

POOCHES IN LOVE

Written by: **Zvezdana Majhen**

Illustrated by: **Polona Kosec**

Matt is the proud owner of Aja the poodle and takes care of her very well, what is more, he has big plans for her unborn puppies. But Aja's heart wants to follow a different plan, as she is in love with the neighbour's dog Khan. If you thought that love couldn't happen to dogs, think again!

Format: 21 × 24cm, colour print, hardcover, 24 pages



Synopsis

Matt is a smart boy who loves his little poodle Aja more than anything in the world. She is also devoted to her young owner and they are close friends. The early spring weather draws people out of their houses and onto the streets and Matt and Aja are no exceptions. On one of their walks, Matt tells Aja that he will find a suitable partner for her this spring, a black poodle with whom she will be able to have puppies. Aja is worried since her heart already belongs to another, a friendly Maltese dog called Khan who lives in the neighbouring block of flats.

That evening Matt got busy and found an advertisement for a poodle named Pax. He arranged for the two dogs to meet, but Aja and Pax did not show any interest in each other at all. The next date she had was with a dog called Corey, but the very same thing happened. Aja was very sad since she knew that Matt wouldn't force her to love the wrong dog, but at the same time, he wanted to sell her puppies for money.

And when Matt threatens to take her to the vet to have puppies the artificial way, Aja becomes more and more desperate. She couldn't even sleep at night as she was worrying so much. She missed Khan and felt heartbroken that Matt was acting so heartlessly. To her surprise, she sees that the doors leading out onto the patio were open and quickly sneaked out to where Khan is already waiting for her. The two young pooches in love escape under the cover of darkness.

The following morning, Matt was surprised to find that Aja had not woken him up as usual. All was quiet in the flat and Aja was nowhere to be found. He feared she had run away. Matt quickly called up his friends to help him find her. Khan's owner, Mr Carl, tells Matt that Khan is also missing. Carl assures him that Aja is safe if she is with Khan, but Matt gets upset because he knows their puppies wouldn't be purebreds.

Carl doesn't let Matt's scheming selfishness get the better of him and explains to Matt in a kind and patient way that love is not something that can be controlled and you cannot just force two people to be in love. After all, Matt also comes from a mixed background as his father is Spanish and his mother is Slovene.

Matt takes what Carl told him to heart and feels bad about what happened. He really misses Aja and is beside himself with worry. But, luckily, that starry night, the two dogs happily return home. They ran to Khan's owner Carl who immediately called Matt who then rushed over to his neighbour still in his pyjamas and took up both dogs in his arms.

The sweet story of Aja the poodle and Khan the Maltese dog teaches us that true love is a universal language that is spoken and understood by all – both humans and animals. Tolerance and acceptance of differences, skills Matt needed to learn, ring true in the words of Khan's owner Carl, who explains how *"love does not care about being purebred or not and will never follow the selfish scheming desires of people"*.

Sample translation

The sun had just melted the last few mounds of snow and began to warm up the chilly ground. Birds had started to sing at dawn and busily weave their nests during the day, looking forward to their little chicks hatching.

The people in the town could now fling their windows wide open and go on long walks. Everyone who walked their dog would stop and chat with friends, praise their four-legged friends and find them suitable mates.

"You will also be having pups this year. I'll bring you the most beautiful black-haired poodle," said eleven-year-old Matt to Aja.

Upon hearing this, she bowed her head and stopped wagging her tail. All she could think was, "I'm the only one who will choose my mate! The Maltese dog from next door, Khan, was just a friend at the beginning, but we soon felt something more between us and want to be together."

In the evening, Matt went online to look for dog breeder advertisements. He caught sight of Pax's ad:

BLACK CURLY FUR,
HANDSOME AND CLEVER,
LOOKING FOR A MATE,
ONE FOR FOREVER,
LOYAL AND SWEET,
WHY DON'T WE MEET?

PAX

He called the number written below and arranged a meeting.

When Aja and Matt went to see Pax's family, the two dogs gave each other a few sniffs and chased each other around the yard, but love did not blossom between them.

Matt told her off at home, "You're so picky! Pax comes from an excellent purebred litter. Your puppies would be worth a lot of money and you're just acting like a stuck up princess!"

Aja was shocked and speechless, "Is that really what he just said? Is Matt actually going to sell my puppies? That can't be true!" She felt a horribly sad sensation well up in her chest.

The very same evening the boy found another advertisement that seemed interesting.

LOOKING FOR A FEMALE,
WITH CURLY FUR AND NICE TAIL.
BLACK AS NIGHT,
TO LOVE WITH ALL MY MIGHT.

COREY

But the meeting between Aja and Corey didn't go as Matt had hoped. They ran behind a bush and both tinkled on the ground. Corey sniffed the wet ground that Aja left behind and whispered to her, "You know that ad? Well, it was my owner who made it, it wasn't my idea. I love a terrier called Teri, but they keep her so protected lately that I haven't been able to see her for over a week. I miss her so much! I can't eat, I can't sleep, I can't do anything!" he sobbed, licking away the tear that was rolling down his face.

"Oh Corey, I understand how you long for your beloved Teri. Some people are just so terribly selfish and inconsiderate. They don't care at all about how animals feel, despite saying that we are their friends. I also love my dear Khan so very deeply. Poor Khan, he whimpers day after day in front of our garden, even at night sometimes, waiting for me," said Aja, just as sadly.

Matt and Corey's owner tried in vain to create a love connection between the two little dogs.

On the way home, Matt was still determined to get his way, "I'm going to try to find another mate, but this is the last time I'm trying...if you won't go along with this one, I'll just have to try a different way. The vet will do it artificially then!" he said, seething, and tightened his grip on her leash. Aja took a deep breath. She couldn't believe her ears, "Artificial...?" She repeated Matt's words over and over in her head. "Can there be anything more artificial than forcing love where there is none?" she asked herself, overcome by helplessness.