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Chapter 1

Jared Meets the Magician

“BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, BEEP!”

Jared Moore hit the “snooze” button on his alarm clock. He sank back under his big blue quilt for five more minutes of sleep. When the alarm went off again, he sat up, yawned, and looked around his room.

The walls were covered with posters from his two favorite basketball teams, the Boston Celtics and Miami Heat. His two favorite players, Ray



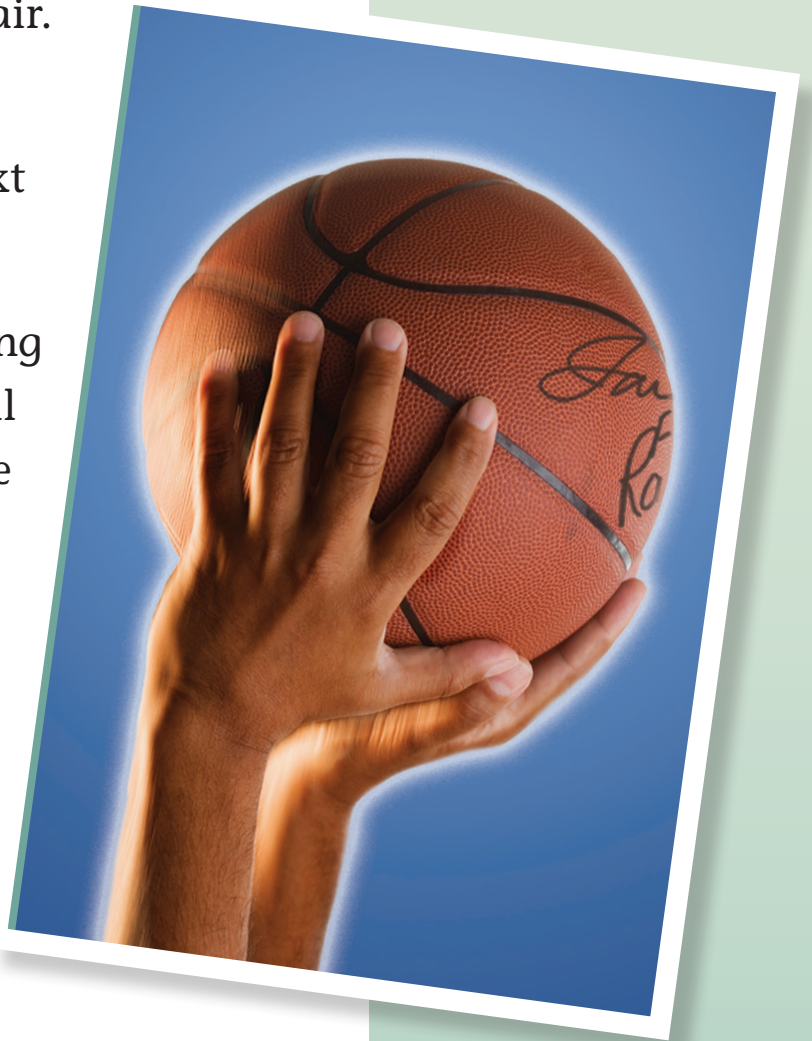
Johnson, formerly a Celt and Johnny Schmidt with the Heat, smiled at him from posters behind his bed. His green and white Celtics jersey, number 27, hung over his desk chair.

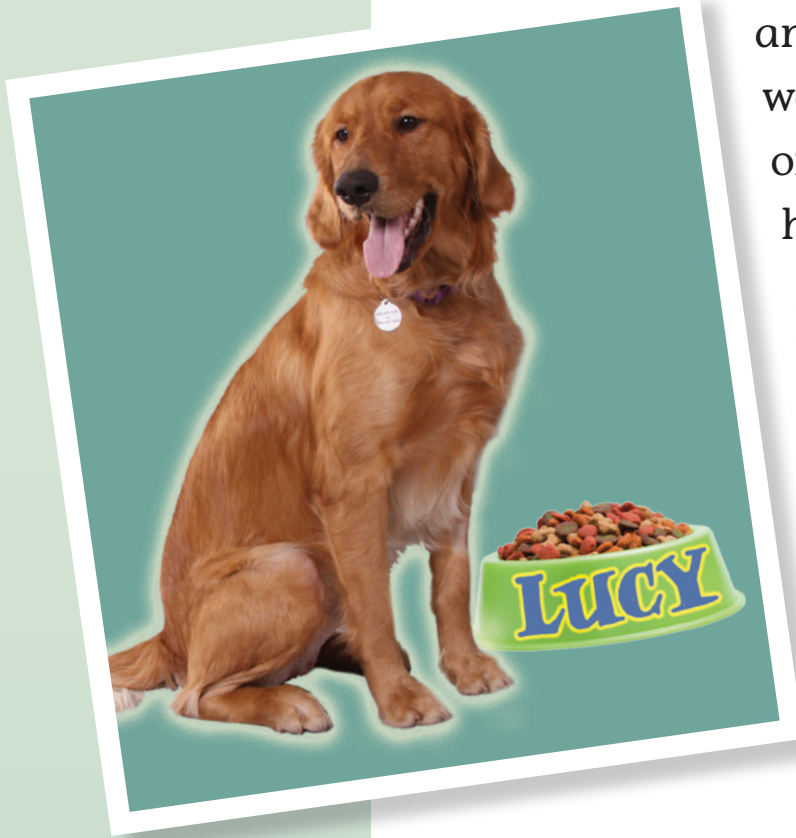
Best of all, his lucky basketball, signed by Johnson himself, sat next to him on the nightstand.

Jared yawned and stretched his long arms. He reached for his lucky ball and held it up in his big hands. He dreamed of meeting Ray Johnson someday. But that wasn't all. He even dreamed of playing **professional** basketball. But if he couldn't play pro ball, he wanted to work with animals. He also dreamed of having a girlfriend!

The truth was that Jared loved animals almost as much as he loved basketball, especially his golden retriever, Lucy. He couldn't stand it when people didn't treat their pets right. He couldn't stand it when people didn't treat each other right, either. Most of all, he hated **bullying**.

Jared shook the messy brown hair out of his eyes and grinned. "Finally!" he said out loud, "Today's the day!" His first day of work at Pet Place. He felt **excited** and a little **nervous**. Pet Place had real





animals, a lot of them, and he would be taking care of all kinds of pets. “That would be so cool,” he thought.

He showered in record time and jumped into clean clothes. On his way out the door, he tapped the “magic 27” on his Celtics jersey for good luck. Then he ran downstairs, calling, “Mom, I’m ready to go!”

His mother was waiting for him at the bottom of the stairs, holding up her hand like a stop sign. “Whoa, there—slow down, Jared!” she said, laughing. “I’m *surprised* you’re moving so fast. You’re usually as slow as a turtle in the morning. Matt won’t be picking you up for an hour yet.”

Matt was Jared’s **volunteer mentor** from school. Sometimes he gave Jared a ride so he didn’t have to take the bus.

Jared sighed a big sigh. “Aw, Mom, I have to wait an hour? So what’s to eat?” As usual, he was hungry!

He was six feet, three inches tall already and still growing! In fact, he could eat and eat, and

be hungry again 10 minutes later. Jared grabbed some milk and cereal and made himself breakfast.

One more hour to wait...

“KNOCK, KNOCK.”

Matt was here. Time to go!

“Hey, J,” Matt said, giving Jared a high-five. “How are you doing, buddy?”

Matt was one of Jared’s favorite people. His friendly voice and smile always made Jared feel good. Even though Matt was as big as a giant football player on the outside, he was patient and kind inside. Jared knew that was what counted. Most of all, he liked Matt because he could talk to him about anything. Matt was almost like his big brother.

“I’m nervous,” Jared said, as the two climbed into the front seat of Matt’s little red car and buckled up.



Matt smiled at Jared. “That’s okay,” he told him. “Everybody feels a little nervous in the beginning. Just remember how much you liked everyone you met at Pet Place. You can ask them for help if you have any questions about what to do.”

“Yeah,” Jared smiled. “I guess you’re right. Everybody I met was cool!” He thought for a moment, then added, “especially Tamika. She’s really cute!”

“You mean the shy girl at the checkout counter you told me about? Maybe she likes you, too, Jared,” Matt said with a wink.

Jared felt embarrassed. He liked Tamika, for sure.

Besides Tamika, he was looking forward to seeing the animals at Pet Place every weekend. There were cats and dogs, hamsters and gerbils, rabbits and fish—even a few lizards and snakes. Jared liked them, too.

But how would he know where to find everything? There were **aisles** and aisles of pet food and toys. “I hope I’m ready to take care of the animals,” he thought.

“What if I mess up, Matt?” he asked out loud.

“Don’t worry. Everyone makes mistakes,” Matt told him. You’ll do better and better as you get

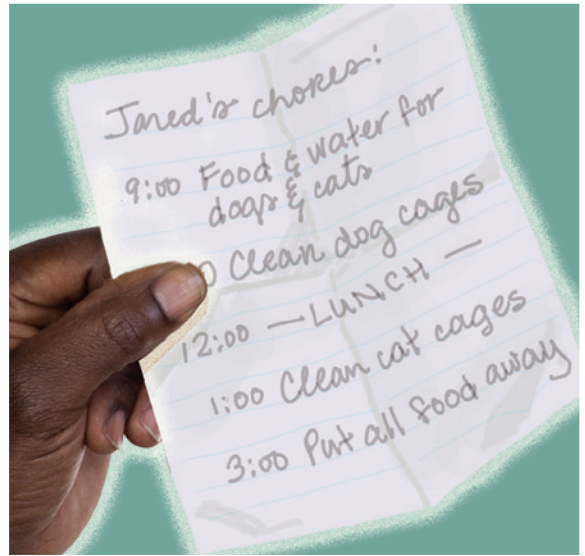
more **experience**. The most important thing is to try your best.”

“Yeah, I can do that. I think my chore list will help, too.” Before lunch he had to feed and brush the animals. After lunch he had to clean some of the cages and put the pet food away. In case he forgot what came next, he knew he could check his list or ask somebody. That made Jared feel better.

Matt pulled into the Pet Place parking lot. He put his hand on Jared’s shoulder and smiled. “Remember – just do your best, J!”

“Thanks, Matt,” Jared said, as he climbed out of the car. “I’ll call you later, okay?” Then he took a deep breath and walked straight to the front door. Surprise! His new boss, Mrs. Shaw, was right there to say hello. She was a short, round lady in a blue suit.

“Welcome back to Pet Place, Jared!” she said, smiling. “Come on back to the staff room with me.” Jared followed her.





A few of the staff waved hello to Jared, including Tamika. “She remembers me,” he thought with a grin.

In the staff room, Mrs. Shaw showed Jared his locker. “You can put your stuff in here,” she said.

“Cool!” Jared thought. “Maybe I can tape up a photo of Ray Johnson!”

He turned off his cell phone and put it in his backpack with his iPod. Then he stuffed the whole pack into his locker.



Next, Mrs. Shaw handed him a green work apron. On the pocket it said “Pet Place” in yellow letters. Over the letters, a smiling puppy and a shy kitty peeked out. And over their heads, a red name tag said, “My Name is Jared.”

“Go ahead—put it on,” she said with a big smile. “Welcome to the Pet Place family!”

Jared grinned and slipped it on. “I look like a real **employee** now!” he thought.

His first chore was to feed the puppies. “This will be easy,” he thought. I feed Lucy every day at

home. One, two, three scoops for each puppy, just like Mrs. Shaw showed him. He filled a water bowl for each one.

Jared finished feeding all the puppies except one. She was a tiny brown collie pup. Her name tag said “Waffles.” He knelt down in front of her cage.

“Hello, Waffles. Are you hungry?” Jared said. He scooped the puppy chow into her food bowl! Then he filled up her red water bowl.

Next he opened the cage. “Okay, girl, here’s your...” but before Jared could say “breakfast,” Waffles jumped out of her cage, knocking over the red water bowl.

WHOOSH! Down the aisle she ran, whirling past people like a brown tornado. Jared took off running behind her, yelling, “Waffles, come back!” **Customers** jumped out of the way. Over at the checkout, Tamika was watching it all.

WHOOSH! Around the corner and back up the aisle came Waffles. Jared was right behind her. Suddenly the puppy came to a halt and



began to drink the spilled water. Jared grabbed her. “I’ve got you now, you goofy pup!”

But Waffles wiggled away. WHOOSH! Off she ran again.

“Oh, no!” Jared groaned. This time Waffles was running straight toward a tall stack of dog food. The boxes were piled high. Would she knock them all down? Jared was getting *frustrated*.



Jared thought, “I need a plan...”

But Waffles had a surprise for him! Just before she reached the stack of boxes, she stopped and turned toward him. “Ruff! Ruff!” she barked happily, wagging her tail. Her big brown

eyes seemed to say, “This is fun! Can we play some more?”

Jared finally understood: Now he had his plan. “I’ll try walking away. Maybe she’ll chase me,” he thought.

He waved at Waffles and called, “Come and get me, girl!” Then he started jogging toward her cage. He stopped and peeked over his shoulder. She was following him!

When Jared stopped, so did she. When he started running again, Waffles did too. Each time Jared stopped to peek back at her, she stopped too. Each time he ran towards her cage again, she followed behind him.

Step by step, his plan was working! No disaster this time.

By now, all the customers were watching the action. Out of the corner of his eye, Jared noticed Tamika was giggling. “This isn’t funny,” he thought.

Soon Waffles was back drinking the spilled water. She was so thirsty, she forgot all about Jared! This time he really caught her. “Got you girl,”





he scolded playfully. He put her back in her cage and locked the door.

Jared grinned and shook his head. “What a big fuss over a little puppy, he thought.

Suddenly he stopped smiling. Across the room, he saw Mrs. Shaw. She was walking towards him. “Uh-oh, here comes trouble,” he thought. “She’ll be mad when she sees the spilled water. What should I do?”

Jared grabbed a roll of paper towels from a nearby shelf and began to clean up. He worked fast. By the time Mrs. Shaw reached them, he had most of the water wiped up. But he still had to explain how Waffles **escaped**.

“What happened, Jared?” Mrs. Shaw asked.

Jared gulped. He was scared. “Am I going to get **fired** on my first day of work?” he wondered. “Maybe I’ll tell her I tripped and spilled the water...”

But then he heard Matt’s voice in his head, “Be a man, Jared. Do what’s right!”

Jared spoke up. “It was my fault, Mrs. Shaw. I was going to feed Waffles and she – somehow – just got away. I’m sorry.”

To Jared’s surprise, Mrs. Shaw laughed. She told him, “Don’t worry, Jared. Waffles escapes all the time. We call her the Magician. By the way, you did a great job catching her by yourself! No one has ever done that before. The next time she escapes, just press number 3 on the wall phone and tell us. Okay?”

“Now you tell me!” Jared thought. But he was proud of himself. He caught Waffles and he told the truth.

That night he called Matt and told him all about his first day at Pet Place, and how he met “Waffles the Magician.” At first Matt laughed, but then his voice turned serious.

“Congratulations, J. Way to go!” He was proud of Jared, too. ■



Vocabulary Words



1	aisle		a walkway between sections of seats or shelves
2	bully		a person who is mean to others
3	customer		one who buys goods or services
4	employee		a person who works for someone
5	escape		to free yourself from something or someone
6	experience		to participate in or watch an event
7	fired		an employee's job is ended
8	mentor		a wise and trusted counselor or teacher
9	professional		a person who has a skilled job
10	volunteer		a person who offers their skills for free



Emotion Words

1

excite



to have a strong feeling

2

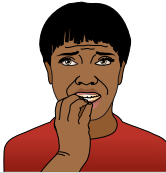
frustrate



being unable to do something

3

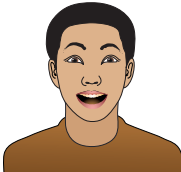
nervous



being excitable or sensitive

4

surprise



something you didn't expect



Test Yourself

Directions: Circle the correct word that fills the blank.

1

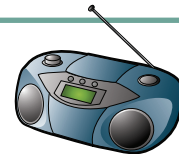
Jared hit the snooze button on his _____ clock.



alarm



grandfather



radio

2

Jared loves _____.



fish



animals



birds

3

He got a job at a _____ store.



grocery



convenience



pet

Comprehension Quiz



Directions: Circle the letter of the phrase that finishes the sentence.

1

Jared was excited because today...

- a. he started his new job at Pet Place.
- b. he would meet Ray Johnson.
- c. he had a date with his girlfriend.

2

Matt is Jared's...

- a. volunteer mentor from school.
- b. twin brother.
- c. basketball buddy.

3

What happened at Pet Place?

- a. Waffles escaped.
- b. Jared built a tower of dog toys.
- c. Jared was fired.

4

How did Jared catch the Magician?

- a. He showed her a dog treat.
- b. He caught her in a net.
- c. He tricked her to chase him back to her cage.

5

Who is the Magician?

- a. Mrs. Shaw, Jared's boss.
- b. Waffles, a little brown puppy.
- c. Matt, Jared's mentor.

6

What did Mrs. Shaw do when Jared told her about Waffles?

- a. She ignored Jared.
- b. She yelled at Jared.
- c. She laughed.

7

Circle the job that Jared does NOT want to have.

- a. Professional basketball player.
- b. A teacher.
- c. A pet store employee.

1. —
2. —
3. —

Sequencing Activity

Directions: Circle the letter of the phrase that answers the question.

What happened in Chapter 1?

1

What happened first?

- a. Jared was feeding the puppies.
- b. Jared caught Waffles.
- c. Jared made a plan.
- d. Waffles escaped!

2

What happened next?

- a. Jared was feeding the puppies.
- b. Jared caught Waffles.
- c. Jared made a plan.
- d. Waffles escaped!

3

What happened after that?

- a. Jared was feeding the puppies.
- b. Jared caught Waffles.
- c. Jared made a plan.
- d. Waffles escaped!

4

What happened last?

- a. Jared was feeding the puppies.
- b. Jared caught Waffles.
- c. Jared made a plan.
- d. Waffles escaped!

Chapter 2

Jared Takes a Chance



Jared stared into his dresser mirror. “Oh, man!” he groaned. “Just look at that zit on the tip of my nose!” he said. Then he thought, “What will the girls at school think? Maybe I should hide it under a Band-Aid.” He frowned.

“JARED! You’ll miss the bus!” his mom called up the stairs. It was her last warning.

“Yikes—the bus!” Jared remembered. “I’m on my way, Mom!” he called back.

In what seemed like one motion, he grabbed his backpack and shot out the front door. He ran three blocks without stopping and got to the bus stop just one step ahead of the bus.

“Morning,” Jared **greeted** the bus driver as he climbed on board, still out of breath.

“Way to go, kid, you beat the bus!” the driver said with a laugh, giving Jared a thumbs-up. A few people clapped. They all saw Jared’s race to the bus.

But Jared was *embarrassed*. He was not a show-off. With his face feeling hot, he slid into the nearest empty seat. Luckily, he had it all to himself. He put his pack next to him and stretched out his long legs.

The bus pulled away. Jared noticed most of the kids on the bus were listening to their iPods. But he liked to look around. Besides, there were all kinds of new signs and posters inside the bus. One showed the Earth from space. “Live Green! Keep the Earth Clean!” it said in big green letters.

Another one spelled out the message “Just Say NO!” in red letters. Giant red X’s crossed out cans of beer, packs of cigarettes, and bottles of pills. Jared knew that meant: Say “No to drugs.” Side by side



with the anti-drug poster was one that showed a wild band of heavy metal rockers. Funny, Jared thought, they look like they just said YES!

The yellow poster across the aisle made him think of Lucy. It showed the outline of a dog and his owner at sunset. Above them was just one word: “**Loyalty.**” Jared said to himself. “Loyal, that’s Lucy. Too bad I didn’t get to say goodbye to her this morning.”

Suddenly Jared’s eyes got big and all fluttery. “CUTE GIRL! CUTE GIRL!” popped into his head. There she was, sitting right under the dog poster—a pretty girl with long red hair. “Wow,” he thought, “she’s way cute!” She was talking in an excited voice to a boy sitting next to her. She talked and talked. The boy laughed and laughed. But it wasn’t a healthy laugh. It didn’t sound like the boy meant it.

Jared was curious. When he looked closer, he **recognized** the girl. “Hey, that’s Sarah Sweeney from math class. I didn’t know she rode this bus,” Jared thought, admitting to himself that he had a little **crush** on her. To tell the truth, he thought a lot of the girls at school were cute.

But Sarah was different. She had strong **opinions**, and she wasn’t afraid to say them out loud. She always dressed in a way that said, “I’m

cool!” Today she wore a bright purple top and a matching hoodie. Jared thought he saw a tiny snake tattoo on her wrist.

He also recognized the boy she was with. Crap! It was Ben Barnes, the school genius. Ben looked like a movie star. All the girls wanted to hang out with him. “Who could **compete** with him?” Jared thought.

He closed his eyes and began to daydream... He and Sarah were holding hands... They were at the movies, watching “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows” together...

He leaned close to Sarah... She turned to look into his eyes. They were about to kiss...

“I SAID STOP IT, BEN!” Sarah’s voice made Jared open his eyes. He looked across the aisle. Ben was leaning over Sarah and playing with her hair. He **ignored** what she had told him, and kept touching her anyway. Then he started saying something she clearly didn’t like at all.





“No way—back off, Ben!” Sarah tried to push him away.

Jared didn’t like what he was seeing. Should he speak up? Matt says you have to respect girls all the time, especially when they say “no,” Jared remembered. He was angry that Ben wasn’t treating Sarah right. If he keeps touching her, that’s bullying, he suddenly realized.

He looked over at them again and saw Ben’s hand on Sarah’s knee. That was too much! Jared jumped up and spoke in a firm voice, “Hey—she told you to back off, dude!”

Ben looked up at Jared and shouted, “Get lost nerd!” He was **angry** and shook his fist at Jared.

Sarah saw her chance. She pulled away from Ben and jumped out of her seat. In a second, Ben was

on his feet too. He grabbed Sarah's arm. "There is going to be big trouble now," Jared thought.

"Everyone sit down— NOW!" The bus driver's voice boomed through the bus. Jared, Sarah, and Ben all looked at each other. Ben let go of Sarah's arm.

"I said, sit down now! Anyone I see standing or shouting gets reported. Got it?" his big voice boomed again.



Jared grabbed his pack from the window seat.

"Quick, sit here, Sarah," he said, pointing to the empty seat next to him.

Sarah nodded and slid into the seat. They both ignored Ben, who sat back down and kicked the seat in front of him! He was so angry his face was bright red. He stared at Jared and Sarah, and swore under his breath.

But Ben knew the bus driver was watching him in the mirror. He got quiet fast.

Sarah turned to Jared. "Whew, that was close!" she said, letting her breath out. "You took a

big chance, Jared. I thought Ben was going to slug you!”

“Yeah, it was scary,” Jared **agreed**. “But I couldn’t let Ben treat you like that.” He leaned towards Sarah and asked, “Are you okay?”

“I guess so,” Sarah said. But Jared saw the anger and fear in her eyes. He couldn’t understand why Sarah sat with Ben in the first place.

“What’s up with you and Ben, anyway?” he asked.

Sarah gave a long answer, without taking a breath. “Oh, we met in art class last year. We did some artwork together. I really thought he liked me. I should have known better. Some girls at school say he’s a liar. They say he cheats too. But I thought they were just *jealous*. Why is Ben such a jerk? He’s got everything. Lots of money. Good looks, too. And he’s great at art!” And on and on she talked.

Jared sat staring at Sarah, afraid to **interrupt** her. “She’s talking...to ME!” he thought to himself. His heart was beating fast. He forgot all about the zit on his nose.

Suddenly Sarah stopped herself. “Sorry!” she laughed. “I’m talking too much.”

Jared didn't care. He was just happy to have her next to him. When Sarah laughed, he noticed she had a little gap between her two front teeth. That made him like her even more.

"Enough about me and the jerk," Sarah said. "So Jared, how come I never see you outside of math class?"

Jared didn't know what to say. "Uhh...I'm really busy. I have basketball practice after school. Coach thinks I could maybe play college ball."

Silence from Sarah. She didn't really care about basketball—or any sports. Not because she was a girl, but because she believed sports were for **jocks**, not artists like her. This was one of her strong opinions.

"I'm not into sports," she finally said. "Who wants to spend their whole life playing games?"

"I do," Jared said. "What's wrong with that?"

"But don't you want to help solve the world's problems?" Sarah asked.

"Sure, I do! I won't spend all of my time playing ball," Jared told her. "I want to work with animals too. In fact, I just started working weekends at Pet Place."

“Cool!” Sarah said, and she really meant it.

“Do you have any pets at home?”

“Just my dog, Lucy. She’s a golden retriever, and she’s really, really smart,” Jared said.

Sarah raised her eyebrows and said, “You know what they say: ‘Dogs are okay, but cats rule!’” She said it like everyone believed it was true.

“Well, I don’t say that! Lucy’s my buddy,” said Jared. “She’s very loyal.”



Sarah laughed. “I’m just teasing you, Jared! But I bet my cat Blue is just as smart as Lucy!”

“You’re on!” Jared said “Let’s shake on it!”

“Seriously, Sarah, Lucy does a lot more than play fetch,” Jared said. “She loves to look at herself in the mirror and watch dog videos on YouTube with me.”

“That’s weird!” Sarah laughed. “She should be watching cat videos!”

Jared agreed. He laughed too.

Sarah liked the way Jared laughed with all of his heart. She liked the way he stood up for himself—and for her. He was loyal and brave. A good listener, too. “Besides, he’s sort of cute,” she thought to herself, “a little too tall, but such beautiful eyes!”

“Ever seen ‘The 10 Greatest Animal Rescues’?” she asked.

“Just one so far,” Jared said. “The one where the horse is stuck under the ice.”

Then Sarah surprised Jared. “Why don’t we hang out sometime and check out the whole video?” she suggested.

“Wow! Wow! Wow!” Jared thought. He was so happy that he stopped being *shy* for once.

“Yes!—I mean, okay, sure!” he sputtered. “What’s your cell number? I can call you Sunday night, and we can make plans...”