



Chapter 3

Boo Meets Girl

I woke up Saturday morning filled with nervous excitement, as if I were getting ready for a first date. Butterflies flitted in my stomach, my heart was dancing a jig, and my hands were shaking so vigorously that it took me multiple attempts to insert my contact lenses. Everything seemed to be going well with my *potential* adoption of Boo, but because of my previous disappointments, I was afraid to get my hopes up.

Around noon, I hopped in my car and drove to Ruff Haus, the pet store where the adoption event was being held. I parked on the street nearby, and as I walked toward the store, I took a deep breath and said a quick prayer to God, the universe, my mom, and all my guardian angels, “If Boo is meant to be mine, please let this meeting go well and let the adoption go through.”

As I pulled open the glass shop door, a string of overhead bells jingled, almost drowning out the clatter of an El train rumbling by. I stepped inside and turned to my left, where my eyes fell upon the shaggy little guy I’d seen in photos online. “Is this Boo?” I asked the volunteer standing next to him.

When she said yes, I introduced myself and explained that I’d been approved to adopt him. Then I crouched down so I could be more at his level, offered my hand for him to sniff, and said, “Hi, Boo.” As he placed his snow-white paws on my knees, relaxed his ears behind his head, and looked up at me with eyes like pools of melted dark chocolate, he seemed to say, “Hi. I’ve been waiting for

you. You're gonna be my mommy." In that moment, the wall of frost built up around my heart instantly thawed. To say that it was love at first sight sounds cliché, but it truly was.

I sat on the floor and played with Boo for a few minutes until the volunteer said, "He might need to potty. Would you like to take him for a walk?"

"Sure," I said. She handed me a leash, and Boo and I were off.

We stepped outside on the cloudy, crisp late winter day and headed down the street. As we made our way around the block, Boo was a perfect little gentleman on the leash. He didn't pull or put on the brakes; he just trotted around with curiosity and spunk. I was a bit surprised by the extent of his skin infection, though. His belly, butt, and armpits were all bald. I'd never seen a dog with alopecia before, but that didn't dissuade me. As we sat next to each other on a park bench on the way back, I said, "Whaddaya think, Boo? You wanna come home with me?" He returned my gaze with a look that said, "I thought you'd never ask."

When we got back to the pet store, I told the volunteer that I did, indeed, want to adopt Boo. But I decided to do a foster-to-adopt, which means that you take the dog home for a few days, maybe a week, essentially for a trial run before actually signing the adoption papers. Given what I'd already been through with Max and Desi, I thought this was the way to go. Plus, my sister Denise, who'd already adopted two dogs through a rescue group in Indiana, had told me that each time an animal is adopted and is then returned to the shelter or rescue, the pet gets a ding on its record, which makes it even more difficult for it to find a forever home. I didn't want that to happen to Boo, and even though I instinctively felt it was going to work out between us, I wanted to proceed with caution.

I thought I'd be able to take Boo home right then, but I was told that the foster mom wasn't at the event, and she had his meds and other stuff, so I'd have to wait. The volunteer told me to email Anna, the adoption coordinator, when I got home to let her know that I wanted to move forward, and she would work out the details.

"Oh. . . . Okay," I said, my smile turning to a disappointed frown. It hurt to leave Boo there, and I could tell he didn't want me to go. He had a look of sadness in his eyes that betrayed his fears, "Why are you leaving without me? Don't you wanna be my mommy? What did I do wrong?" I tried to reassure him that he'd

be coming home with me as soon as they'd allow it. I hope he understood.

The moment I got home, I emailed Anna. "I met Boo today at the adoption event. He sure is a sweetie. We took a walk and he did his business and was great on a leash. He seemed to really like me too and didn't seem to want me to leave. I would like to proceed with the adoption or foster-to-adopt process. Please let me know when we can make that happen."

Seven agonizing hours later, Anna replied: "So glad that you found Boo to be a great match; he sure is a sweetheart. I've copied Boo's foster mom on this email so you two can coordinate a time to pick up Boo (and his supplies) from her home and start the foster-to-adopt. Once he's been in your home for a few days, we can line up a time to finalize his adoption!"

My friend Karen and I had already made plans to do hot yoga the next morning, so I arranged to pick up Boo around noon, after the class. The foster mom sent me her phone number and address, and surprisingly, she (and therefore, Boo) only lived a few blocks from me. Had I dared to brave the bitter cold of the Chicago winter to take a walk, I might've actually run into them.



The next day, Sunday, March 9, 2014, I picked up Karen for hot yoga as planned. Quivering with excitement, it was difficult for me to relax during the class. I was like a kid on Christmas morning—literally, I was like my gleeful seven-year-old self when Santa brought Arnold to me.

After yoga class, Karen and I parked in front of the foster mom's building then rang the bell for her unit. She buzzed us in, then we made our way up a short flight of stairs to her apartment. As we stood outside her door, a large dog began barking, jumping, and making quite a ruckus on the other side of the wooden barrier. My pounding heart momentarily stopped as I gave Karen a wide-eyed, panic-stricken look and muttered, "I hope there hasn't been a mix-up and Anna sent me to pick up Cujo instead of Boo."

Finally, the foster mom called out, "I'll be right there. Let me just put this guy in another room."

Whew. Once Cujo was safely tucked away, she let us in, offered us a seat, and went to get Boo. I was bouncing with nervous

energy as Karen and I sat patiently (or impatiently, in my case) on the couch.

As soon as Boo skittered into the room, he recognized me, jumped into my lap, and smothered my face with kisses. He knew right away that I was there for him and that I was his mommy, not Karen. The foster mom had already packed up Boo's supplies, and once the leash was clipped onto his collar, he was playfully nudging me toward the door as if to say, "Let's blow this joint!" But the foster mom needed to go over a few things with me first.

She said Boo had just been neutered a few days prior, so he was on antibiotics and needed to wear an Elizabethan collar, aka a "cone of shame," to avoid licking or biting that area. He also had the aforementioned skin infection and an ear infection, so there were drops and other meds to treat those.

She also divulged a little more about his backstory: "In early January, animal control picked up Boo in the far western suburbs. He was found wandering the streets with another small dog, a poodle mix we named Cody. The two of them were taken to the humane society, and when their owners hadn't claimed them after the mandatory seven-day hold, we (meaning One Tail at a Time) scooped them both up. We believe both dogs are around seven years old and had been living on the streets for several weeks at that point."

My heart ached thinking about Boo—or any dogs or cats—living on the streets, especially during the harsh winter conditions in the Midwest.

"Because Boo and Cody were picked up together," the foster mom continued, "we thought they were a bonded pair, so they were placed in the same foster home. But when Cody began taunting and bullying Boo, they were separated, and, after that, both boys were much happier."

Once we had all of Boo's supplies and were filled in on his story and treatment protocol, it was time to go. As much as I love dogs, I can't imagine fostering them because it would be so hard to say goodbye. I'd heard that the dogs are usually reluctant to leave the safety of the foster home they likely thought was their forever home. It can also be difficult for the foster families to say goodbye. However, in this case, it seemed like the foster mom and Boo hadn't really bonded because she seemed rather aloof when it was time for us to go. But about a year later, when my sister Denise

started fostering dogs, I asked her how she could give them up. Denise, who doesn't often show her emotions, said it's not easy, but she's just happy to see the dogs go to a good home. So that was probably the case with Boo's foster mom—or maybe she was just putting on a happy face for us. Either way, one thing was clear: Boo was ready to get out of there and get to his new home.



Before going to my place, Karen and I decided to take Boo on a shopping spree. We headed to a nearby pet store and picked up a few things for him, including a new collar and leash, some toys, treats, and a bag of food. (I'd already purchased bowls and a bed for him.) Back at my apartment, I gave Little Boy Boo, as I called him, the run of the place. He joyfully romped around, exploring his new digs, and instinctively knew it was home. He was bursting with exuberant energy and had a huge grin on his face as if saying, "Yay! I've finally found my forever home and have a mommy again!" I giggled with glee at his playful antics, amazed at how he instantly warmed my heart and my home.

As Karen and I sat on the floor and played with Boo, I removed the cone. It quickly became apparent to me that they might've misjudged his age. I'm no expert, but the little guy had a LOT of energy. The foster mom said he liked his naps, but I had a difficult time believing he was seven. His age didn't matter to me, but he seemed like he was definitely under four, perhaps only one or two. In addition to gleaming white teeth, he had quick reflexes and loved to play with toys, particularly plush ones with squeakers. As much as he liked to make them squeal, it was his mission to tear apart the toy, remove all the batting, and rip out the squeaker. By the end of the day, he'd already destroyed one of the toys I'd bought him, a little blue monkey. With his goal accomplished, he cuddled up next to me on the couch, lying on his back with his arms limply bent at the wrists, in what soon became known as "rub-my-belly position," and quickly fell asleep.

Karen—or Auntie Karen as she was soon dubbed—spent an hour or so at my place, playing with my new bundle of joy. During that time, we discussed names for him. For years, I'd planned to name my next dog Wrigley. But about half of all male dogs in Chicago (at least on the North Side) are named Wrigley, so that was starting to lose its appeal. Although it was certainly fitting

because he was a *wriggly* (and wiggly) little guy—another sign that he was most likely younger than seven.

I considered a handful of other names, including Albert, for his plume of fluffy white hair à la Einstein; Ronnie, for Cubs legend Ron Santo; Benny, for Benny Goodman, aka the “King of Swing” (I love swing dancing and big band music); George because he had a little swagger when he walked, like George Jefferson; and Scooter because he did a “Boot Scoot Boogie” on the rug when I first brought him home. I’d also considered calling him Freddie after my Uncle Mike (whose real first name was Frederick), who had recently passed away.

As Karen and I played with Boo in my dining room, we tried to gauge which name he liked best. I almost went with Freddie because when I called him that, he stood up on his hind legs and did a little cha-cha, like he was performing on *Dancing with the Stars*, which made me think of Fred Astaire. Over the next few days, I even conducted a poll on Facebook for my friends to help me choose a name, and as expected, Wrigley won (by a single vote). But ultimately, the deciding vote was mine. A few days after bringing him home, I looked at that adorable little face and gazed into those deep, soulful brown eyes at the sweet gentleman who had already captured my heart and said, “You are a good man.” Right then, I knew he was a Benny. He looks like a Benny, don’t you think?

But on that first day, he was still Boo. After Karen went home, he and I snuggled on the couch while I posted photos of him on Facebook and emailed friends and family members to introduce them to “the new man in my life.” With the guys I’d dated, I often waited months to let my family and friends know about them because I wanted to make sure they were keepers. (Spoiler alert: They generally weren’t.) But with Benny/Boo, never once did it cross my mind that I was being presumptuous—that maybe it wouldn’t work out. Just as he seemed to know that I was his mommy, I knew that he was my little boy. We were simply meant to be.

In fact, until Benny came into my life, I didn’t realize how sad and lonely I was. From day one, he filled my world with so much unconditional love and joy and happiness that I wondered how I’d ever survived before him. He ignited a spark in my heart that had been dormant for years, and he brought so much light into my life

that I felt like I was Dorothy Gale, stepping from the black-and-white of Kansas into the vibrant technicolor world of Oz.



On our first night together, when I took Boo out for bedtime potties, I quickly learned a secret he'd been harboring. As we crept down the sidewalk in the dark, all of a sudden, he yanked on the leash and took off running, scraping his cone of shame on the ground and dragging me behind him as I desperately stumbled to keep up. I didn't want to let go of his leash, lest he get lost or run into the street, but he was choking himself and gasping like a smoker with a three-pack-a-day habit. After a few seconds, it dawned on me that he was in hot pursuit of a bunny who'd emerged from the bushes when we walked by.

"Slow down, buddy!" I hollered. But he was unable to reel in his primal instincts, and I worried that he'd break his neck or asphyxiate himself. When he finally settled down, I announced, "We're getting you a harness tomorrow."



The next morning, I awoke with a furry little cuddle bug nestled by my feet. It had been my intention to have Boo sleep in his bed on the floor, but he had other ideas. As soon as I'd turned off the light, he started whimpering, so I lifted him into my bed and said, "Oh, all right. You can sleep up here."

I had wanted to let him sleep in my bed all along, but I'd read that it could be disruptive for romantic relationships, so I thought I'd try forcing him to sleep on the floor. But when he cried, I thought to myself, *Screw it. I have no romantic prospects on the horizon, so any guy who wants to be with me is just going to have to accept that this little one sleeps in the bed too.*

Fortunately, the stars aligned in a way that enabled me to work from home my first week with my baby boy. At the time, the publishing company where I worked didn't allow employees to work from home on a regular basis. We all had laptops, though, so if we were feeling under the weather but well enough to work, we could do so from home rather than take a sick day or infect others at the office. But in this case, I'd asked my boss to let me work from home for the full week. Such a request was a bit unprecedented, but it was

perfect timing because in addition to my regular editorial duties, I was also writing a children's book for the company on my favorite band, U2. I consider myself somewhat of an expert on the history of the band, so the company was basically saving money by having me write it, rather than hiring someone to do it. The least they could do was let me work on it from the comfort of my home so I didn't have to schlep all my reference materials (books, magazines, CDs, and DVDs) on the El train and into the office.

To help Benny socialize with Bella, Edwin and Eva brought her up to my apartment and I watched her during the day while they were at work. Benny and Bella got along like peanut butter and chocolate, although Benny was a bit shy. Whereas Bella wanted to play with him, he seemed content to play with his toys.

Having that first week at home with Benny was a godsend. As I worked on the first draft of the U2 manuscript, I stretched out on the couch, sandwiched between Benny and Bella, which strengthened the bond between mother and son. I also got Benny into a routine with his meals and walks, and, putting my newfound knowledge of how to nip separation anxiety in the bud, I spent a little time each day leaving him at home alone for increasingly longer periods of time to get him used to me being gone and reassuring him that I'd always return.

During the week, Anna from OTAT reached out to see how things were going with Benny and me. I told her that we were doing great, that he was such a sweet little guy, and that he'd made himself right at home. We made plans to meet on March 17, to finalize the adoption.

The night before we made it official, I decided it was time to give Benny his first bath. I didn't know how he'd react, though. Despite being a "water dog" and loving the swimming pool, Arnold hated getting a bath. He'd shake and spray me with water and try to jump out of the tub any chance he got. But with Benny, I needn't have worried. As usual, he was a perfect little gentleman. After filling the tub with a couple inches of warm water, I placed him in it without incident. He stood stone-still and let me lather him up and pour large cups of warm water over him to rinse. When he was all clean, I wrapped him in a towel and cradled him in my arms like a baby. When he started to shiver, I blow-dried his long locks to warm him up.