



The Dog Park

Laura Caldwell

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A couple's best friend?

Stylist Jessica Champlin knows it takes more than a darling goldendoodle to save a marriage. She and her ex-husband, investigative journalist Sebastian Hess, had too many irreconcilable differences for even their beloved dog, Baxter, to heal. So they've agreed to joint custody, and life has settled into a prickly normalcy.

But when Baxter heroically rescues a child and the video footage goes viral, Jess and Sebastian are thrown together again, and her life takes some very unexpected twists. The line of dogwear she creates becomes wildly successful, and suddenly she's in the spotlight with everyone watching—the press, the new guy she's seeing, Sebastian and the past she never imagined she would face again. Soon there's only one person by her side—and it's the person she least expected. She's willing to open up to a new normal...just as long as Baxter approves.

The Dog Park Details

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Author : Laura Caldwell

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From Reader Review The Dog Park for online ebook

Claudia says

[the way Sebastian knew about Jessica's past since the beginning when they got engaged and the way he loved her but couldn't share his own secrets, I understood him and I liked him since the beginning. Jessica was a very strong woman but she was very insecure about her past bein

Barb (Boxermommyreads) says

Although I read a lot of fantasy and paranormal books, every once in a while I love to throw in something different to mix things up. Well, this past weekend was the time to do this as I was in need of a quick read and "The Dog Park" was the perfect choice. This book is all about second chances. I cannot resist a cute dog in almost any book and Baxter fit the bill. I would say he is just about the most important characters in the book as without him, none of the other would be very interesting at all.

The characters in this book are engaging and while not immediately likable, do tend to grow on you. I enjoyed watching Jessica grow and develop and by the end of the book, I could see her as someone I would hang out with if given the chance. I honestly had issues with all three men in the book, but by the end, the book ended in the best way possible.

When I was younger, while I always loved animals, I never thought I would be one of those animal-crazed nuts who treated their pets like little humans. But you know, I am one of those nuts and proud of it. My 4 legged boys are my children and I cannot imagine life without them and Jessica clearly feels the same in "The Dog Park."

I thought this book was going to be mainly a cute, rom-com but it actually contains a lot of substance and is much more deeper than originally imagined. Thanks Ms. Caldwell for a wonderful way to spend a cold Sunday afternoon.

Jonel Boyko says

This is a well put together and thought out novel. I love the fact that the realities of life for those of us in our 30s with pets instead of kids can easily relate to the tale. At the same time, there are definitely aspects that take you out of your everyday life. Caldwell melds this all together into a brilliant tale that kept me captivated throughout. I enjoyed the beginning, which made me smile, just as much as the explosive ending. At the same time, Caldwell writes in such a manner that the reader becomes part of the tale. You find yourself joining the characters along their journey. Caldwell's picturesque descriptions weave their way throughout the story, providing you with an easy introduction to this world.

I know we routinely say 'I didn't see that coming' when reading a book that takes an unexpected twist, but Caldwell takes that to a whole new level. When I say I didn't see that ending coming, what I mean is 'never in a million years could I have possibly fathomed this story taking that kind of a twist.' At the same time, it works perfectly. Caldwell has gradually built us up in such a manner that when you see how things end, it's

really the most logical conclusion.

Caldwell's mellow writing style and upbeat attitude really draw you to the main character. Her attempts to overcome much of what she is living through as well as being a better person for herself mesh perfectly with this style and are quite charming. At the same time, the emotional turmoil brought forth through her relationship with her ex-husband breaks your heart. I love how Caldwell develops her past and her present, as well as the way that they crash together. The manner in which the rest of the cast is developed is similarly enlightening. You get to know many of them quite well, each adding to the story in their own way.

As a whole this was a fantastic novel. I'd recommend it to anyone who enjoys romance, dogs, and a big surprise. I definitely can't wait to read more work by this author.

Please note that I received a complimentary copy of this work in exchange for an honest review.

Kathy says

This is a very charming story about a dog and it's two, who share the dog through a joint custody agreement. Though divorced, Jess and Sebastian still communicate regularly about Baxter, the dog they purchased during their marriage. Neither has moved on and are both trying to do just that. When Baxter's antics during a daily walk brings him and his two "dog parents" instant national acclaim, things change for everyone. This is a book I thoroughly enjoyed reading. The characters were well developed. The dog Baxter was especially well done. I enjoyed watching him as he and his owners went about their daily lives, each growing in their own way. However, this is also a story about soul-searching, healing and getting over things in our past that can impact our entire lives. As I read the story, I felt warmth for everyone involved, except Sebastian, mostly because I found it difficult for someone so in love that he could withhold such a big part of himself and his life. I could understand Jess holding back on her past but not him. Still, I found the story interesting and enjoyable. I think anyone who likes dogs (or other pets) would find this endearing. I received this from Goodreads to read and review.

Jess says

Unfortunately, this one was not a winner for me. I found myself bored by the characters and really bewildered by how much attention was put onto the dogs themselves. Entire pages were just about the interactions between the dogs, and although I love animals and I love reading about animals this was just too much for me. Yes, I do realize the title is called The Dog Park, but I expected more of a romance with added quirky parts about dogs (I was imagining something similar to Jill Shalvis' Animal Magnetism series). This was just not my cup of tea.

Bree T says

Stylist Jessica Champlin lives in Chicago sharing custody of Baxter, a "goldendoodle" with Sebastian Hess, her ex-husband. Sebastian and Jessica got Baxter as a last ditch effort to save their struggling marriage and although it didn't work, it keeps them in touch with each other as they trade Baxter back and forth each week. Sebastian works as a foreign correspondent, often in dangerous war torn areas and it was the nail in

the coffin in the marriage when he was unable to give that up. Jessica couldn't handle not being allowed to know where he was going to be or how long he was gone. Although there was never an issue of a lack of love in the marriage, it became a question of what she could continue to tolerate. And eventually they made the decision to go their separate ways. They both love and cherish Baxter and they make an effort for him, to keep things civil although it doesn't always work.

When Baxter saves the life of a child, it's filmed by a teenager and uploaded to Youtube. Overnight, Baxter the Superdog (named for his brightly coloured leash that Jessica had sewed stars onto) becomes an overnight sensation. The video is viewed millions of times, it is shared on news networks as their 'feel-good' puff piece at the end of the bulletin. People begin to recognise Baxter in the street and soon Jessica is inundated with requests about his collar and leash. She begins making them and then branches out into other items which she labels 'dogwear'. The business really takes off and Jessica finds herself having to hire people to keep up with demand. But although Jessica enjoys the spotlight on herself and Baxter at first, and it brings its perks, all of a sudden her dark past is brought to the surface, something she never even told Sebastian about. And the betrayal comes from someone closest to her.

What was a whirlwind of positive praise changes in an instant as Jessica has to face all her secrets being made public. She finds that the one person who stands by her could also be the one person she stands to lose forever...and now she has to make a decision about what she really wants and do everything she can to make sure she can get it.

I almost didn't keep reading this book because of the 'goldendoodle' thing. I don't really buy into it as a breed – it's a crossbred designer dog that might've been started for real and proper reasons but basically leaves so much open for backyard breeders to come in and sell these types of dogs, fooling people that they are a real breed. Also, the names are utterly ridiculous. A "goldendoodle" is never going to sound like an actual dog breed. It sounds like something a woman named Candy dreamed up in her backyard when she bred Fluffy to Fido. Basically what you have is a Golden Retriever crossed with a Poodle. You don't have a "goldendoodle". And because they're not a recognised breed, there's basically no way to buy them from a reputable breeder. They're all backyard breeders, some just may be a little more careful than others and make sure they do the rigorous testing in breeding two types of dogs together that are both known for having hip problems. I googled them and although the puppies are cute (basically all puppies are cute) once they grow up, they tend to look....well, a bit weird.

But I ended up persisting and I found this book quite unusual and for that I liked it. I've read a few "love reunited" stories and even ones where the characters have been married before. But I haven't really read anything where the characters are in the situation that Jessica and Sebastian are in. They loved each other madly and moved to Chicago from New York, where Sebastian was from. But eventually Jessica's inability to deal with Sebastian's job led to their marriage breaking down although they're still on relatively good terms for a formerly married couple. They see each other mostly weekly during dog exchanges but they also talk and text regularly. They do have niggling little arguments at times but on the whole, things are quite good. They've been divorced for about two years at the start of the book and I'm assuming that none of them have really moved on to other partners before now. Jessica meets a man that she begins dating and Sebastian's attitude about this is enough for me to assume that this is the first man Jessica has dated since their break up and Jessica makes no mention of Sebastian ever having another girlfriend after her, although it seems that in Chicago there are plenty of women he was involved with before her.

I feel as though there should've been a bit more about Sebastian and Jessica's unresolved feelings for each other though. Their interactions are all really quite mundane and revolve so much around Baxter and what he is doing. I get that they both really love their dog and that's great. But they're also two humans that were

married and in a relationship for a long time. Surely they have more to talk about than Baxter, at least I really wanted to read them talking about more than Baxter. Also I thought the way Sebastian's job played out was a little bit crazy but it was written in a way that made me buy into it. I also liked the resolution of Jessica's past and the fact that the author didn't really go into the obvious route of making it turn into some sort of total love triangle or use it to spin out more drama that prevented Jessica from being with who she is supposed to be with. I think this novel is light-hearted and funny and there's a few sad moments too but at times it really lacks the punch that it needed on the romance side. It needed a bit more feeling to really lift it up a bit more, make it into a total favourite. But it was still a pleasant story. Definitely one for someone who really likes dogs. If you're not a fan or mostly so-so towards them then the constant dog stuff in this book will probably end up becoming quite tedious.

Alycia says

This book's theme was second chances. Jessica Champlin and Sebastian Hess are divorced but have joint custody (their idea) of their goldendoodle, Baxter. After a trip to the dog park with Jessica, the two become an instant media sensation and local celebrities overnight after Baxter saves a little girl from being hit by a car. Jess is a stylist who starts an accessory dog line that becomes wildly popular, that she loves and in turn helps her land new styling jobs with dogs.

Even though the two are divorced, Jessica wants to start living again, and the two are pretty amicable. Sebastian is a serious war reporter and doesn't like all the media attention that his dog receives. He thinks it's not real news, but he does relent when he sees it helps Jess' new business. Everyone loves "Super dog," Baxter's nickname since the heroic incident.

Eventually Jess meets a new love interest, Gavin who seems wonderful. Expect Gavin and Sebastian when thrown together are totally oil and water. An event happens that really makes the reader emotionally invested, especially in Baxter. I won't give any spoilers away, but once again we see a second chance. And again at the ending.

I really enjoyed all the dog related bits in the book. After all, that is what drew me to the book. I have enjoyed devouring animal related fiction lately.

I recommend this book to anyone tempted to try, it's more animal centric than other similar books, on the market, but I recommend it. I am interested in what Caldwell has in store next. This book releases July 29th.

*Thank you to Harlequin for providing me a copy of this book via Netgalley.

Moon Love says

I loved this book! I put it on my to-read list the moment I read the blurb. It also helped I'd been looking forward to a new Laura Caldwell book for a long time. I was expecting a great story, and that's exactly what I got, plus lots of goldendoodle adorableness.

Laura Caldwell writes great characters. I loved Jessica and Baxter. I wasn't sure about Sebastian or Gavin. Both men gave me different first impressions and my final impression of them was different from what it

started out as. I love that Jessica gave Baxter and other dogs importance as much as she did the humans. After all, the book is titled The Dog Park, and much of the story wouldn't take place if it wasn't for Baxter.

I felt like I read this book really quickly. There were a number of moments in this book that broke my heart. I cried as I read them. I really felt like I connected with Jessica and Baxter. I wanted to connect with Sebastian badly, but it seemed he was destined to remain aloof for most of the book. I didn't want the book to end when it was finished. I'd love to read more about these characters and others at the dog park. I'd like to give Laura kudos for writing such a unique and fresh book. I am already eagerly awaiting her next book.

Gaele says

A cute story that shows the healing power of a pet, while the humans in his life seem to struggle and obsess over their mistakes and own issues. Jessica and Sebastian have relocated to Chicago, his hometown, so he can take a job offer with a newspaper. As Jessica is a stylist, she can work from anywhere -but fitting into Chicago was hard for her. A puppy chose them, and the love affair in this little family has begun.

Treating Baxter the puppy much like a child, Jessica would decorate leashes and collars for him, and they both find the love that is missing in their own relationship in the unconditional affection that the puppy, Baxter shows for them both. When divorce becomes the logical solution, a shared custody option for Baxter is arranged, and he is moving from Jessica's to Sebastian's in alternate weeks.

A chance encounter with a small child, a truck and a teenager with a large youtube following bring Baxter and his star-clad collar and leash set into the public eye, and a demand for gear from pet owners for their own "superdog" decorated items has Jessica starting a new business.

Jessica needed to find her own life, and stop obsessing about Sebastian: she needed to learn to find her own way and be honest with him, and let go of the anger about his close-mouthed behavior. Sebastian needed to get over himself and realize that he loves her, and that she deserved to know the truth. The relationship with the new guy seemed too good to be true - and his irrational attitudes about Jessica's obsession with the dog (yes - I did say obsession because it often felt as if the dog was the ONLY important character in her life) were understandable, although his behavior was reprehensible.

Most of the book I felt was obsessing over the dog, and the often isolating obsession that Jessica had for Baxter - rather than dealing with her own issues. I love animals, and the story was cute, but as a catalyst for character growth and change the dogs introduced were good - they just ran away with the story far too often. I did read this story in one sitting though, and I could see that Jessica's obsession was an understandable reaction to her situation. It was refreshing to see her open her eyes and learn that she needed to make some changes to get her happy.

I received an eArc copy of the title from the publisher via NetGalley for purpose of honest review. I was not compensated for this review: all conclusions are my own responsibility.

Kristen says

In the Dog Park, Laura Caldwell told us a beautiful story about two people and the love for their dog via

Jess's POV. It all started out for Jess Champlin and Sebastian Hess, once married and now divorced, when she took their dog out to the dog park in part one. When Baxter saved a girl's friend, he became a superstar and phenomenon across the airwaves and social media. He's been known as "superdog". For Jess a stylist, it helped her branched out into the dogwear business with his collars, while her ex Sebastian didn't want to be in the papers and became secretive, due to his work. For Jess and her ex, they have joint custody of Baxter with timeshare. That's when she met Gavin, a new love interest in her life. In part two, it's about Jess and Baxter's high rise to fame and how Baxter's accident changed everything for all of them--it also created a love triangle between them and her ex. Betrayal and a standstill rocked Jess's world in part three, when it brought her closer to the truth and a much happier ending. A lovely woman's fiction novel and for those who are dog lovers as well.

S says

I just didn't like the "voice" in the book. For some reason, I couldn't get into the characters or the story.

Michelle says

This was a cute doggie read about Jessica Champlin, her ex Sebastian, and their dog, Baxter. Her ex-Sebastion and her are still good friends, and share custody of Baxter... their parting was really due more to how secretive the nature of ex-Sebastion's journalist job was. Jessica simply could not handle not knowing where her husband was going and when he'd be back, etc. thus the breakdown of their marriage because he couldn't reveal certain details of his job to her.

I've decided that I like books that incorporate animals into the story as focus, and this story does just that. Baxter becomes "Super Dog" after saving a little girl from being hit by a car. Baxter's fame bolsters Jessica's business and thrusts her and Bax into the spotlight. Jessica meets a new guy and things start moving forward and looking up for everyone, but... there are some secrets from Jessica's past that threaten to expose her, and everything comes to a head when her new boyfriend is the one who exposes her to the world.

When Baxter is hit by a car in a hit-and-run, Jessica learns some important truths about herself.

Meanwhile, ex-Sebastion is going through a crisis at work and Jessica realizes how much they love each other. Can their love survive their secrets being revealed?

Let me just say that while I did not rate this 5 stars, that is not because it was a bad book. It just wasn't as riveting or suspenseful as what I normally like to read, so it was a little easier for me to put it down and read other things. A book that really grips me will take all of my attention away from all other books until it is finished, and this book did not do that. It was, however, a nice light distraction that I thoroughly enjoyed. I can't think of any major flaws with it, except that it might have been a little predictable. If you like chick-lit and romance, and/or books with pets as characters, you will probably enjoy this book a lot.

I received this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Jennifer says

Not one of my favorite Laura Caldwell books, it's more of a 2.5 than 2. This book was all over the place. The library has it labeled as a Romance, but really it's not. The beginning makes it out to be lighthearted and fluffy but it's not. The book goes from a couple sharing a dog after divorcing, to said dog saving a little girl and the dog becomes a HUGE internet star and makes the news. Jess capitalizes on her dog's fame and creates dogwear, starts styling dogs for photo shoots and goes on every news program, while her ex shies away from the media. Sebastian is a war correspondent and doesn't consider this actual news. Then the man Jess has been seeing gets a story about her in a celeb magazine, dredging up her past arrest and marriage to a rock star. Not to mention the dog gets hit, makes the news some more, Jess's first husband shows up (even though they haven't spoken in over 10 years), Jess complains how her parents didn't really love her and her second ex-husband gets held hostage in the Middle East. So many things in this book seemed unbelievable.

Kathy says

4.5 stars.

The Dog Park by **Laura Caldwell** is an absolutely delightful novel about an adorable dog named Baxter and his dog mom, Jessica Champlin. This sweet and light-hearted read is also a wonderful journey of self-discovery and healing for Jessica after she and Baxter unexpectedly become an overnight sensation on social media and in the press after Baxter saves a young girl's life.

Jessica and her ex-husband Sebastian Hess adopted Baxter as a puppy in an effort to save their marriage. Although both fell madly in love with Baxter, their marriage ended in divorce and now they share joint custody of their lovable dog. After the video of Baxter's heroic exploit goes viral, Jessica begins a wildly successful dogwear line while Baxter remains everyone's favorite canine hero.

Since Jessica and Sebastian share custody of Baxter, they continue to see one another on a regular basis. They still have some of the same arguments that led to their divorce but when Jessica becomes involved with her new business, a lot of her animosity towards Sebastian lessens. She also begins a new romance and she is surprised by how much she enjoys her new life. But a shocking betrayal by someone close to her exposes her long hidden secrets and leads to a long overdue reconciliation with someone from her past. When another calamity strikes close to home, Jessica finds help from unexpected people in her life, but her most startling discovery is the hidden strength she finds within herself as she takes charge of a frightening situation.

The Dog Park by **Laura Caldwell** is an engaging novel with a charming cast of characters and a refreshingly unique storyline. While there is a bit of a romantic element, it is not a traditional romance. Instead, it focuses mainly on lead protagonist, Jessica, as she heals the wounds of her past. It is a fun, heartwarming read that I absolutely loved and highly recommend to everyone who enjoys stories with animals.

Angela says

A nice story that while a bit too tame compared to other books I read was still enjoyable. Really liked Baxter.

