Dog Camp

Kicked out of summer camp early, Florence Grebe returns to her stepfather's Doggy Daycare to avoid her mother's disappointment for a few hours longer. Instead, her stepfather hatches a plan to hide Florence with the dogs while they fake a successful summer camp.

*At Platte Camp, we provide campers the experience of a lifetime*

"Expelled in a day?"

Florence (curly brown hair on freckled white skin like her mother) slouched in the waiting room of *Dogsome Doggy Daycare*, her stepfather's latest business, between two massive cloth bags. Her stepfather, a round, brown man, paced from the kitchen to the blinds, stopping to peek at the Consulate across the lot.

Florence asked, "Are you mad?"

Pharoh paused. "I don't care why they expelled you, but I promised your mother this camp was a good idea. She's expecting a report card we can hang on the fridge."

Florence snorted. "Hang this," she said, handing over her report card from camp. Six activities, all *Did Not Finish*. A handwritten explanation and a big red stamp, applied with such gusto that it left an imprint, screamed *EXPELLED* in red ink.

"Mom's going to flip when she sees this."

"She won't see it," said Pharoh with the calm of a man who hadn't considered his plan.

*Fun-filled days await*

Florence, two food bowls in each hand, followed Pharoh.

"Stay here a whole week?" Her father's suggestion shocked her.

"Until Saturday. You're supposed to be gone, so your mother and I made evening plans."

Outside, the most astute dogs crowded the glass door, pawing for attention.

"What plans?"

Pharoh stumbled on his tongue before settling on, "Just... plans."

He continued, "I need you to arrive home on Saturday with a smile on your face, sun on your skin, and a report card for the fridge. Do that and we'll forget the expulsion. Deal?"

Florence nodded.

*Experience has been our best teacher*

Pharoh took her report card into the back office, saying, "I can fix this. I used to work at the Embassy." That left Florence to look after all the dogs. She walked and fed and cleaned up after more smelly dogs than reasonable, but it wasn't until her father packed up that the first real problem arose.

"Where am I supposed to sleep?"

"Not the waiting room. Grooming tables?"

"Dad!"

"What? Your bags have clothes for a week! Grab a dog bed and get cozy. Remember, you're still at summer camp."

With that, he left.

*Expand the limits of your imagination*

Twelve dogs were boarding overnight, but they more than filled the ten kennels the \*Dogsome\* had available. They were not quiet sleepers.

The kitchen was too cold. The bathroom, too cramped. She ended where her father suggested: in a pile of blankets on a grooming table.

And yet, the room was dark and eerie. The building groaned. Buzzing things with claws and fangs tapped on the glass, asking to get in. Florence tried to ignore the growing worry that they were already inside, crawling on a hundred legs up the table and under her skin.

Gathering her courage and blankets, she searched for a new bed.

*Campers gain respect for themselves*

A sound awoke her pillow (a malamute named Snuggles), who lept out from under her with a bark. Voices from the waiting room broke through the groggy fog on Florence's brain. She sat up and yawned, in no rush to join the drama up front. She'd made a bed of blankets in the back of a small concrete stall.

Then the doorknob to the waiting room turned, and every dog barked.

Florence tossed a pair of blankets over her body.

"Hey, quiet. Quiet!" Her father.

Peeking out, Florence watched two pairs of shoes enter the kennels, stopping just outside her own.

"Pharoh, I need you to do this. He's a Consulate VIP. I promised that you'd have the dogs ready for the gala." Florence froze upon hearing her mother's voice.

"Sure, but what about our plans tonight, Stacey?" A hint of sadness tinged her father's words.

"Pharoh, sometimes plans change."

Her father sighed. "Fine, I'll get them groomed. I used to work at the Embassy, you know."

"That was years ago, love. I'll have them unload the dogs."

When the door latched, Florence sat up. Her father's face contorted when he saw her through the kennel's metal bars.

"What are you doing?" he hissed.

"I had to sleep."

"Nevermind, stay hidden. Snuggles, lie down."

Florence, under many blankets and one heavy dog, hid from the parade of yipping barks that followed.

*It's a chance to step out of your routine*

"Fifteen full spas?" Florence gawked at the horde of just-delivered dogs in the grooming room. "We did eight a day last summer!"

"Full spa for each one. We just need to find our routine."

Shampooing, washing, rinsing, rinsing again. Drying, clipping, trimming, combing.

The father-daughter pair found their flow, and it smelled amazing.

*Every summer is a window of opportunity*

Twelve hours later, fifteen dogs, from Pekingese to English Spaniels, waited in line and on leash. Three black SUVs pulled up. A white man in a fancy black suit came in. Every tail wagged at his arrival.

"Ah, there they are! How are you, Bailey? Muffin? Chip? You all look so shiny!" He sniffed one of the Shih Tzus. "So fresh!" The man turned to Pharoh. "Their Majesties will be most pleased!" He turned away, shouted to load the dogs, and left.

Afterward, Stacey walked in with a smile on her face. Florence, sitting in the corner, froze. Her mother hugged Pharoh. "Thank you."

Her father's face softened into a smile. "I couldn't have done it alone." He directed Stacey's attention to Florence's corner.

Concern filled her mom's eyes. "Why aren't you at camp?"

Florence breathed through a grimace.

"Plans change?"

*Unique experiences cultivate resiliency*

Florence stood watching the dogs in the yard with her father.

"That went well," he said.

"What were you doing with my report card yesterday?"

Her stepfather smiled. "Don't worry about it. I used to work at the Embassy."

Behind the white oak tree in the yard sat a big tan bulldog, resting after its latest meals. Its collar held a tag with SHREDDER embossed across its face.