



# The **Chocolate Lab**

**TOP DOG**

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Scholastic Inc.



For Ethan  
(who keeps me on my toes  
more than Cocoa)

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# Chapter 1

## Triple Trouble

**You've** got to be nuts if you don't like dog snuggles. There's nothing better than waking up late on a Saturday morning with a warm, fluffy dog sleeping right beside you. I love when that dog lifts its head and then drops it back down, happy to be lying in your comfy bed, too.

Sure, sometimes the dog stretches and pushes you over the edge. Sometimes you wake up to find your face squashed against your dog's rear end. But dog snuggles are the best.

The trouble is that I never get to wake up next to a dog because our Labradors never let me get to sleep in the first place. Our chocolate Lab, Cocoa, has always vibrated with energy. And ever since we adopted Nilla, our yellow Lab, and Licorice, our black Lab, all three dogs have decided they like camping out with me.

That's why I'm so tired while pushing the broom around the old mill my family runs to make our authentic Colonial-era chocolates. The waterwheel turns. The gears clink, clink, clink. And I push my broom slower than a zombie wading in caramel.

"You missed the corners, kiddo," Grandpa says as I bump into his feet.

"Sorry," I grumble.

I know it doesn't sound like it, but the past few months at the mill have been great.

Grandpa Irving makes chocolate the way

we learned to do it from my great-great-great-great-(however many times)-grandmother's cookbook, which we found behind one of the walls of our house.

Dad works in the store. It's been busy, busy, busy with people who can't resist buying our melt-in-your-mouth chocolate.

Mom is the food artist. She takes Grandpa's big bricks of chocolate and turns them into her famous bite-size candies. She grabs a bunch of ingredients you'd never think of putting together and creates something that makes you think you've skipped the dying part and gone straight to heaven.

As for my sister, Hannah, she's too busy to spend much time in the shop since she's gotten involved in animal rescue. She sets up rides for dogs that need to find forever homes. Every Saturday, she meets Ms. Shaw's van to help