited to see her and told her that they couldn't wait for her show. Each time someone said something, Suzie's anxiety grew. She didn't think the show would be as good as they all seemed to believe it would be. Her Grandma noticed her nervousness and told her to just focus on doing what she and Spike do while training and to not think about the people watching. She knew that Suzie would do just fine if she could keep from becoming afraid of the people watching.

The time came, and the announcer called out for the next act, introducing them in a very excited tone with lots of fanfare. Suzie took her bag and set up some props for her demonstration. She felt it was better to think of it more as a demonstration than actual entertainment to make it less stressful on her. This way, she wasn't intending to really entertain so much as educate. She hoped this would work because thinking about entertaining people just made her tummy hurt. Setting it up as a demonstration removed all of that fear and anxiety somehow.

After everything was in its place, Suzie affixed her treat bag and clicker. She signaled to her grandmother to release Spike. He ran straight to her and sat attentively. This seemingly insignificant act resulted in clapping and many comments about how good that little puppy was. People asked if this little girl could come to train their dog, and offered many other complimentary statements. Suzie sighed a little as she realized how easy this crowd would be to please. Her grandmother noticed this as well and let out a breath she had been holding since letting Spike go. It now made sense to her, as it likely did to Suzie, that being next to her, doing what they love to do, would distract him from all the excitement and people he wasn't used to. Suzie had him where he needed to be, and she was now where she needed to be. This was going to be epic in the history of Play At The Park.

Suzie felt much better and simply showed how Spike could do some easy behaviors. But the behaviors were chained together, and that made them seem almost magical. He would do each thing she asked right as she asked it. Occasionally, she would say "YES!" and drop a few treats for him to pounce on and eat. When he finished with his quick payment, he would sit, looking at Suzie, waiting patiently for her next cue. Sometimes she used words, sometimes she only used hand signals. This was met with much louder applause than the cued behaviors. To the audience, it seemed quite magical. At the very end of the show, they both bowed to each other, and then to the crowd.

The people were all standing and clapping. Suzie had a grin from ear to ear. Her grandmother had a grin from ear to ear, and somehow, Spike seemed to have a grin from ear to ear. The applause seemed to last forever, and Suzie was congratulated by everyone. People with dogs asked when she could come train their dog. She was on cloud 90. She only wished her mom could have made it in time; something had come up, and she wouldn't come till the next day. That was okay; she wanted to have one more night with Spike. He had earned his dinner that night, and Suzie added a few extra special treats in the bowl as a bonus. He ate his dinner and immediately went to his bed and fell asleep.

He was a young puppy, and Grandma had been a bit worried he was too young for such training, but he seemed to be fine with it, the tough Jack Russell Terrier shining through. Suzie was really good about keeping the sessions short and letting him be a dog the rest of the time. Suzie was good about acting in a way as to sort of passively train Spike in all their interactions. She seemed to intuitively grasp the idea of classical conditioning without really knowing anything about it. She felt that this was one of the reasons that Spike was so good at learning from Suzie. She was literally always training him, even when she wasn't. He would miss her terribly when she leaves for home.

Chapter 8. Going Home

She chatted with her daughter about the week and the incredible show that Suzie and Spike put on at the park. Her daughter had missed a special moment, but it had been recorded, and links were already popping up. "This could easily go viral, it's got that sort of flair, people love it," Grandma told her daughter. "Tomorrow might be a whole different world for her," Mom replied, thinking it a funny joke. They chatted a bit about the show as her daughter found some of the videos and noticed they already had a lot of views. She worried for a moment; the last thing she wanted was a famous six-year-old daughter. Her mother reassured her that no one said who she was, and no personal information was associated with the videos. All anyone knew was that she was Suzie's grandmother, and if anyone came looking, Grandma would become a "big bad granny bear."

She knew her mother wouldn't put Suzie in any real danger, but as a mom, she was obligated to worry about such things she didn't want to worry about. She finished up the call and hung up.

The next morning, when she woke up, the videos had indeed gone viral, and she was getting messages about personal training. Her granddaughter could start a successful business at six! She responded that they should check back in another twelve years or so. Most replied that their dog behavior problems would solve themselves by then. It was all very light-hearted banter. People truly loved the connection they saw between these two drastically different creatures. They communicated with one another at a level no one saw—a level they may not even have realized they were communicating on.

She had one last surprise for Suzie because she knew their leaving would be much harder this time than any time before. She pulled the bookstore bag from the top shelf of her closet and took the book out of the bag along with an empty diary book. She thought Sara looked like an older Suzie, and Hero looked a lot like a bigger Spike. It was almost eerie, as if she might one day see a book with her granddaughter on the cover. She wondered for a moment about Sara's start. An autobiography of her life as a dog trainer would probably be fascinating. She decided to keep a journal of her granddaughter's exploits in dog training in case such a biography of her was ever warranted. She would start it after Suzie left for home. She set the diary aside on her nightstand and put the other book back into the bag.

This book was just a loaner. She had written to Sara and asked for an autographed copy with a special salutation. She needed to send Sara a link to the video; Sara might think of some good things to say that would inspire Suzie to follow this path. When that book arrived, she would trade her for this one back. Her daughter's birthday was a few weeks away, and she planned on taking a trip to visit them for the weekend.

Her phone rang, and she quickly answered it because Suzie was still sleeping. It was the people she had gotten Spike from at the rescue. He had been part of a whole litter of puppies who came in together. One of the puppies was extra shy and wasn't able to attract any interest in being adopted. He needed to go to a home, and they wanted to donate the puppy to Suzie.

They had seen the other puppy perform with Suzie in the video and knew that Suzie would be the perfect person to draw out the puppy hidden inside this little bundle of anxiety.

"That was actually quite perfect, YES!" Grandma exclaimed as if she were marking a behavior to reward. "That is so perfect! I will be in later to pick him up. Suzie is going home today, but I will be going to visit them in a few weeks, and that should allow the puppy to decompress a bit with his familiar brother here before he goes to live with her." They thought that was a smart idea and agreed to see her later when she came in.

Apparently, her outburst woke Suzie. She appeared rubbing her eyes, Spike in tow right behind her. They were pretty bonded after this week, and it would be hard on both of them to say goodbye. She couldn't wait to present Spike's brother to her in a few weeks; that would be some surprise for her. She would make it her daughter's birthday present, so technically it would be Suzie's mom's dog. But Grandma knew things about this sort of thing, and she knew that Suzie would do everything with the pup, and it would really be Suzie's dog. Dogs always pick their owners; the one who makes them the happiest is the one they love the most. Her daughter didn't want a dog, but the real present was some business education for Suzie. They were going to set up a business model, and she was going to pay Suzie to train her dog for her. She would also make extra money for the care and feeding, and whatnot. This would do a few things that would be educational for Suzie. Suzie's mom thought it was a great idea and actually agreed with her mom, instead of finding fault with the idea as it seemed she usually tried to do. She was glad that her daughter was on board; that would make this so much easier.

"Breakfast is ready whenever you are. How about you make sure Spike is taken care of, get cleaned up and dressed, then meet me in the kitchen. Your mom will be along in a couple of hours." Suzie ran off to comply with the request as Grandma pulled the book from behind her back. She wanted to present it at just the right moment. She put the book back into the bag and headed to the kitchen. She set the bag on the table by the door, went to the kitchen and waited. Suzie came in all dressed and chipper, Spike in tow as usual. She fed Suzie and told her about the videos of her performance. She showed her a few of them, and it was so exciting to see her face light up. She had been so engrossed with the performance that she had no idea what it might have looked like to the crowd. She watched in amazement as she and Spike did their routine. She reminded herself a little of the videos Sara made, the spur-of-the-moment unscripted ones. This excited her, but the next moment she seemed sad.

"What's the matter, dear?" Grandma asked, a bit concerned, but instinctively knowing what was bothering the little girl.

"I'm going to miss Spike, Gramma," Suzie said softly.

"I know you will, dear, it can't be helped, but he will always be here waiting for your visits, and we will come visit in a few weeks. You will get to see him again."

"I know, Gramma, but I'll miss him and you. I've had more fun here this week than ever. Do you think Mom would let me get a dog, Gramma?"

"To be totally honest, I'm working on that. Your mom has always been against it, but I think I'm beginning to convince her that maybe it's time."

"Really, Gramma?"

"Maybe, dear, we will have to wait and see. Be patient, and don't forget what you learned this week."

"I won't, Gramma, I promise!"

Suzie had finished her breakfast and had watched most of the videos of her performance. Now it was time for a quick walk before her daughter arrived.

"Let's take a quick walk around the neighborhood, Suzie. It will be Spike's first walk, so let's take the treats and his small tug toy."

Suzie ran to get the leash, and this excited Spike. He was jumping and wagging his tail. He loved the leash; it always meant that fun things were coming. She cued a sit, and he sat patiently while she attached the leash to his collar. She attached the treat bag and stuffed a short tug toy into her back pocket. She turned around to open the door, and Spike reached up and pulled the tug out of her pocket. They both laughed as they walked out the door, Spike holding his toy high as they walked to the sidewalk.

Some neighbors were outside in their yards, and as they began to clap, others showed up from their houses and began clapping too. They were standing on the sidewalk as everyone was clapping at her. She looked up at her grandmother, who said, "I might have mentioned to a neighbor or two that we were going to be taking a walk. I guess they just wanted to see a famous person."

"Where is the famous person, Gramma?" Suzie asked, puzzled.

"You, my dear, and I think it proper that you take a bow."

At this, Suzie looked at all the people clapping and bowed to them. At this, Spike dropped his tug and bowed as well. Bowing had been the cue for this trick, so it made perfect sense to Suzie that he would do this. But the neighbors went wild when it happened, laughter, whoops, and hollers occurring all at once. She stood up, and Spike stood back up. She took another bow, as did Spike. The whooping, hollering, and laughter intensified, then died down.

Suzie straightened up, looked at all the neighbors assembled in their yards, and said loud enough for all to hear, "Thank you to all my adoring fans!" She then kissed her hand and held it in the air. Spike sat up in a beg and waved one of his paws. Everyone clapped some more, then dispersed as they began their walk. They went around a few blocks, and Suzie taught Spike not to pull the leash by stopping every time he tried pulling and walking whenever he would let the leash go slack. He quickly learned that pulling on the leash caused stopping, where not pulling allowed him to keep moving. If he tried dragging her to some interesting smell, he would find

himself slowly moving away from where he wanted to go until he let the leash go slack. Occasionally, he would look back at Suzie, and she would say "Yes!" and drop a treat for him to pounce on and eat.

Suzie's grandmother figured out what Suzie was doing and exclaimed, "How did you figure out how to get him to stop pulling?"

Suzie responded that moving was what he wanted most, and that stopping his movement any time he hit the end of the leash would cause him to figure out that not pulling the leash would allow him to keep moving. "When he pulls forward, pulling him back is sort of like removing the treat if he lunges for it in your hand by pulling your hand away. He learns his pulling causes him to back up, and when he figures it all out, he won't pull to get where he wants to go." She had done nothing more than stopping and starting again, or slowly pulling him away from where he was pulling her. No clicker, no words, except the "Yes!" when he turned to look back and the treat that followed. That was almost too simplistic, but here it was working like a charm. Maybe this style of training, setting up a problem to figure out, has made this little dog figure this out easier than she thought he should have. Suzie's little mind had learned a lot too, and maybe this had some effect on the success of this technique between these two. She sensed a level of communication between them, and she imagined that Suzie maybe learned more than she had taught Spike this week, and in the same exact way: refining what works and discarding what doesn't.

Spike saw a squirrel run down from a tree, grab something, and run back up. At this, he got really excited and was pulling the leash and barking. Suzie called him, but he just kept pulling and barking. Suzie slowly pulled him backward, and eventually, he turned around and came back to Suzie, excited to have his instincts kicking in. It felt good to bark at the squirrel, and he had no good reason not to until he started moving away from the squirrel-infested tree. He didn't like that and turned around to see what was going on. At that moment, he saw Suzie's hand wagging back and forth; he knew that meant "come get a treat," so he did. She backed up some, and he followed, forgetting all about the squirrel. He sat, and she dropped a treat for him to catch. He missed the catch and had to chase and pounce on the treat. She backed up again, and he followed. She stopped, and he sat. She dropped three treats for him to find and eat.

"How did you know to do that, dear?" Grandma asked.

"I saw a video where someone taught a dog to do this. They said that it breaks their train of thought and gives them something familiar to do that is more fun and comfortable than barking at something. When I'm gone, you have to do it just like I have, okay, Gramma?"

"I will, dear, I promise." And she meant it. She wouldn't let Spike forget any of the things she had taught him. He was now famous too, at least in this neighborhood, and she wouldn't want to embarrass her granddaughter in front of her neighbors; it was a point of pride now.

The remainder of their walk was uneventful, and her mother had arrived a few minutes before they returned. At that moment, she appeared in the door with Suzie's bags. When she saw

them, she dropped the bags and said, "Suzie!" She held out her arms wide for a hug. Suzie ran to her, Spike in tow, for a big hug.

"Mommy! I missed you!"

"I missed you too, dear. I heard you had a busy week, and what is this video I saw of you with Spike at the park? That was amazing!"

Grandma had come up behind Suzie and gave her daughter a hug before taking the leash from Suzie. "I imagine you are itching to get headed back."

"I am," she replied as she gathered up Suzie's bags and headed for the car. Suzie gave her grandmother the treat bag and clicker as she said, "I love you, Gramma. Thanks for such a great week. I'll miss you and Spike." Tears welled up in her eyes as she bent down to say goodbye to Spike. He licked the salty tears from her cheek, and she hugged him tightly. She stood up and went to the car. That was less stressful than her grandmother thought it would be.

She went inside and grabbed the bag from the table by the door. She went back to the car, and Suzie was just buckling her belt. She opened the door and pulled the book from the bag. She handed it to Suzie, who was delighted to see Sara's book. "For me?" she exclaimed.

"No, but I'm letting you borrow it. You can't read it yet, but your mom will help you with that, and the pictures should give you some ideas. Something to do for the drive home, and you always have your game."

"My game, I had forgotten all about it!"

At this, Suzie's mom gave a knowing look to her grandmother and smiled, "Thanks, Mom, for everything. See you in a few weeks?"

"Yes, dear, I'll come for your birthday," and gave her a knowing wink. She couldn't tell her about Spike's brother yet, but would when they next talked. She would be going to pick him up straight away. It would be a few weeks before she could deliver him, but that would be good for the puppy. They say it takes about three weeks to become comfortable in a new environment. The puppy would be in a better space when they went to visit. It sounded like the puppy had some fear issues and anxiety. She hoped that Spike could help with that, and she would do all the training she saw Suzie do with Spike. Get him used to the training technique so Suzie would have some good success with him and keep her interested. Just like you don't want to set up a dog to fail, she didn't want to set Suzie up to fail.

She kissed Suzie goodbye, handed her the clicker, and told her she could keep it as a memento of the trip. Then she closed the door, waving goodbye. They drove off as Grandmother headed for her car. She put Spike in, and they went to pick up his brother.

Chapter 9. The Clicker Game

Suzie was bored. She wanted to train a dog, but she didn't have a dog, and no one she knew had a dog—at least not one that wasn't big and mean. There were a couple of dogs in the neighborhood, but they were outside dogs, kept in kennels, and no one ever did anything with them. Suzie felt sorry for them, but they were big and mean and barked at everyone. She didn't see herself training any of those dogs. She looked at Sara Carson's book, but since she couldn't read, she looked at the pictures, and it only made her want to train more. She had tried playing her tablet game, but it wasn't the same; it seemed boring by comparison. Her Grandma had bought all of the expansion packs as promised for the Puppr app, but it didn't do much good since she didn't have a dog to train.

Her friends showed up one day, wondering where their friend had been. Suzie wasn't too interested in playing with her friends either, but she went outside and played anyway. It was something to do, and it was better than sitting around bored. She had kept the clicker in her pocket, and she felt it now and remembered her fun the week before.

They went to the park and were playing on the climbing structures. She was lost in thoughts of training dogs when it dawned on her that she didn't need a dog to play the training game. She could play with her friends! That was it—it would be a super fun game for kids to play. She conceived of it in a flash.

She called her friends over, and they gathered around. Suzie said, "I just made up a brand new game. Who wants to try it out?" Her friends, who were always up for something new and fun, were excited to try it out. She pulled the clicker from her pocket and asked who wanted to go first. A few hands tentatively shot up, and she asked them all to come forward. She gave them the same instructions her Grandma gave her. She selected the first to go and designated who would follow. The first person was somewhat confused, but when Suzie clicked, they began to understand how to play the game. When they figured out the criteria that Suzie had set, not only did they get a click, but also a hearty "YES!" from Suzie.

"That was fun!" the first person exclaimed. "I want to do it again!"

"You will have to wait for your turn again, it's the next person's turn." Suzie turned to the next person and thought about it for a second, and then said, "Go!" The second person, having learned from the first, more quickly figured out the criteria to be met with another click and hearty "YES!"

The next person was having a bit of trouble, and Suzie realized she had picked something a bit harder than she should have. She focused really hard on her timing with the clicker and the slightest movements in the proper direction. Eventually, the third person got the final click and another hearty "YES!" from Suzie.

At this, all the kids wanted to play, and a few others had come to see what the commotion was. The kids talked a bit, and then lined up to play some more, the first four respectfully at the end of the line. They played over and over, each kid getting the criteria within just a few minutes.

One of the parents had caught what was going on and brought it to the attention of everyone in the park. The last kid to go was the one who initially had some trouble with his criteria. Suzie knew it was the last one; she had to be getting home, and the streetlights were about to come on. She thought a bit more about this last one, and then said, "GO!"

Mike was the kid's name, and he had done three previous turns. He understood just what needed to be done. He flew through the process quickly, and when the click and "YES!" came, everyone cheered and clapped. Some of the parents had been recording on their phones and were uploading videos and showing them to others and the kids.

Suzie had to get home and knew it would be difficult if everyone started talking to her, so she left quietly and skipped all the way home. She had found a way to play her game with people, and it made her very happy.

When she got home, her mother asked if she had fun at the park. Suzie replied she had, and when asked what she had been doing, she just replied, "Training my friends like dogs."

"I'm not sure I like the sound of that, young lady. Explain what you mean by 'training your friends'."

"I clicker trained them. It's a game I made up that is just like training Spike was, only with people. Everyone loved it; we all had lots of fun. Some of the moms were taking videos; maybe they can show you."

At this, her phone rang, and she picked it up. "Oh, Hi Janice, yes, she made it home fine. I heard she made up a new game... She did? That sounds really interesting for sure. I'll check it out, thanks." She hung up the call and started tapping her phone until it started making the sounds Suzie remembered hearing earlier in the park. Suzie's mom turned the phone so they could both watch, and Suzie was again amazed at how this looked from this perspective. It really reminded her of training Spike. It was identical, but it was also a fun game kids could play.

Suzie's mom chimed in at this and said, "This reminds me of the old 'hot and cold' game we played as kids, but without the 'cold' part and using a clicker. I think you have a winner here, girlie! Now, how do we patent this and sell it to Hasbro or Parker Brothers?"

"Huh?" asked Suzie, confused at these things she had never heard of before.

"Nothing, Sweetie, just making a joke."

Mom was so proud of her little girl. Suzie had figured out how to do what she wanted to do, even if she couldn't do exactly what it was she wanted to do. This new game should get her through to the puppy that was coming with Grandma for her birthday. Her mom had called later, after they had gotten home, and shared the story of Spike's brother. She was actually quite excited to be getting a puppy, instead of full of dread at the prospect. Her mother had told her how it would be her dog, and how they would set up Suzie's small, one-client dog care and training business. Suzie would be taught how to run it just like a business, complete with

expenses, a wage, and taxes. They wanted to make it as realistic as possible, but on this super small scale. This child will enter school as a professional, private dog training and care business owner. Her mom was beginning to think that the public school system might be in for more than they could handle with this child. Suzie was something special for sure. Mom looked lovingly as her daughter found and watched more of the videos people had posted about her new twist on an old game.

Chapter 10. Fame and Fortune

The next morning was spent looking at all of the videos that had gone viral in just a few days. Suzie's mom was reading her some of the comments on the videos. Suzie felt overjoyed at the nice things people had to say. Some of the comments were negative, so her mom skipped over those. "How could anyone have a problem with this?" Suzie wondered. "Some just needed to have a problem," Mom figured, and ignored them.

Suzie couldn't wait to see her friends and talk about the new game, and they were excited to see her too—they had all seen the videos! Everyone was excited to play, and everyone wanted to go first. Suzie had just the thing: she arranged the kids from oldest to youngest and said the older kids would go first, and then they could get back into line. She thought that the younger kids might pick up some skill watching the older kids go first. Anyone who hadn't played before was in a separate line at the end, again, oldest to youngest. There were a dozen kids in the line. She pulled out her clicker and told the first player to "GO!"

They played for hours. New kids came, and some kids had to leave, but all in all, everyone had a great time. They were asking where they could get clickers to play with their friends. Suzie told them that they could simply say "YES!" instead, or use a clicker pen if they had one, or wanted to play quietly. Her mother made a mental note to get some personalized clickers made with a yet-to-be-designed logo for Suzie's new business as soon as she could.

By the time they made it back home, it was dinner time, and the answering machine had a message on it, which was odd because no one used that phone. It came with the cable, so they still had one. Her mom hit play on the answering machine, and a voice introduced itself as a local news producer. They had seen Little Suzie's videos and wanted to do an interview with her about her new game and her dog training. They were obviously amazed at what they had seen and wanted a return call as soon as possible, no matter the time.

Her mom deleted the message and said, "They've waited this long; they can wait till after we've eaten. Never deal with news people on an empty stomach, I always say. How about you, Princess?"

"Yeah, Mommy, I'm really hungry," Suzie said, rubbing her growling tummy. "My belly sounds like Spike is attacking his tug toy in there."

"Let's eat, then I'll call them back. It sounds like it doesn't matter how late it might be. It's pretty exciting that they want to interview you, though. Do you want to do that?"

"Sure, Mommy, as long as you think I should, I will do it," Suzie said, not sure what else she might have said to such a question. She really didn't know what it meant to be interviewed, so it was a worry for another time. Right now, all she wanted to do was eat.

They ate, and Suzie sat down to watch the movie she had watched at her grandmother's with the talking dogs. Her mom called back the news people and asked a few questions, then set up a time the next day when they could meet at the park and get their footage. Maybe they could

interview Suzie, but Mom would decide that tomorrow. She said she looked forward to meeting them tomorrow, hung up, and came to watch the movie with her little princess. She had no idea where this would end up, but she was willing to see where it took them.

Fifteen minutes into the movie, Suzie was asleep. She was resting her head on her mom's lap, so her mom contented herself with finishing the movie. Then she quietly moved Suzie to her bed and tucked her in. Tomorrow would be a big day for Suzie.

Mom missed her husband. He had been deployed to Europe as a specialist who was rare in the military. He had these sort of missions occasionally where he would have to leave for months at a time. He called her often, but hadn't called since Suzie got home. She sent him a text message telling him she missed him and a few of the happenings of late with Suzie's newfound fame, including some links to her favorite videos. She closed with a short message about how she hoped he could make a moment to give her a call; it would mean so much to hear his voice.

She went to bed and dreamt of the life of the mother of a famous daughter. In this world, it is easier than ever to wake up and find yourself famous.

Chapter 11. News at 5 and 9

The next day played out about the same as the previous day, except that there were more kids at the park and more parents too. At the appointed time, the news people showed up, and Suzie was well into playing the game with the other kids. There were so many that a separate group had formed. The players took turns being the one with the clicker, and everyone got to play that side today too. Some of the kids had a hard time with the timing, so Suzie played a different game with them where she bounced a ball, and they had to click the moment the ball hit the ground. This got them all up to speed quickly with their timing. It also made the game much more fun for everyone, as all the kids got to be both the person doing the clicking and the person being clicked. Even Suzie let someone else click for her, and she got to remember that side of the game and how it felt. It was important to be the one being trained on occasion, to get both perspectives. She knew that this was important to people clicker training dogs and mentioned this to her mother. Her mom agreed that it probably would be.

The news crew began recording right away. The camera moved around and got shots of the action from many different angles. The reporter came to where Suzie's mom was standing and asked if she was the girl's mother. She stated that she was and asked what sort of story they were doing on her daughter. The protective mother was coming out, but in a friendly way. They assured her that they just wanted to do a short bit on a local kid who was taking the internet by storm. They asked if she had seen how much the videos were being watched. She replied that she hadn't paid any attention to them other than to watch some of them.

The reporter asked if they could interview her, and she said, "Sure," so the cameraman was waved over, and the reporter asked a few questions. She explained how she had visited her grandmother last week, and she had a new puppy who Suzie had taken to training. Somehow, she had gained an understanding of how to use a clicker to train her grandmother's puppy, and about how when she got back, there was no puppy to train, so she turned it into a game, you know, for kids. "The idea is basically the same as the old hot and cold game we played as kids, except there is no cold, and the objects have become behaviors. It is really quite simple and sort of genius in a childlike way, if that makes any sense."

The reporter asked how she planned on handling her daughter's instant fame, and Mom thought about it for a minute and replied she didn't think it would change much about their life. She wanted to talk about the puppy that would be coming and the business idea, but that was a surprise, and she didn't want everyone to hear about it before Suzie got the surprise. She thought for a second and said, "If this story does go somewhere, I will have something else you might wish to cover in a few weeks."

The reporter thanked her and asked if they might interview Suzie. Mom thought that would be fine, but she wanted to know which questions they wanted to ask and told them to stick to those and not ask her anything she hadn't already approved of. They agreed to those rules, and she called Suzie over once her round was done. She handed the clicker to another kid who then started a game with someone new.

The reporter got down at Suzie's level, as did the cameraman. They asked her some questions, and she answered very matter-of-factly to each one. She seemed so adult-like while they were talking; she was probably trying to act like those she had seen interviewed on TV. When it was all over, they thanked her, and she ran back into the group of kids to play some more. She slipped into a line of kids waiting to play and watched the others as they worked out the puzzles with the clicker cues they received. She was impressed with some of the criteria people were thinking up; some had kids doing all sorts of fun things on the play equipment.

Everyone had a blast again, and that night, the neighborhood children all sat glued to the news for the first time to see if they could catch a glimpse of themselves in the coverage. It was a short segment, and not many of the kids showed up in the few shots that they got of the group. But the anchors said that they would be sure to follow this local prodigy in the future, and they were sure we'd be seeing more from her. They ended the newscast with a montage of the clips that covered her first big play in the park.

"That's some prime coverage right there!" her mom said as she switched the TV off. "Okay, that was the second episode of the news. You got to stay up way past your bedtime to see it again. I've recorded it, so you can watch it all day tomorrow, over and over again, if you like."

"YAY!" Suzie exclaimed, jumping up and down and clapping her hands. "I will! I just wish Daddy were here; he would be so proud of me!"

"He sure would, and I bet he's seen your videos, and I wouldn't be surprised if he calls..." Mom trailed off as she checked her watch. The time flipped to exactly 10 PM, and as it is with military personnel, he was right on time. Her phone interrupted what she was about to say, "... within the next few minutes." She had arranged the time, so she knew it was coming; the timing worked out almost perfectly. "And that would be him. Why don't you surprise him and answer it? I bet he thought you fell asleep by now."

"YAY! He will be so surprised, but I'll pretend to be you, okay, Mommy?" she proclaimed with a sly grin.

"Yes, that'll surprise him even more. Do it! Put it on speaker so I can hear too."

Suzie answered the call and tapped the speaker button. In the deepest, six-year-old voice she could muster, she said, "Hello, honey, how was your day?" imitating what she had heard her mom say so many times before. It was the most hilarious thing her mother had ever seen, and she had to stifle a laugh by covering her mouth.

Her father responded in character, playing along. "Hi, sweetie, it was fine, and yours? How's Suzie? I saw some videos, and they were amazing! Was it really her, or just someone who looked like her, and I'm being made a fool of?"

Suzie, still in her deep voice, said, "Yes, she's quite the prawnidgee."

"Do you mean prodigy, sweetie?" her father asked.

She hadn't caught the first "sweetie," but the second one stood out. It dawned on her at that moment that her dad called her "sweetie" and her mom "honey." "You knew it was me all along, Daddy!" she squealed in her normal six-year-old voice. "You sneaker, you! I miss you, Daddy!" she said, almost coming to tears.

"I miss you too, Sweetie, and you can't sneak a sneaker. You do get that from me, you know. So, tell me all about these videos. How did you come to be so famous so fast? These videos have millions of views. Do you know how many that is?"

"A lot?" Suzie asked timidly, unsure of her answer.

"Yes! A lot, lot, lot, lot... LOT, and that's a LOT! Tell me how all of this happened, and Mom hasn't brought a dog into the house without consulting Daddy first, has she?" he quipped with a different, more serious tone.

"No, Daddy, we don't have a dog, but I made up a new game that is like dog training, but for kids, and I do that instead. I still want a dog, but it can wait now till after you get home. When are you coming home, Daddy? I miss you!"

"I miss you too, sweetie, soon, before Mom's birthday for sure. She asked for me to be home for her birthday for her present. I offered her a new car, anything she wants, but she wants me, so me she gets. I'm not done here yet, but my commander gave me permission to take leave for a week to come visit you two, my all-time favorite gals!"

"YAY, DADDY! I can't wait to see you!" Suzie cried into the phone.

"I can't wait to see you too, sweetie. Hey, isn't it waaaaayyyy past your bedtime? Can I talk to Mommy? Is she around, or has she left you unsupervised while she is out having the time of her life? I can't imagine her letting you stay up this late, and no babysitter, boy, is she going to hear about this!" he said, feigning anger in a silly way that made her giggle.

"I'm right here, dear. She got to be on the news tonight, you know the happy, feel-good local girl gets famous story they like to stick in last to keep people past the last commercial breaks? She was that girl tonight. I'll tell you all about it while our FAMOUS little princess here gets washed up for 'beddy-bye' time. Run along, Elton John," she joked, mocking Suzie's fame. Suzie didn't get the joke, but she heard Daddy laugh, and that made her laugh too.

"Goodnight, Daddy!" Suzie shouted into the phone as she handed it to her mom. "I love you, and I can't wait to see you!"

"Good night, dear, and ditto to you too, sweetie! Sleep well!"

"I'm sure she will," responded her mother. "Run along now; I'll come tuck you in shortly."

Suzie heard her dad say, "So, how was your day, honey?" in a sort of mocking way towards Suzie's little prank on her dad. Her mom chuckled at that.

Suzie left the room, and her mom quickly filled her dad in on everything. She left out the part about the puppy her mom had already gotten. She figured that was a battle for another day. Besides, she felt pretty good about him being totally fine with it. He had never had a dog as a child, and it turned out that all of his dog experience had been much like the few dogs in the neighborhood: fenced in and mostly not friendly. She could see how that perception might turn him off a bit. The reason she insisted on him being here for her birthday was to witness this special moment in their daughter's life. The rest she could forgive, but this moment promised to be incredibly special to Suzie, and she wanted her father to be there for her.

They wrapped up the call, and she went to tuck Suzie in. As she thought might be the case, Suzie was already asleep, and it had only been ten minutes. She fixed the blankets and set her teddy under her arm and turned off the light. Tomorrow—heck, all tomorrows—might be a big day for her little big girl.

Chapter 12. Daddy's Little Girl

Suzie and her mom were waiting for her father at the gate to the local base. He was coming in on a military transport. The normal airports apparently didn't fly to where he was working, so he hitched a ride back on a returning C-130 cargo transport. They weren't first class, or even coach, but they weren't the worst way to fly. He brought some snacks and delighted himself in watching all of his daughter's videos and sharing them with others taking the same flight home for a quick vacation, or rotation out to a different assignment. They all delighted in the videos and news coverage, and a few were from his hometown, so they already knew of him, but didn't really know him. Seeing his daughter's fame made them all feel like family in a weird but natural sort of way. He said that his daughter would be there to greet him, and they could see for themselves.

At the base, Suzie and her mother watched the gate intently. He would appear at any moment, and Suzie would run screaming towards him like a daddy-seeking missile, arms flailing wildly. He would be there to catch her like a jet landing on an aircraft carrier, his arms wrapping around her like the catch wires grab the incoming plane. She was fascinated by airplanes and had watched all sorts of videos of airplanes doing airplane things. The aircraft carriers fascinated her most! She had been on one once, and it was as big as the whole world to her little five-year-old self.

She pretended to be an airplane coming in for a landing, even calling the ball to the tower in her final approach. No one had taught her this; she just sort of picked it up from watching footage of planes landing on aircraft carriers. Flight seemed to fascinate her, especially. She would spend hours sometimes watching things fly: birds, butterflies, insects, even the bugs around the lights at night. She wondered if they thought the light was the sun and they had flown to it. She wondered if they told their little bug friends about their journey to the sun at night when it was cool enough and close enough to touch. Their friends probably thought those bugs were weird. They probably thought that staying up past bedtime was a bad thing. To a six-year-old, bedtime was a big thing; it probably was to the bugs too, at least in her mind.

She saw a few people approaching the gate through cracks in the privacy fencing, but they weren't her dad. She heard a big plane coming in for a landing and thought maybe he was on that plane. She watched it approach as it circled to line up for the landing. She didn't know if her dad was on the plane or not, but she waved anyway. She didn't know that there weren't any windows to look out of on a cargo plane, but she also didn't quite grasp that she wasn't all that visible to anyone on the plane, even if there was a window to look out of. She was simply doing what seemed natural to do as a six-year-old girl waiting for her daddy to show up.

All of a sudden, as she was waving, someone picked her up from behind and growled a big, daddy-sounding growl. She squealed. Her mom squealed. Her dad squealed in the best little girl voice he could muster, but it still sounded like a deep daddy-squeal to her. She giggled as he threw her into the air and spun her halfway around to face him and caught her again. She put her arms straight out as she always did when he was tossing her. She loved the feeling of being weightless, and he would toss her as much as she cared to be tossed. But this time, instead of

grabbing her under her arms with his hands, he grabbed her and gave her a big, huge bear hug. He whispered to her, "I missed you so much!"

"I missed you too, Daddy!" she said, half-giggling and hugging him back as tight as she could around his neck.

He grunted the words, "When did you go and get so stronggggg..." As he pronounced the final word, he sounded as if he were being strangled, and she quickly let go. He held her back and looked at her. "Yup," he said, "that's the famous girl from the video!" He turned around to some guys loitering by the gate and shouted, "Hey guys, come check this out! It's the little girl from the video I showed you!"

As the men made their way over (a few accompanied by their wives and kids), he set her down. Immediately, the wives and kids saw who it was. They all came rushing over, the girls dragging their soldiers by the hand. "We were just telling them about you!" one of them exclaimed. "Yes, that's the girl we were telling you about, she's famous!" Everyone gathered around and talked about the fabulous things they had seen in the videos and on the news. Suzie took it all in with more maturity than her parents thought possible. She didn't seem to be phased by everyone's delight in her. It didn't seem to be going to her head; she just sort of seemed to be taking it as a matter of course. As if it were normal, and nothing worth getting excited about, even though most six-year-olds would be crawling out of their skin at the prospect of this sort of fame.

Suzie always had her clicker in her pocket; it was that sort of a keepsake for her. She would always have that specific clicker in her pocket. If she loaned it out, she made sure to get it back. It had a great deal of sentimental value to her. She had even watched a braiding video where someone braided something to the clicker where the hole was to attach something to it out of paracord. It was a fun craft that she also used to make a leash for Spike. It was black and white and it perfectly matched him. She pulled the clicker out by the paracord handle she had made, slipped it around her wrist, and tightened it up so it wouldn't fall off, but still loose enough that it fell into the proper spot in her hand that she could use it. If she let go of it, it didn't go anywhere. And if it was dangling, with a flick of her wrist, it would find itself in the proper spot in her hand. Then she simply had to orient it for her thumb to depress the clicker, and she was ready to go and asked, "Who wants to play The Clicker Game?"

"I do, I do," the other kids chimed in, and the other mothers got excited too. They hushed the men and pointed to the game that was beginning. Suzie played with each of the kids, and then she chose someone to click for her. The guys thought it was great, and everyone felt as if they had been treated to a special moment. Suzie's parents asked if everyone wanted to get pizza. The town had a great family-style pizza parlor that everyone loved. They all agreed and proceeded to the restaurant.

One of the servicemen was an MP, and he knew just who to call for security camera footage of the whole thing in the parking lot. On the way to dinner, he had called and said, "Hey, someone might want to review the footage of the parking lot over the last half an hour or so." He said into

the phone excitedly, "Trust me, just do it! No, it's not an emergency, but trust me, you want to see this!"

The local pizza parlor catered to a lot of different sorts of people, and there was a small bar in a sectioned-off area, but the big screen television in the bar could be seen from almost every part of the restaurant. They figured it drew people into the bar, and on this night, it did just that. Someone shouted as they were pointing in the direction of the bar, "We are on the news!" Everyone looked, and sure enough, there was the security camera footage of them in the parking lot. They all went into the bar and stared at the TV. The bartender had noticed and grabbed the remote to turn up the volume.

"...As we mentioned earlier, there was a treat for some soldiers returning home today. Right in the parking lot is our little Suzie giving them a warm welcome home." They cut to the security footage in full screen and finished their broadcast.

"You got to be the feel-good story again tonight, Suzie!" her mom exclaimed, eyeing her daughter proudly.

"Yaaay!" Suzie said, jumping up and down, clapping her hands. Afterwards, they went home and had a bit of dessert before settling in to really watch Suzie's videos as a family and talk about the fame that was starting to seem a bit inevitable at this point.

Suzie told her parents that she didn't mind the fame or the attention. She was afraid people wouldn't like the game or her training, and they loved it—that was all that mattered. People feel good when they all know someone famous. "I don't think I'm special, but a lot of people know who I am. I don't know them, and that is sort of weird, but if they like what I do, then I see no reason to not like them back. Their excitement is to me what the click is in the game. It is what makes me feel best. I don't get overly excited as maybe some would, but I don't really feel the need to. It is what it is, and I'm going to just keep playing my game, no matter how much people love it or me. I'm just going to do what I do."

Her mom chimed in at this point with, "My mother kept saying, 'Out of the mouths of babes,' and now I know just what she meant by that." "This little girl had some sense of logic that was a bit uncommon among children, yet, she viewed things in an overly simplistic way. There was some chance that this was all a fluke, and it might get more complicated at some point as realities hit home. Maybe it was beginner's luck, maybe it would fizzle, or her interest would fade. But whatever the outcome, I would support her daughter in her dreams however I could, and I would do my very best to protect her from the ugly side of fame that always seemed to find people of stature, if it went that way."

Her father told her how proud he was of her achievements, and he hoped that his mission would end soon so he could come and witness the birth of greatness! He sent her to get ready for bed and helped his wife clean the rest of the mess so they could all head for bed. It had been another busy day for everyone. "Want to play a quick round of the clicker game, dear?" he said to his wife with a smile and a wink.

"Is this new slang, or do you really want to play the game?" she asked with the same sly smile.

"Both," he said, the smile never leaving his face.

"YES!" was her only reply, and she handed him a plate with some warm pie with ice cream on it. "A special treat for my special soldier," she added. She thought that was the gist of it anyway; she hoped her timing had been right and he got the message that he did a good thing.

We won't discuss the details of what happened next, but the part we can discuss was the tucking in of an already asleep little Suzie. They both kissed her softly on the forehead and straightened her blankets, adjusted the teddy under her arm just so. She stirred a bit, and they left, turning off the light.

Chapter 13

Mom's birthday was only a few days away, and Suzie hadn't gotten her anything yet, she didn't really know what to get her, and she hoped her dad could help her find just the right thing. Her dad had found out from his wife that in no uncertain terms, Suzie would be getting a puppy for her upcoming birthday. "It would be her dog but Suzie would be forming a business to care for it for me, it will always be her dog, but for all intents and purposes it is mom's dog." Dad put up no arguments, knowing that to do so would be like losing WWII. Besides, he didn't hate dogs, he just didn't love dogs. He was fine with it given Suzie's emerging talents, he didn't think that the dog would prove to be problematic in any way. He only hoped Suzie didn't burn out on this talent of hers. She showed great promise.

Her dad had been home for a few days, he had loved watching her at the park playing her new game with the other kids. He did notice that all the clicking made for an interesting cacophony of noise. Other kids had acquired their own clickers and they all sounded just a bit different. There had to be a dozen or so going at any given time. The kids had spread out now, and were doing more of a pairing up sort of thing instead of the long lines of kids waiting. All of the kids had become proficient at the game very quickly. They would trade off playing each side and sometimes switch off from player to player.

Today, while at the park, a man approached Suzie's father. He had a large beautiful dog at his side and introduced himself as a local dog trainer who had seen Suzie on the news and wanted to see this spectacle for himself. He stressed how amazing this all was. "Do the adults ever play?" he had asked her father.

"I've never seen or even heard of an adult trying the game. her father replied."

"Time to change that!" the newcomer said as he walked towards a nearby picnic table and took off his backpack, setting it on the table. He then asked the large dog accompanying him to step up onto the table, he placed him in a down, set the leash on the table, held one hand up facing the dog as the other hand reached for a treat from a pouch at his hip, he extracted a morsel and gave it to the dog. He motioned one last time for the dog to stay with his open hand, added "Guard my pack" pointing to it, then he turned back to the people watching the kids play.

The kids had stopped as Suzie became distracted by the most beautiful dog she had ever seen. And so well behaved, he was just laying on the table watching his handler walk away, panting, but not in a nervous way, he looked totally calm and relaxed. As the man turned towards Suzie, she saw the dog place one of its paws on the backpack laying off to one side of him. The dog surveyed its surroundings and deemed everyone trustworthy for the moment and went back to watching the man. People didn't approach or otherwise disturb the waiting dog. A few moved away from the table.

As the man met Suzie's gaze, he said "His name is Frodo." Expecting that to be the question on her mind as she stared wide eyed at him. "He's a beautiful dog huh?" he added? She nodded in agreement, shifting her gaze to him. I've seen what you do on TV and had to come see it with my own eyes, this is really amazing, you made this game up all by yourself young lady?"

"Yessir!" Suzie confidently replied with a big grin.

"Have you ever played the game with a professional dog trainer?"

"No, are you a dog trainer?" Suzie asked, more excited.

"I am, and I want to play your clicker game with you and I hope you don't mind if I record it." he added pulling a small camera from his pocket.

"I don't mind sir, do you want to go first, or do you want me to go first?" Suzie asked ready to play. She was excited, she wanted to find a dog trainer in town, but one found her first. This was just what she wanted to try, seeing how a real dog trainer could do with the game. "Have you played before?" Suzie added. "Do you have a clicker, you can use mine." she offered as she held it out by her paracord wrist band.

"Only with dog's Suzie, I look forward to my first go at your Clicker Game with the inventor of the game herself. You've become quite the celebrity in the last week, and I feel honored to be in the presence of greatness, he bowed to her and she blushed and giggled a bit in her 6 year old little girl way. I have my own clicker though." he said pulling one out of his pocket with a different sort of something she couldn't quite make out tied to the clicker. "I would be honored if you would choose who goes first."

Suzie stopped to think about this choice for a minute, weighing both angles. If she went first, she might embarrass herself because this man was a professional. She felt a bit intimidated, but at the same time he had shown her so much respect with his compliments that she felt good about her achievements. She figured that if she went first, his clicker skills might teach her something, then she could let him go and feel more confident about it. "I'll go first if you please sir!" she said as she curtsied in response to his bow. The crowd chuckled and clapped.

"One thing before we start, I can tell your dad is in the military, all military children use the word "sir" a lot with their elders. Also his really short hair is a dead giveaway." At this some laughed

and looked at her dad, he smiled, but felt a bit embarrassed having been pointed out by this newcomer. "My name is Marcus Hunter, but my friends call me Marc, and I'd be honored if you called me that."

"Okay Marc." Suzie replied, "Should I start now?"

"Whenever you are ready young lady." he replied as readied his clicker in his hand. Suzie noticed a small ball protruding from the backside of his clenched fist, he was holding the part attached to the clicker as sort of a handle. She stuffed her clicker back into her pocket for now, leaving just a bit hanging out so she could get it back out later without having to reach all the way into her pocket for it. Marc was paying close attention to her and made a note of this.

He stood there calmly waiting for her to do something, she began looking around to think of something to do, as she gazed in a particular direction, she heard a click that was much faster sharper and definitely perfectly timed, so she moved that way and heard another, she reached out for the bar on the jungle gym that had come into her view first and another click. She thought it was too easy because the clicks were happening so fast, but she kept going, she reached for the bar above that one and got another click. She then pulled herself up onto the bar and got a click. She grabbed the next bar, but no click, she stood up on the bar she was on, but no click, she sat on the bar and got a click, she stood back up nothing, she hopped off the bar and heard a click, she grabbed the bar again and got another click, she let go of the bar and grabbed it again, no click, she pulled herself up again, click, she got onto the bar no click. She was getting confused now, she thought it would be easier than this, she was glad she let him click first, he had chosen a hard criteria. She got down to the ground again, and heard another click, she grabbed the bar and got a click, she pulled herself up and got a click, she let herself back down and got a click and a hearty "YES!". She had to do one pull up on the bar. All of this took less than 90 seconds. The crowd applauded and complimented her on her performance.

Suzie thought it should have been easier than she made it, but she did learn something along the way and she knew how she would set the criteria up for him. She wasn't sure what to do before now, but had just the right thing. She was having a hard time seeing all of the steps, this was more than she had ever expected of anyone, but she hoped it would all work out.

"That was fun!" she almost yelled. "Your turn, and I'm ready whenever you are.", she went to pull out her clicker but the end had fallen into her pocket, so she reached in and dug it out, at this, Marc let his clicker fall just enough to catch it by the round part which had been protruding from the back of his hand before. He showed it to her now and it indeed looked like a small handle, but the end had a round piece that she found fascinating. He handed it to her and she noted it was made of the same stuff hers was, and questioned him how he made the round part. She had seen the braid before in a video, but this was the first time she had ever seen a monkey's fist.

He responded "I'll tell you all about it when we are done, and I'd like to check out yours too, I see how it hangs there when you let go of it and then flip it back into your hand when you need it and that is really cool, the round part at the end of mine keeps the end from dropping into my pocket like yours did, we can add one of these to yours real easy and then you won't have that problem."

Suzie got her clicker ready and waited. All of 2 minutes had passed since they started. To the onlookers, it was a fast paced puzzle of behaviors and clicks.

"Wow, you did really well there, and you kept ahead of my ability to keep up with the behaviors you offered. You are a real Border Collie of a little girl, that's for sure!".

Suzie seemed a bit puzzled by this comment, but paid it no mind, she glanced at her father who was grinning ear to ear, she hadn't seen that on his face for a long time. She also noticed mom had finished her chores and was standing next to him grinning as broadly.

They had some words this morning, mom had been putting off critical household things that needed to be done and dad needed to take Suzie to the park today and get some one on one time with his daughter.

Suzie waved and yelled "Hi mommy!". Her mom waved back and she noticed Marc had begun offering behaviors, but none were in the direction of her criteria. He kept touching things on the play equipment, he wasn't giving her anything she could click until he looked at her wondering why she hadn't clicked. She clicked the moment their eyes met. He stopped focusing on the play equipment recognizing he wasn't able to predict this little six year old and that the criteria could be anything. He started walking in a circle, this was a good tactic, because as soon as he was facing the direction of the criteria, Suzie clicked. What he faced when she clicked was his dog, that made sense. He walked towards his dog and got a few clicks along the way, he gave his dog a pet on the head, no click, he ran his hand down his neck, got a click as soon as his hand reached the collar, at this moment he got the jist and grabbed the leash, he got a click, but no yes, he led the dog off the table and got a click, he walked towards Suzie and got a few clicks along the way, he arrived at Suzie and stood there for a second, realizing there was more to the task as he had received no clicks, he looked at his dog and got a click, he said the dogs name and got no click, but did get his dog's attention, he asked for a sit and got a click, but again no yes, he asked Suzie if she would like to meet his dog and she clicked as she half shouted "YES!!!". Everyone laughed and began clapping.

He looked back to Frodo and said "Friend, go say hi." as he moved his gaze to Suzie. She held her hand out palm up, below the level of Frodo's chin, which to her seemed the natural way to greet a dog. When Frodo heard the cue, he dropped his ears, turned towards Suzie and stood up, his back slightly arched, head down a bit and tail wagging loosely. He sniffed her hand and then, moved to sniff her face since it was so nice and close to the ground, at this she giggled and reached up to pet him behind the ears. His ears pricked straight up, his tail wagged a bit

faster and he licked her all the way from her chin to her forehead. Suzie giggled some more and used her sleeve to wipe the slobber from her face.

Everyone laughed and clapped.

Suzie was once again on cloud 9. Off in the distance was a news camera van, the crew was just getting back into the van and no one had even noticed that they had arrived, filmed, and quietly left. Marc had told him he was going to do this and let them know in advance when he would be there in case they wanted to get some footage, he hoped they wouldn't disturb the moment by letting their presence be known. He would be in after for a full interview if they wanted one. His phone buzzed just as he noticed the van driving off, he smiled and checked his phone. Sure enough, the crew had phoned the producer and the producer wanted an interview before the nightly news broadcast. He responded that he would be there straight away, bid everyone a farewell, and as he left, he grabbed his small camera and said not jokingly at all that they might make sure to catch the local news tonight. They all laughed at this because every night the news had said something about this local phenomenon. Tonight would be special.

He grabbed his backpack from the table and walked towards his car. The people in the park were talking amongst themselves about the thing they just witnessed. Suzie and her parents snuck off and made their way home. Another busy day, and another tired little girl. They only let her watch the early version of the news, but they recorded it so she could watch it over and over. Marc had appeared in an interview describing what was actually happening in the fast paced run that Suzie had, and the genius of the criteria she had selected for him and her expertise in using a clicker. He offered her an internship at his dog training center whenever she wanted it. She was considered an associate and could train dogs at the center if she wanted to free of charge, and maybe one day offer some classes. That was as long as her parents agreed to it. He was happy to work with the world's youngest dog trainer, he felt honored to have met her and looked forward to what she might be capable of as her skills progressed, and her skills already rivaled his with clicker mechanics and basic learning principle comprehension. He joked that he almost felt as if he should be her apprentice. He closed by stating that he joked in his classes that the basics of training are so incredibly basic and simple that they can be understood by any six year old, we make it more complicated than it really is, and then this little six year old comes along and punctuates my point. She gets it, it really is that simple. We can learn a lot from this shining star!".

The next day Suzie was the talk of the town and a few days later, almost everyone in the world had met Little Suzie. Her mom had ordered 100 box clickers with the words Little Suzie on the back for her to pass out to people as she saw fit.

Her birthday was a couple days out and she was getting presents for her daughter. She didn't even care if she got any other gifts this year, Suzie's passion and the puppy coming was all she wanted for her birthday besides her husband at home and her mom visiting. She had a unique situation in that her mom loved her son and showed him lots of respect. He felt the same, and that made her life perfect and complete.

Chapter 14. Hanging Out with Daddy.

Suzie's mom thought it was time for a break from Suzie going to the park. She had let a few of the moms know that she wouldn't be there today, and they said everyone would miss her, but they understood. They told her the community had planned a get-together at the park this weekend for her birthday and asked when the best time might be. She replied that wasn't necessary, but would get back to them when she knew what the weekend looked like.

Suzie and her dad were taking a short trip today to the lake, some distance out of town. It was a weekday, so there wouldn't be many people there, and they could have a nice, quiet day together hiking and observing nature to give her mind a break from everything that had been happening so fast. They walked around the lake and talked about all the things happening in Suzie's life, how things might change for her. He was trying to prepare her six-year-old mind for potential fame. He told her, "Some people don't like it when others are successful. It doesn't happen much with kids, but as people get older, they begin to envy the success of others. They do mean things to break you down and hurt your feelings. I want you to know that when strangers do this to you, they don't know what they are doing, and you should ignore them and forgive them for yourself. They will do what they do, but you shouldn't let it affect you. Do you understand, Little Suzie?"

"I think so, Daddy," Suzie replied.

"If people are mean to you, find me or Mommy, and we will help you. How do you deal with a dog when it does something you don't want it to?" he asked Suzie.

"I will ignore it if I can, Daddy," Suzie replied.

"That is the best thing to do in this case, too, I think."

"Let's head home, it's getting late, and we don't want to keep Mom waiting if she has dinner prepared now, do we?"

"No, Daddy, we don't want to keep Mommy waiting!"

As they were driving back, her father had made a left-hand turn, then signaled to get into the right lane. He waited for a few flashes of the signal and its clicker-like ticking sound, then moved into the right lane. Immediately, the cabin was filled with red and blue lights. He was being pulled over by the town's police. He found a safe spot and pulled to the side of the road. He rolled down his window, wondering why on earth he was being pulled over. He began gathering his paperwork to give to the officer.

The officer introduced himself. He stated he worked for the township police force and said, matter-of-factly, that he bet her daddy didn't know why he had been pulled over, to which her daddy said he didn't. At this moment, the officer took a good look at Suzie in the back seat and pointed to her, looking back at her dad, and said, "Is that who I think it is? Oh, the boys back at the precinct are not going to believe this! I almost don't believe it myself!"

"Believe what?" her dad asked.

"I'm guessing you caught the news last night. Marc mentioned the idea of positive reinforcement as a component of this clicker game, then used a traffic stop as an example. He said, 'What would happen if instead of punishing bad drivers, we rewarded good drivers? People think they might get a reward for driving well and subsequently put forth a greater effort at being a good driver.' He added this would have a noticeable side effect of helping the bad drivers stand out to the officers. The chief loved the idea and implemented it just this morning, but most of the guys thought it was dumb, so they aren't taking it seriously. I thought it was a novel idea and am anxious to see how it plays out. So, you, sir, get the first good driver ticket issued, and that just seems so right to me. Here is your ticket. Present it at city hall to receive your reward, and here is a magnet to let others know to beware of you because you're a safe driver." He slapped a magnet on the fender of the car, tipped his hat, said, "Pleasure to meet you, young lady," and headed back to his car. He reappeared a moment later with his phone in his hand and asked if they minded if he got a quick selfie with the little star. They obliged, and he took a few selfies, pointing into the car where some funny faces might have been made for a few of the shots. He bid them good day for a second time and headed back to his car. He reappeared again and mentioned that his chief would likely go to the news station with this and to expect some more coverage.

As her dad drove away, he couldn't help but think that they couldn't try to contain this at this point; it had taken on a life of its own. Suzie and her father both had yet to get anything for her mom's birthday, but it was late, and they were definitely going to miss making it in time for dinner. But she was understanding as she turned on the TV to the news station, just in time to see the chief of police announcing their new program and the coverage of her dad getting the first good driver ticket. It included all of the selfies the officer took—the goofy-faced ones even. They all laughed when those were displayed.

There was one more day until Mom's birthday, and Grandma would be coming tomorrow, too. She couldn't wait for that. She missed Spike terribly and hoped Grandma had kept up with his tricks. No matter, she had thought up so many tricks to teach him. She knew she would only get to a few over the weekend. She couldn't wait till tomorrow!

Chapter 15. Mommy's Big Day

The big day came, and Suzie's mom turned her phone off. It had been making noise all morning; everyone was congratulating her on making the news every night that week. They all wished her a happy birthday. Everyone knew about it because of the party in the park. She had decided that Saturday would be the best day for it; it was her actual birthday, and she sort of wanted to get it over with. That would leave her a day with her husband before he had to return to duty. He had tried to extend his leave, but his commander needed him on a mission; his absence was going to hold up a bigger mission if he didn't return. Suzie was sad he couldn't stay longer, but understood the importance of his work to a lot of people in faraway places. Grandma had appeared after Suzie fell asleep. She was sad she didn't get to see her granddaughter when she arrived, but knew Suzie would be there in the morning, and so would Spike. That made it hard to sleep, but the busyness of the previous week had helped her overcome it.

When she awoke in the morning, it was to Spike licking her face. She began to cover her face and giggle. "Spike!" She grabbed and hugged him. He had gotten just a little bit bigger. They went outside, and she made sure Spike had everything he needed. She went back inside and saw her grandma for the first time. "Gramma!" she yelled as she ran towards her for a big bear hug. "Thanks for coming and bringing Spike! I am so happy to see you both!"

Grandma reached into her pocket and produced a cookie in a Ziploc baggie. As soon as Suzie saw it, she yelled, "Cookie!" and reached for it.

"Spike is all taken care of?" Grandma asked her.

"Of course, Gramma," Suzie said, jumping for the cookie Grandma was holding just out of reach of her jumps.

Mom, just noticing the prize, said somewhat scoldingly, "Mother! Cookies before breakfast? I never got away with that at the age of six!"

"When Suzie has a six-year-old child, you get to do it then, and you definitely shouldn't be allowing her to have cookies before breakfast. But grandmothers have special powers when it comes to their grandchildren. Don't let that spoil your breakfast, Little Suzie," she said with a smile as she lowered it enough for her to grab the next jump.

"I won't, Gramma," Suzie promised as she took a big bite out of it and smiled broadly, showing cookie crumbs and chocolate chips stuck to her teeth. Her mom gave her grandmother a funny look, and Grandmother just smiled and said, "Sorry, dear, it couldn't be helped. You should probably just ignore my bad behavior." They both laughed at this and finished preparing breakfast.

Chapter 15. Mommy's Big Day.

"Where's Daddy?" piped Suzie.

"He has some things to do for me this morning. He will meet us later at the park. We need to be there by ten, and it's almost nine. You had better get moving. Spike is fine outside for now. Go get cleaned up so I can feed you some proper breakfast." Grandma began setting the table for breakfast and took a moment to turn her daughter in the direction of the bathroom, giving her a push in that direction, then making a click sound with her mouth, emulating the sound of a clicker.

"You owe me a treat for that, Mom!" she heard Suzie shout from the bathroom.

"She's got you there, dear," Grandma said, pulling a bigger bag of cookies from her other pocket and setting them on the counter. "Suzie snacks." They both laughed as the cookies got moved to an upper cupboard, out of sight and mind. Then they finished setting the table for breakfast.

Spike's brother was with her husband. It was hard to keep Suzie from finding out about it if he was anywhere around the house. The shy puppy preferred being in a kennel and didn't mind riding in the car at all. Grandma had shown him how to open the windows just a few inches and mentioned to park in a shady spot and not leave him for too long alone. She also gave him a bag of treats and instructed him to pop one into the kennel periodically. He had left with his instructions to parts unknown.

They drove to the park instead of walking; there was a lot of stuff that had to be taken: Mom's gifts, her trick props, food, and the birthday cake. It was going to be a regular picnic, show, and party with the whole neighborhood. It was a potluck sort of party, so picnic tables had been moved together, end to end. Someone brought tablecloths, and they were taped down so the wind wouldn't move them around. The food had been put at one side, and at the other end was the pile of presents. Apparently, most everyone had brought one, even though Mom had insisted that she preferred no presents; there they were, anyway.

Everything was set up, and Suzie had staked out a spot to do a little show with Spike. She had been able to see what he remembered learning almost a month ago, and he hadn't forgotten any of it. She had set up an area with what looked like some of her toys: a step stool, a little piano, and what looked like a wand and top hat a magician might use. A few of the boys had skateboards, and one had been borrowed and was sitting with the other things. Suzie had never taught a dog how to ride a skateboard, but she had watched some videos and knew that Spike would pick right up on it. Her demonstration included teaching Spike something that he had never learned, and this would work well.

Chapter 16. The Drone Pilot.

One of the skateboard boys sat at a picnic table off at a distance. He had a bulging backpack, and he began to unpack it, pulling out various colored protective cases one by one. He attached some antennas to some goggles and set a remote controller to one side. He attached a battery to the goggles and set them on his head, but not over his eyes, up on his forehead. Then he reached for a smaller protective case, opened it, and pulled out something that looked like a metal X with little propellers on each corner. A canopy in the middle held a camera, and Suzie wondered what he was going to do with these things. He reached into another bag and pulled out a small battery, affixed it to the little X with some bands, and plugged in a wire. All of a sudden, the thing beeped a few tones, and he set it down. He pulled the goggles over his eyes and grabbed for the remote that he couldn't see because of the goggles. Suzie chuckled at this. Then he found it and flipped a switch on the controller, and the propellers on the thing began spinning. It darted into the air, and she stood there amazed as it flipped and swooped and darted all over the sky. After about three minutes, the little drone went back to the table it took off from and landed with a few odd bounces. He flipped the switch back, and the little drone died. He raised his goggles and found himself looking at Suzie.

"That was amazing! How does it work?" Suzie asked excitedly.

"You are the girl from the news, huh? With that Clicker Game thing?" he asked, sounding a bit annoyed.

Suzie wasn't expecting him to be so gruff. "Yes," she replied somewhat timidly.

He had been changing the battery on the drone for a fresh one, and as he connected it, it made the same beeps it had made before. He set the drone down on the table, facing towards her. She only wanted to know more about this fascinating flying machine and how it worked. He pulled the goggles down over his eyes and said, "It looks like a dumb game to me. Excuse me, but I'm trying to fly here. Do you mind stepping away? I don't think this little drone could hurt you, but I don't want to take any chances." He could see her through the camera on the drone. She was looking straight at it, and he noticed her fist come up and wipe her eye as she turned to run back to her dad. He felt a twinge of guilt for making her cry; he didn't mean to do that. He was flying now, and the guilt faded as he got into his flying zone. He had spent a lot of time getting really good at this game; it was the only one he cared about. He had started on the computer, and getting this real drone was a lot of hard work. He had to earn a lot of money because they were hundreds of dollars. His first one had crashed and broke, so he had to save for another one. He had done a lot of yard work, and every battery pack he burned through, it made it all worth it. He loved tuning out the world from his normal senses and rising above it all inside the little toy drone. When the goggles came down and he saw the word "ARMED" appear on the screen, the rest of the world didn't matter.

He was flying around and surveying the crowd from a safe distance when someone broke from the crowd and began walking towards him. It was the girl's father, and he didn't look happy. He kept flying and practicing his freestyle moves—"Tricks," he called them. His drone was one of

the cheapest, smallest drones available. The camera wasn't the best; it was pretty good, but small and grainy. The goggles were the box type, so it could be hard to see things clearly. The fisheye nature of the lens also made things seem much farther away than they really were. He sort of stopped doing so many flips and crazy flying to focus more on some slow freestyle moves that kept the drone facing in the general direction of himself and the approaching person. He thought the father might try to interfere with him, but he knew that if anyone touched him in any way, they would get into all sorts of trouble. So he merely kept his drone over the grass, doing slow rolls that kept him in sight. He had been flying closer to the ground, just in case the man decided to pull his goggles off. He didn't want to break anything if he had to disarm the drone before he could safely land, and it had to crash to the ground. He was learning how to repair them, but it was a lot of frustrating hard work.

The man walked up to the table, observed him for a moment, watched the drone flying for another moment, then sat clear at the other end of the table, watching the little drone. He was going to wait; that was respectable. He would defer to the man. He carefully brought his drone in for a perfect landing directly in front of him. He disarmed it and reached up to remove the goggles from his face and looked at Suzie's father, who had a bit of a sour look. He just sat there not saying anything. Tommie piped up first, "Sorry for making your daughter cry," he confessed. "I didn't mean to, and I spoke without thinking. I'd be happy to apologize to her."

"That would be great. I appreciate your candor. She only wanted to know more about this fascinating contraption. Since she was just a baby, she has had an obvious fascination with all things that fly. Even the birds. You see through the goggles what the camera sees, so basically it's just like being inside the thing?" he asked, looking the drone over.

"Yes, these aren't the best sort of goggles, but I have two pairs. I'll go for another flight, and you can watch." He produced another set of goggles and removed the screen. He powered it on and handed it to Suzie's father. The screen was separate from the goggles; that was genius, Suzie's father thought to himself as he looked it over.

"Wait, let me see that for a second," he quipped, taking it back. He checked for an SD card and pressed another button. A red dot appeared in one corner, and he handed it back. The drone was powered up. He grabbed the controller and lowered the goggles. He armed the drone and entered his own world. He used to have people watching him fly all the time, but since Suzie got back, everyone was playing her new game that wasn't really dumb. He just didn't like that it took all the attention he used to get away.

He flew around and did some fancy upside-down maneuvers that always garnered some positive remarks from his friends—"wows" and "how'd you do that?" and all sorts of things that made him feel good. He loved flying, but sometimes he felt as if he loved the adulation the flying got him just a little bit more than the flying itself. He had noticed this in the absence of all the positive reinforcement those comments gave him. He had at least one person who was watching, and the "wows" and "how'd you do that's" started up again. He felt the happiness he had been missing and really poured it on. As he made a slow dive into a canopy of trees, he noticed a figure walking beneath the canopy, so he aborted his dive and came around the front

to see who it was. He noticed the uniform and immediately dived for the person. It was the POPO, the coppers—also, his dad. He flew a circle around his dad and saw him grasping for the drone just out of reach. He never flew too close to people, even with this small, light drone that probably couldn't hurt you even if it tried as hard as it could. His dad waved, and he could hear him comment on how good he was getting. He turned towards the table he was flying from and noticed that Suzie was sitting on her dad's lap, and the whole crowd was commenting on his performance. He had paid no attention to what was really going on around him; that happened most of the time he flew. He was surprised he hadn't noticed it while flying, but then remembered he was pouring it on and hadn't bothered to look in on his surroundings. His father had always told him, "You have air superiority. If someone sneaks up on you, you have my permission to test just how much this thing can't hurt someone by ramming them in the face. I will give you some qualified immunity for that."

He was really good about maintaining a good awareness of everything going on on the ground for safety reasons. There were no regulations for toy drones, so he wasn't required to, but his father had always taught him that if you do stupid things, it helps to create stupid laws, and stupid laws make his job more difficult. He didn't want to have to hassle kids for flying drones, so he needed to be a model example of a professional pilot. He was too young to get an FCC license, so he simply studied it and passed enough practice tests to satisfy his dad.

He flew towards the waiting crowd. As soon as Suzie had pulled her mom over to see what her dad was watching, everyone naturally followed. Her dad had shushed her and then waved her over as soon as he had taken off. Everyone noticed the shushing and kept quiet. Eventually, they began letting out quiet "wows" and "how'd he do that" that steadily got louder and louder. He seemed oblivious to it, simply smiling in response to each. He had only used about half of his battery and was about to do some more tricks, but heard a helicopter flying above them. His dad always told him to defer to real aircraft, so he headed back to land. But his father had sat down in front of his landing pad.

His father saw what he was doing and said, "You have my permission to safely get some footage of that helicopter if you can, and the crowd. Just fly where you know the helicopter can't. Stay below it and away from directly underneath it."

He could do that easily. He had done some chasing in his game. He checked the battery; it wasn't down to very low levels yet. He flew away from the area opposite the helicopter, got behind the crowd, and flew in from that angle, panning around the side of the crowd without flying directly over them, but keeping them in frame. He kept flying sideways until the helicopter came into view. He flew around the side of where the helicopter was, orbiting it from below. He couldn't help but toss in a few flips and rolls. He was, after all, flying some freestyle, and he knew it wouldn't affect the safety. He was still a long way from the helicopter. He flew sideways around the chopper, keeping it directly in the center, as he came around behind, then the other side to the front. He turned back towards the crowd and flew an orbit around them back the way he had come. It looked very cinematic considering the poor quality nature of the footage the goggles were getting. It had the feel of a 60's TV set just out of good reception range.

He then maneuvered for a landing. His battery was on the verge of dying, and he didn't want it falling out of the sky on anyone's head. He had never done what he was about to do except in the simulator, but as he approached the landing site, he saw his dad in the way. He had bent down for a second to tie his shoe, and he popped up right in front of his landing path. He hit the gas, flipped the drone over, upside down, into a sort of a sideways split S maneuver, then right side up, facing the other way, and lowered the drone to nail the landing on the table where it had taken off from. Three seconds later, the drone shut off as the battery gave up all the juice it could.

He lifted the goggles from his eyes to his forehead and asked for the screen Suzie and her parents were watching on, tapped a button on the side, and the red dot went away. The helicopter circled the park and then flew off. He disconnected his equipment and stowed everything in its protective case, then put all of that into the backpack.

"I'll be wanting that SD card for evidence," Timie's father said as he held out his hand. Timmie pulled the chip out of the screen, put it in a case, and handed it to his father, who slid it into a shirt pocket. He then turned to Suzie and said, "It was so nice to meet you the other day. I hope you don't mind. I shared all of the pictures with the TV people."

"I didn't. I thought they were funny," replied Suzie with a slight giggle.

"I'm glad. I see you have met my son. He's a pretty good pilot, huh?"

"He is fabulous!" Suzie exclaimed.

Tommie piped up and said, "Sorry for what I said earlier. I didn't mean it, and I spoke without thinking. I'd be happy to apologize to her."

Chapter 17. The Big Reveal.

Tommie piped up and said, "Sorry for what I said earlier. I didn't mean it, and I would like to hear more about your game. I haven't played it yet, so I really shouldn't judge it so harshly. Will you show me how to play your game?"

Suzie forgot all about whatever he had said before. She said that she would be happy to, but only if he would teach her how to fly. He said he couldn't guarantee anything, but he would be happy to try.

"Deal! Want to play now?" she asked excitedly.

"Sure," he said. "How do you play?"

"Well, instead of telling you, how about we have someone play, and I'll explain as they go," Suzie suggested. "Any volunteers?" she added.

At this, every child's hand went into the air. Suzie picked two competent players who played pretty slowly so she could keep up with the explanation. He seemed to grasp it, so they started. He did pretty well for his first try. Then he wanted to use the clicker, so she had him practice with her so his timing wouldn't be too far off. He did good at this part too, and said he was wrong, adding, "It's actually a pretty cool game." He remembered he had one more charged battery left and asked if she wanted to pretend to fly the drone. She squealed with delight. He set it up so they both wore goggles, and he sat sideways on the picnic table bench so she could sit in front of him. He held the controls, and she had her thumbs right on top of his. It was an imperfect match because her hands were still too small to really work a controller. Her reflexes probably had some maturing to do before she could get really good at it, but if she started at six, how good might she be by the age of twelve? He worked the thumb sticks, and her thumbs followed along without adding any input. For a moment, Suzie felt as if she were really flying the thing. It was amazing!

"That was the most amazing thing ever!" she exclaimed as Spike jumped on her lap and began licking her face. He did this sort of thing when she got overly excited. "Oh my! I forgot all about Mommy's birthday! I have a show to do! Do you want to watch me and Spike do some tricks, Tommie?"

"Sure, just let me put my stuff away, and I'll be right there."

Suzie ran off with Spike in tow to do a little practice on the props before starting her demonstration while people situated themselves. Marc showed up at this point and set up his little camera in a good spot to catch all the action. His dog wasn't with him today, and in the distance, reporters' cameras were pointed towards the action. The helicopter had begun heading back to the park, but would keep a greater distance this time. There were vans for every major station in the area, and no one had really noticed, given all the stuff happening.

Suzie's mom was glad that all of the festivities were taking attention away from her birthday. She was approaching that age where women generally want to forget about birthdays. The big party went against every grain in the fiber of her being, but she was doing it for the sake of her daughter. She was extremely happy her daughter was distracting from the stated purpose of the gathering.

She began with all of the easy stuff Spike knew the best and worked towards the harder stuff. Everyone was amazed at all the tricks he knew. He could do so many neat tricks. She ended with the teaching of the skateboard trick. Up to this point, she hadn't used a clicker, and as she pointed it out, people noticed she hadn't. She said the clicker was just for teaching the trick; once the trick is taught, you don't need it anymore. She then showed how she would play the exact same game with the dog that she played with the kids. The dog responded much the same as the kids did while playing. Eventually, he had two front feet on the board and was pushing with his back feet. Then he popped one of those feet on the board and heard a click, then another click for each time he pushed with the other foot. He carried this on for a bit, and then she threw a handful of treats on the ground for him to find. He jumped off the front of the skateboard, and it shot backward from under him.

The crowd went wild! The helicopter had come closer for better footage of the last part, and the film crews began tearing down to get their footage back to the studio in time to air on the early news. Guaranteed, it would be the first story this time, and not the last. Marc scooped up his little camera, handed a wrapped box to her mother, and smiled at her dad. He walked past the Deputy who handed him a small SD card as he passed. He got into his car and headed to the local TV station for his next interview about Suzie with his extra footage.

It was time for the real party to begin, and Suzie was collecting up her props to put into the car for safekeeping. The people who had brought gifts were gathered around the pile, and her mom was sitting in front of it, Grandma and Daddy off to the side. A special gift was beneath the table that no one had seen yet. Spike knew what was there, and crept under the tablecloth to nap next to his brother, hidden inside the little dog carrier. They both slept quietly while Mom opened all of her gifts to the delight of the watching people. At the very end, Grandma stood up and proclaimed that there was yet one more gift to give. She reached under the table and pulled out the kennel. She took it to Suzie's mother, who opened the end of it and said, "A puppy, for me? But I don't want to care for a dog. Why are you giving me this puppy as a present? It should be Suzie's puppy."

"You silly girl, Suzie isn't old enough for a puppy. You have to be the owner of the puppy, but you could hire Suzie to train and care for your puppy. If you are lucky, the puppy will choose her instead of you, but your puppy it is till then."

Suzie's mom looked at her and asked, "Is that okay with you, sweetie?" she asked, holding the puppy a bit awkwardly.

Suzie had been a little sad seeing the puppy was for her mom, but this changed things. "Sure, Mommy, I'll do my very best!"

"I know you will, dear. I wouldn't want a puppy any other way." She held the puppy out for Suzie to take, and Suzie walked around the table and took the little puppy from her mother.

At this, her grandmother piped up, "He is a bit more shy than his brother, but I think you will pull him out of his shell." The puppy was incessantly licking Suzie's face by this point. "It looks as if you have a good start already."

"Thanks, Mom," Suzie's mother said as she gave Grandma a hug.

"What are grandmas for, if not to spoil their grandchildren who show great responsibility?" she said, looking proudly at the little cookie monster cuddling the new puppy. "What are you going to name him, dear?" she asked her daughter.

"I think I'll let the master puppy namer name him. How about it, Suzie, what is my puppy's name?"

"Spot, Mommy! His name is Spot!" Then she ran off with Spike and Spot to romp around in the grass away from the crowd.

Grandma hadn't seen Spot act so unreserved the whole time she had him; he was exactly where he needed to be. She hugged her kids as they all watched Suzie play with the puppies.

Epilogue

The next day was spent with the family. It had been a very busy week for everyone. Grandma had left in the early afternoon, leaving Spot and taking Spike. Suzie began training Spot and found that her grandmother had already started him on almost all of the things that she had taught Spike. She said that Spot had seemed to learn from what Spike knew, and either he was a smarter dog, or just did what he saw his brother doing. He seemed to learn easier than Spike had. She had one other thing to do before she could leave: she needed to collect her Sara Carson book back; she wanted to start teaching Spike the rest of the tricks in it. Suzie brought the book out looking a bit sad, but as she handed it to her grandmother, she noticed her grandmother holding another one out to her. "Open it," she said.

Suzie opened the cover, and inside, Sara had signed it and added some other words. She asked what it said, and her grandmother motioned that her mother should read it to her. Suzie held it up to her mother, but wouldn't let go of it. Her mother bent to see better, and said, "To my favorite junior dog trainer, just keep doing what you are doing and fame will find you." To this, they all chuckled; this had already come true. Her mother continued, "I hope to meet you someday. I love your new game, I play it with all my friends. Take care, Love Sara Carson." It also had a little footprint and it said "Hero" next to it.

"Hero signed it too! Super awesome!" and she began jumping up and down. Grandma gave her a hug goodbye, hugged her parents, and bid them farewell. On the way out of town, Tommie's father pulled her over and gave her a good driver ticket. But since she was from out of town, he gave her a choice of gift cards for places where she lived. The police department had purchased local business \$5 gift cards that helped local businesses from the initial business card purchase and any subsequent money spent when they cashed in the card. It made a noticeable economic difference for those small businesses, as well as greatly decreasing the number of accidents throughout town. People were driving safely because everyone had either been cited for driving good, or had heard of someone who had. The police were spending more time writing good driving citations than bad ones. One person on the city council had issues with the expense, but somehow the numbers kept showing that the program was actually saving money by clearing the courts of traffic issues and creating more efficiency throughout the system; the loss of revenue wasn't even missed. People were happier, police were more respected, and the police chief was promoted to mayor when the next election came around. He appointed Tommy's dad as police chief for doing such a good job of getting his coworkers to get on the good driver bandwagon.

All of the news networks covered the event, and the drone footage of the helicopter was even used. The FAA took issue with it, but when it was explained that the pilot's father was a police officer and told the boy to do it safely, he observed and provided line-of-sight piloting for his son. He had acquired the FAA certificate that allowed his son to sell his videos, or make money with them on the internet. He would be starting his own little content creator business. The news station occasionally hired him for special footage of local news-worthy things they wanted aerial footage of; his father always accompanied him as the pilot for the mission. For this, they had purchased an expensive drone that tracked people and flew some kilometers distant with

perfectly clear video. He was even teaching the kids how to fly their own toy drones. Suzie was showing great proficiency; she really knew how to learn. His timely encouragement and suggestions were helpful, but the best reinforcer for her was his compliments when she did something just right. One day she pointed out how that dynamic was just like clicker training. Just the compliment was the marker and the reward.

He agreed with her and added that when he had noticed that it was the day of her mother's birthday. Remembering what he had said and her crying always made him feel bad and as always he apologized again; he had almost every time he saw her. It was getting old, she said, "I forgive you, I know you didn't mean it, and you've more than made up for it, please forget it ever happened." That made him feel better about the mistake, and he gave her a quick hug and thanked her. "I'm glad we've become friends."

The FAA realized that it was all on the up and up, and let the charges drop. They had taken issue with the news channels broadcasting it and the YouTube videos making money off of it; they had strict rules about making money without their certificates and authorizations. Tommie was promised as soon as he was of the proper age, his father would help him study for the test, and pay for it. Till then, he must have his father present for any video footage that would be used commercially. His father also decided to learn how to fly, but he was much, much slower at picking it up than Suzie was.

The news channel which interviewed Marc interviewed him again, and the segments from the interview went into the national footage. He had garnered just a bit of fame from this all as well; it definitely saw a bump in his business. He helped her set up classes for the other kids and paid her portion of the fees to her parents to give her as they saw fit. They put it all into savings except for enough to buy her and Tommy matching freestyle drones. He recommended the Emax Tinyhawk II Freestyle. That would be just what they need. They were a bit concerned about the size of that for Suzie, and asked about something smaller. He looked a bit and found the new Nanohawk X that was slightly larger but looked smaller. It was much lighter and used only one battery; that was probably the better option for her, he agreed. He used them both to make a review/comparison video for his channel, and she got to be in the video as well. They did a mock race that she won because he let her, then they chased one another for a few minutes and finished with their own little freestyle trick routines. She was almost as good at this as he was by now; he wished he had started at six; he would be a pro by now. He envied her for the ability to learn so easily. He wondered how her teachers would handle this. He was in sixth grade and remembered how first-grade teachers could be, especially with the smarter kids. He would keep an eye on her. They would be in the same school for a few years. She was already well known and liked by the other kids. He didn't think anyone would mess with her, but a few kids were part of a group that tended to get into some trouble. She might stand out to them as prey, being one of the smart kids, and he didn't want to think too much about how that might play out. Smart kids seemed to get picked on the most for some reason. They were like bully bait. He would protect her if it came to that, though; he knew a few things about defending himself. His father had taught him defensive police moves and had enrolled him into martial arts classes. He hoped he never had to use those skills, but was confident that he could if need be.

Suzie's dad returned to his mission and basically saved the world from all sorts of bad stuff that ended up not happening because of his specialized skills, behind the scenes without any fanfare. He was cool with that; let his daughter be the famous one, he was just fine with that too. He came home and changed departments so his family wouldn't have to leave this base, and he no longer had to go on overseas missions. He became the commander of that department with his next promotion, and his future was settled until he retired. He loved this community, and everyone in the community loved them. Going anywhere else seemed like a really dumb move. The command knew what he had accomplished, and he basically got to write his own orders for the duration of his career. Those orders would always order him to stay right here.

He and his daughter joined Tommy and his father at the local Dojo for martial arts training; their families became very close, and they all spent a lot of time together.

Grandma and Spike visited often, and she would visit grandmother as much as possible. She and Spike and Spot formulated an elaborate trick routine that always amazed anyone watching and the rest of the world the following day, much like some of Sara's videos had. She even got to meet Sara and Hero, and the whole Supercollie gang, one of which was a very well-trained cat. They had come in an RV for a whole weekend to do a workshop at Marc's training center, and she and Spot and her grandmother and Spike got to attend as special guests. It was the most fun she ever had, which was saying a lot! Hanging out with Sara was the best part; she was full of encouragement and support for this very young and very talented dog trainer. She hoped one day she would be able to attend one of Suzie's workshops. As Suzie was hugging Hero goodbye, Sara presented her with a hat, the winter kind. It was a white hat with black paw prints all around the edge and a black ball on top. "My good friend in Canada makes these special paw print hats, but only for special people. The paw print is Hero's paw." Sara handed her the hat, and she looked at it in awe. She put it on her head and gave Hero a second hug.

"Thank you!" she half sobbed, "and thank your friend, too."

"I will," Sara replied as she knelt down with her arms out, indicating she wanted a hug.

Suzie gave her a long hug, and when she let go, Sara straightened the hat on her head, then put her hand on top of her head and rubbed the hat around as she made a growling sound. Suzie giggled as Hero got a bit excited and started bouncing and barking, thinking a fun game might be about to happen. Sara motioned him to load into the RV, and she followed him, turning for a last wave before closing the door and driving off.

Suzie also learned all about the running and management of a small business by taking care of Spot for her mother. This money accumulated pretty fast in her savings account, and any money she made from her training with Marc just made it grow all that much faster. She already had a few grand in savings, more than the whole family at the moment. She spent some of it buying her and Tommie better goggles, that used up a thousand, but she knew that money would replace itself pretty fast. This was her money, and if her parents couldn't think of a good reason why she shouldn't spend it on any particular thing, they spent it based on her choices. The new goggles were much better and freed up the box goggles for others to use, to bring them into the

cockpit, too. You could fit a lot of people inside those little drones, you just needed enough receivers. Tommy had figured out how to attach a cell phone to a smart TV using a special receiver for the phone, and when he flew while at home, everyone watched on the big screen inside while he flew from the couch.

Marc finished writing the book you now hold, and it became an overnight sensation. The whole world was fascinated by this new Clicker Game fad. The series of stories told about Suzie rivaled those told about Harry Potter after a few episodes of her exploits became available.

But that is all another story for another book. Remember, Suzie is about to start school. That story should prove just as interesting as this one, probably more so...

Dedicated to Little Suzie, the most amazing little girl I've ever met.

Marcus Beauregard Hunter