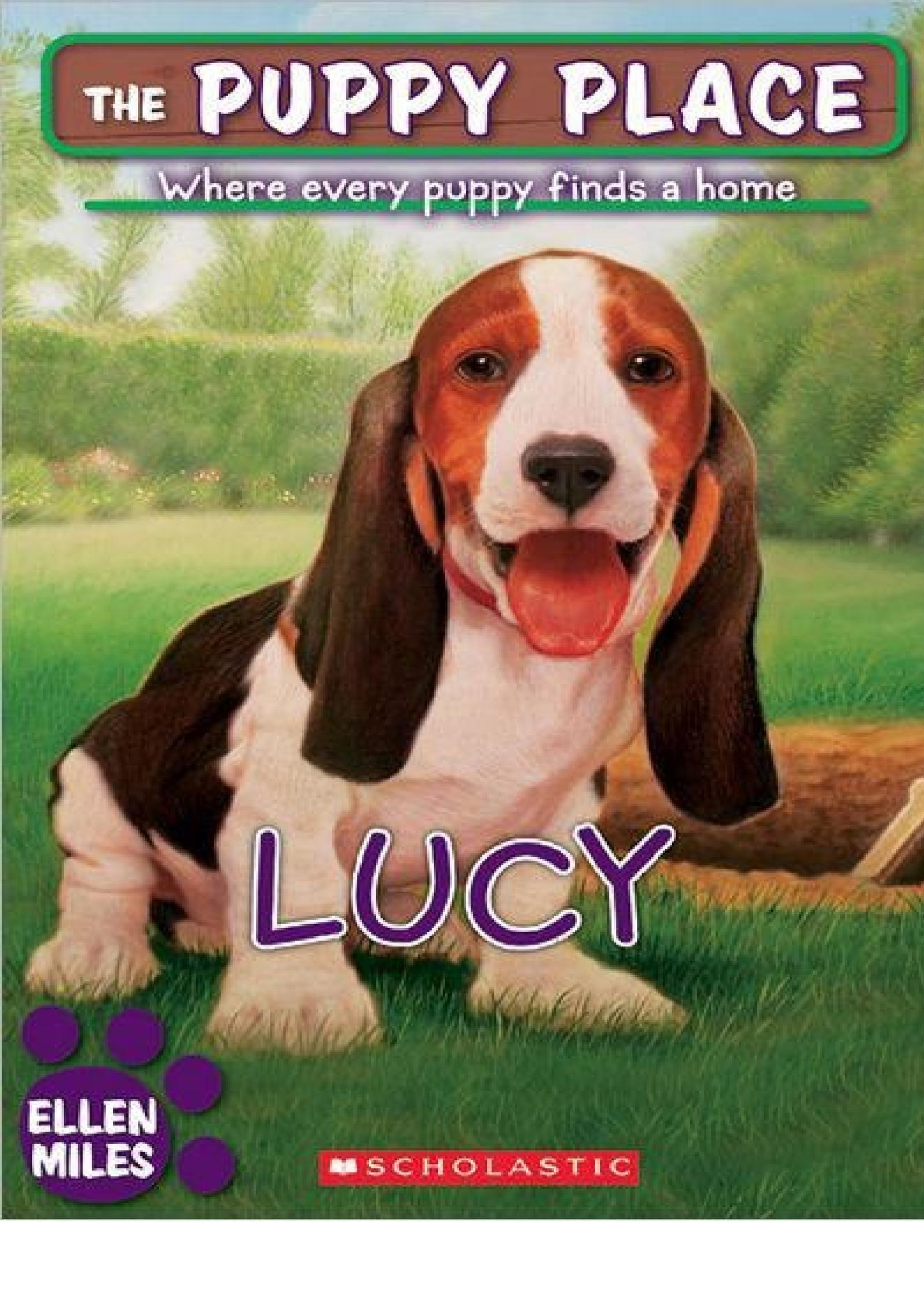


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CHAPTER ONE

Charles Peterson was having a bad day. A very bad day.

It had started first thing in the morning, when he couldn't find his math workbook. Why had he wasted all that time doing problems 17A through 22C for homework, if he wasn't going to be able to bring them in to show Mr. Mason? "Where is it? Where is that workbook?" he mumbled, as he threw things around his room. Two mismatched sneakers, a hockey jersey, his favorite pajama top, one of Buddy's chewed-up stuffed toys—he could find all *those* things. But not his workbook.

"C'mon, Buddy, help me find it," he said, ruffling the soft brown fur on top of his puppy's head. As always, just touching Buddy made Charles feel better. That was something he could count on, even on a bad day. He sat down and pulled the puppy into his lap to give him a real hug. "You're the best," he whispered into Buddy's ear, as he stroked the heart-shaped white patch on the puppy's chest. Charles couldn't believe how lucky he was to have his very own puppy. Of course, Buddy belonged to all the Petersons: to Charles's older sister, Lizzie, to his younger brother, the Bean, and to his mom and dad. But Charles was secretly pretty sure that Buddy loved him best of all.

Buddy usually slept in Charles's room. He sat under Charles's chair at dinner (well, maybe that was because Charles had a habit of accidentally-on-purpose dropping scraps of food for him). And when everyone was sitting in the living room Buddy would always bring his favorite toy, Mr. Duck, over to Charles first.

Charles had known a lot of great puppies in his life, because his family fostered puppies. (That meant they took care of them until they could find each one the perfect forever home.) But Buddy was the best puppy ever. Buddy had started out as a foster puppy, but when it came time to find him a home the Petersons had all agreed that he belonged with them.

Now, Mom appeared in Charles's doorway. "Hey kiddo, let's move it. You're going to be late for school."

"I'm looking for my math workbook," Charles told her. "I can't find it anywhere."

"Hmmm, is that what you're doing?" Mom asked. "To me it looks like you're cuddling with Buddy." But she smiled as she crouched down to sort through the mess on Charles's floor. "Isn't that it?" she asked, holding up a blue book.

Charles stared. How had he missed that? He nodded. "That's it."

Mom shook her head. "You'd lose your own head if it weren't attached," she said. "These days you can't seem to find anything." She handed him the book. "Breakfast is on the table. Hurry down."

The next bad thing that happened was at school. Every Friday afternoon, Mr. Mason put a list of words on the blackboard for everyone to copy down and study. Every Monday when they came in, the words would be erased, and Mr. Mason would give the class a quiz. That Monday was no different. Right after morning meeting, Mr. Mason said it was time for their weekly spelling test. "Did everyone learn last week's words?" he asked. "Take out a clean sheet of paper and number it from one to ten, then write down each word as I read it out loud."

Charles was a pretty good speller. While other kids were staring into space or tapping pencils on their teeth, he quickly wrote down all ten words. As usual, he was one of the first ones to finish—right after Amanda Bing, who was always first. He passed in his paper and got out the book he was reading. The class always had free-reading time while Mr. Mason sat at his desk and corrected the tests.

Charles had only been reading for a few minutes, but he was already lost in his book — it was about a boy who lived on his own in the wilderness and got to be friends with all the animals — who

Mr. Mason tapped him on the shoulder.

“Charles,” he said. ~~“You’re going to have to take this test over again.”~~ Mr. Mason held out the test, and Charles was shocked to see red marks all over it. “You missed seven words,” said Mr. Mason. “Were you having trouble hearing me when I read them out loud today?”

Charles shook his head miserably.

Mr. Mason nodded. “Okay, don’t worry about it. We’ll test you again later this week. I know you’re usually one of my best spellers.” He left the test with Charles and went back to his desk.

Charles stared down at his paper. He still couldn’t believe his eyes. How could he have made so many mistakes?

“Oooh, Cheese blew the test,” Sammy whispered from the next desk over. Sammy was Charles’s best friend and next-door neighbor. They liked to call each other Cheese and Salami.

“Shut up.” Charles knew that was not a nice thing to say, but right then he did not feel like being teased.

Sammy leaned over to look at Charles’s test. “Sneep?” he asked. “What kind of word is *that*? It sounds like a Martian word. Did you turn into an alien over the weekend?” He made antennae out of his fingers. “Murp-murp, take me to your leader,” he said in a silly, high voice. “I come from the planet Veeba and we need sneep. Many sneep! Bring us sneep!”

Sammy giggled, but Charles didn’t see what was so funny. He pulled the paper away from Sammy and stuck it into his desk so he wouldn’t have to see those red marks staring back at him.

The third bad thing happened at recess. Charles was the pitcher in a kickball game against a bunch of third graders. His friend David was the catcher. That day, for the first time ever, their team was ahead — even though the third graders were all bigger and stronger.

Charles stood at the pitcher’s mound, facing Danny Stumpf, the tallest and fastest third grader on the team. Charles knew what was at stake. There were two outs and runners on second and third base. If his team could just keep the third graders from scoring for about five more minutes, the bell would ring, recess would be over, and the game would go down in history.

He squinted at David. Earlier in the spring, the two of them had worked out a system of signals. David was a great catcher because he knew every kicker’s weakness. He knew which ones should go for an outside pitch, or a slow roll, or a bouncer.

David flashed a sign.

Charles squinted again, nodded, and let loose with a bouncer to the outside. Danny Stumpf took three strides to the plate, walloped the ball with his foot, and kept on running for first base as the ball flew up, up, up in a long arc. It looked as if it might go all the way past the monkey bars, but finally it began to drop — about a mile from any of the second grade fielders.

Danny circled the bases, pumping his fists and yelling. He and the other two runners crossed the plate before Sammy, the left fielder, had even caught up with the ball.

The bell rang. The game was over. The third graders had won again.

Charles trudged toward the door, where his class was lining up. He felt terrible. Then David said something that made him feel even worse. “Didn’t you understand my sign?” David asked. “Stumpf loves the bouncer. I was asking for a slow roller to the inside.”

After that, Charles gave up hoping things would get better. It was a bad day, that was all there was to it. He just had to get through the next few hours of school, go home and eat dinner, and go to bed. Tomorrow just *had* to be better.

At the end of the day he dawdled at his cubby so he could walk home alone. He didn’t want to hear what Sammy had to say about his spelling test, his failure as a pitcher, or anything else. When everybody had left, he slipped out the door and headed home slowly, kicking a small rock as he walked.

“Hey, Buckaroo, where have you been?” Dad asked, when Charles pushed the door open. “I’ve been waiting for you to get home.”

Charles shrugged. He didn’t even feel like explaining. But then his dad said something that instantly changed a very bad day into a very good one.

“We have a new puppy to foster, and I was just about to leave to go pick her up. Want to come?”

CHAPTER TWO

“We’re stopping to pick up Aunt Amanda on our way,” Dad told Charles as they backed out of the driveway in Dad’s red pickup. “I heard about the puppy from her, and she insists on coming with us.”

“What kind of puppy is it? Where did it come from? Is it a boy or a girl?” Charles bounced up and down on his seat. Already, he’d almost forgotten all about his bad day. How bad a day could it be if they were getting a new puppy to foster?

Dad smiled. “I really don’t have many details,” he said. “The only question I can answer is where the dog came from. Remember how we heard about all that flooding down south last week? Lots of pets were left homeless when people’s houses washed away. The shelters down there have done everything they can to find each dog’s family, but there are still some animals left needing homes.”

“But how did the puppy get up here?” Charles asked.

“Aunt Amanda has an old friend named Bunny who runs an all-breed rescue,” Dad said. “She takes in all kinds of dogs and tries to find them homes, just the way we take in puppies. Her place is sort of a cross between a foster home and a shelter. I guess Bunny has so many dogs right now that she just can’t handle one more, especially a young one. When Aunt Amanda told her that we foster puppies, she couldn’t wait to meet us.”

Charles sat quietly for a moment, imagining what kind of puppy they would be meeting. Maybe it would be a fluffy Pomeranian. He’d always wanted to foster one of those. Or maybe it was a large breed. Charles had loved Maggie, the huge Saint Bernard puppy his family had fostered.

“You okay, pal?” Dad broke the silence while they waited at a stoplight. “You looked pretty bummed out when you first came home. Want to talk about it?”

Charles shrugged. “I just had a bad day, that’s all. I messed up in a kickball game, and Sammy teased me about something, and stuff like that.” He played with the buckle on his seat belt.

Dad nodded. “Not every day can be a winner, I guess.” He shook his head. “That Sammy sure does like to joke around. I bet he didn’t mean to hurt your feelings.”

Charles looked out the window. He didn’t want to talk about it anymore. He just wanted to forget about his bad day.

Dad pulled up at Aunt Amanda’s and she climbed into the truck. She was all excited. “I can’t wait to see Bunny. I haven’t even talked to her for months,” she said. “It’s terrible to lose touch with an old friend.”

“You and Bunny go way back, that’s for sure,” said Dad. “I remember when the two of you used to chase me around the yard because you wanted to dress me up like a baby doll.” He and Aunt Amanda chuckled.

Charles liked it when Dad and Aunt Amanda talked about old times. It was funny to think of his father as a little kid. The drive to Bunny’s was over an hour, but the time went by quickly as he listened to them tell stories and joke around.

“This is it,” said Aunt Amanda, as Dad turned the truck down a long dirt driveway. Charles saw a rambling old farmhouse with a big red barn. “The kennels are in the barn,” said Aunt Amanda, hopping out of the truck as soon as Dad pulled to a stop. “I bet Bunny’s in there.” She headed for the barn just as a tall woman in jeans and a denim jacket appeared at the door.

“Panda!” yelled the woman.

“Bun-Bun!” screeched Aunt Amanda. They threw their arms around each other and laughed out loud as they hugged.

“Panda?” Charles asked Dad.

Dad shrugged and grinned as he stepped out of the truck to give Bunny a hug.

~~Charles wondered if he and Sammy would still be friends when they were grown up. He felt a twinge in his stomach when he remembered how he'd spent most of that day feeling mad at Sammie. Maybe Dad was right. Maybe Sammy really *hadn't* meant to be mean. He just liked to joke around, which was ordinarily something Charles really liked about his friend.~~

"So where's this puppy? Why was it so important for me to come see her?" Aunt Amanda asked after she'd introduced Charles to her old friend.

"Ha! You'll see," said Bunny. "Come on in, everybody." She led them into the barn. "As you can see, I've got a full house these days." She waved a hand at the kennels that lined both sides of the barn. Charles saw dogs of every size and type — and heard them, too. The barn echoed with the noise they all made, barking their heads off as Bunny strolled down the aisle speaking soothingly to each dog as she passed.

They were all barking — except for the last dog on the row. She was not barking, but she wasn't quiet, either. She was howling. The little brown and black pup sat on her short legs, her long muzzle tilted to the sky so that her floppy ears draped over her back. "Awwwooooo!" she howled, and the sound made the hair on the back of Charles's neck stand up. He had never heard anything so sad.

"This is Lucy," said Bunny. "This is the puppy I told you about."

"But," Aunt Amanda said, "that's amazing." She stared at the pup. "She could be Pepper's twin."

"I know!" Bunny crowed. "That's why you had to meet her."

"Wait, who's Pepper?" Charles asked.

"Pepper was my dog when we were growing up," Bunny told him. "He was part basset and part dachshund and part hound, just like this girl probably is."

"Oh, and he was such a character." Aunt Amanda laughed. "Remember how he would howl whenever you left for school?"

Bunny laughed, too. "Of course. And who could forget the cowboy-boot incident?"

"Ha!" Aunt Amanda said. "That's when we started calling him Captain Hook. Remember, Paul? Do you remember Hookie?"

By now, the puppy had stopped howling. She tilted her head this way and that, watching Aunt Amanda and Bunny, almost as if she were listening to their conversation.

Dad nodded and smiled, but Charles saw him glance at his watch.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Bunny quickly. "We're taking up too much time with our old stories."

"It's just that I have to pick up the Bean from preschool," Dad said. "My younger son, that is. We're going to take Lucy, maybe you'd better tell us a bit more about her."

Bunny nodded. "I wish I could," she said. "But she just arrived yesterday, and I really haven't had a chance to get to know her. All I can tell you is that so far she's been a total sweetheart, and I don't think she'll give you any trouble. Poor thing. I know they've done everything they could to find her a new family. I'm sure she misses her home, but I bet she'll cheer up a bit when she gets some love from your family." She opened the door to the kennel and stooped to click a leash onto the puppy's collar. Then she handed the leash to Charles. "Enjoy her," she said. "From what your aunt's told me, I trust you to find her the perfect forever home."

Charles knelt down to pet Lucy's soft, warm coat. She looked up at him with her huge brown eyes. Then she tilted her long nose up and howled.

I feel so alone. I lost my home and my family — I lost everything!

The mournful sound almost made Charles feel like howling himself. Poor Lucy. He stroked one of her long, silky ears, then lifted it to whisper inside. "I'll take care of you, I promise. You're safe with me."

Lucy snuggled against his knees and let out a long sigh. Charles hugged her close and felt her warm breath on his face. "I'll take care of you," he promised again.

CHAPTER THREE

“You did *what*?” Mom stood in the kitchen, her arms folded.

Charles and Dad looked at each other. “Um, we said we would foster this puppy?” Dad said, as he weren’t really sure.

“Her name’s Lucy,” Charles said. “She’s really cute.”

Mom raised an eyebrow as she looked down at Lucy. “Well,” she said. “That happens to be true. She’s adorable. Those ears! But we are supposed to have an agreement in this family —”

“Uppy!” The Bean raced into the kitchen and threw his arms around Lucy. He had fallen in love with the brown-eyed pup the minute he first saw her, when Dad and Charles stopped to pick him up at preschool. Lucy loved the Bean right back. Her tail thumped against the floor as she licked his face on his cheeks.

You remind me of a boy in my old family, the one I lost when all the water came.

“She seems really sweet, too,” said Lizzie. “Didn’t Aunt Amanda’s friend tell you that she’d be no trouble?” Lizzie had gotten home from her dog-walking job just before Mom came home, so she already heard the whole story.

Dad smiled gratefully at Lizzie and nodded. “I’m sorry, Betsy,” he said, turning back to Mom. “I guess I just got carried away. Amanda was so excited about seeing her friend, and they were both so sure that this puppy was perfect for us to foster.” He looked down at his shoes, then back up at Mom.

“Can we keep her?” Charles asked. “Please?” He sat down on the floor next to Lucy, pulled her into his lap, and began to stroke her ears. Lucy looked up at Mom with her huge, sad brown eyes. *Good girl!* Charles thought. Who could resist those eyes?

Mom sighed. “Where’s Buddy? We’d better make sure the two of them get along.”

“I put him in the den when Dad and Charles first got home with Lucy,” Lizzie said. “I’ll go look for him out.” She headed for the door, turning at the last minute to lock glances with Charles and give him a secret thumbs-up. Charles grinned back at her. They both knew it was a done deal — as long as Buddy was friendly. And Buddy was always friendly.

Lizzie was back in a moment, with Buddy scampering along behind her. “Buddy, look, a new puppy!” Lizzie said, as he bounded over to touch noses with Lucy.

Lucy struggled to get out of Charles’s arms.

Cool! Another dog to play with.

A moment later, both puppies were chasing each other around the kitchen table.

“All right, all right!” Mom threw up her hands. “But get them out of here so I can get dinner started.” Charles could tell she was trying to sound stern, even though she was smiling as she watched the puppies play.

“Let’s take them out back,” Lizzie said. “I wonder if Lucy likes to fetch.” Charles and Lizzie always wished for a dog who would fetch, since Buddy sometimes wasn’t that interested in bringing back balls they threw for him.

But Lucy wasn't interested in the ball at all. What she wanted to do was sniff. She ran around the backyard, sniffing at every inch of it: the grass, the fence, the rosebushes, the trees.

"That's the hound in her," Lizzie told Charles as they watched. "Hounds love to follow the noses."

Buddy chased around after Lucy, trying to get her to play, but she ignored him until she had checked out the whole backyard. Then, finally, she whirled around and put her front paws down and her butt up in a "want-to-play?" pose. Her long ears flopped onto the ground.

Buddy put his own front paws down, tail wagging. And then they were off, tearing around the yard in a mad chase. Charles and Lizzie watched and laughed, and the Bean clapped his hands. "Guppies!" he yelled, jumping up and down.

When the puppies were tired out, Lizzie took Buddy inside while Charles helped Lucy calm down by walking her around the yard. He wanted to make sure she had not forgotten to pee while she was outside. You never knew with a new puppy. This would not be a good night for Lucy to make a mess in the house, not when Mom had just barely agreed to let her stay.

Back inside, Buddy still wanted to play. He pulled his stuffed toys out of the basket in the living room, shaking each one in his mouth as he showed it to Lucy.

The puppies were playing tug with Snake when Mom called Charles, Lizzie, and the Bean in the dining room for dinner. It was homemade pizza, one of Charles's favorites. He had three pieces plus some salad that Dad said he had to eat. He was stuffed.

After dinner, Charles and Lizzie both helped clean up. Then they went back into the living room to see what the puppies were up to. Lucy lay on the rug, chin on her paws, all tuckered out from her big day. She glanced up when they came in, and the look in her soft brown eyes went straight to Charles's heart.

Buddy wandered around the room, sniffing here and there as if he'd lost something. "What are you looking for?" Charles asked him. "Where's Mr. Duck?"

Usually when Charles asked that question, Buddy would run straight to his favorite toy and bounce back with it dangling from his mouth. But tonight, no matter how hard he — and then Charles, and Lizzie, and the Bean, and even Mom and Dad — looked, they couldn't find Mr. Duck anywhere. Mr. Duck had flown the coop.

CHAPTER FOUR

“...and we still haven’t found him,” Charles finished up, at morning meeting the next day at school.

“Poor Buddy.” Mr. Mason smiled at Charles. “He must really miss Mr. Duck.” Mr. Mason was such a good listener. No matter what you talked about at sharing time he always had a question or comment.

“I think he does,” said Charles. “He was kind of moping around this morning.”

“Maybe you can get him a new duck toy,” offered Hannah, who always tried to make everything better.

“Maybe,” agreed Charles. But he knew that Buddy loved Mr. Duck just the way he was, even though the toy had no stuffing in his belly and his once-orange beak was sort of gray. Buddy didn’t care, as long as Mr. Duck still had two flappy wings and a squeaker in his head.

“Well,” said Mr. Mason. “Does anybody have anything else to share?”

Charles raised his hand again and started talking before Mr. Mason even called on him. “I wanted to tell a little more about Lucy,” he said. “She’s really sweet and her eyes are so pretty —”

Mr. Mason nodded. “Maybe tomorrow you can tell us more, Charles. But right now I think Ben had something he wanted to share.” He pointed to the wipe-off board, where people signed up if they had news to share. Charles had not really noticed the other names listed there.

Charles knew that it was only fair to let Ben share. But he knew that what he had to say about Lucy would have been much more interesting than Ben’s story about visiting his aunt who was a dentist.

He slumped down, staring at the yellow stars on the blue rug where they all sat “crisscross applesauce” for sharing every morning. He tuned out Ben, and thought about Lucy. One funny thing they had learned about her last night was that she loved to sing. It had happened when Dad put on some music after dinner. When the woman on the CD started to sing, Lucy did, too! She sat back on her haunches, lifted her long nose to the ceiling, and let out a long, mournful howl that cracked everybody up.

“Well, I see someone has a future in show business,” Dad had shouted over the racket.

“She’s a natural,” Mom shouted back.

Lucy howled even louder. She didn’t stop until the song ended. Then, when a new song started she began all over again. When the CD ended, everyone in the family took turns making Lucy howl by singing favorite songs to her. Her best duet was with the Bean, who sang “Old MacDonald.” Lucy seemed to love the “E-I E-I O” part, only when she sang it, it came out more like “E-I E-I OooooooOOOOOoooOOOOO!”

“How about you, Charles?”

Charles’s head snapped up and he looked at Mr. Mason. He had been so lost in his thoughts about Lucy that he’d almost forgotten where he was. “Um, what?” he asked.

Mr. Mason smiled. “Did you hear the question?”

Charles shook his head.

“I was asking everyone how their writing is coming along — you know, for the contest?”

“Contest?” Charles had no idea what Mr. Mason was talking about.

“Remember, I announced it yesterday,” said Mr. Mason, patiently. “There is a school-wide writing contest going on right now. You’re supposed to write about a pet, or any animal really, that inspires you.”

Charles did not remember hearing anything about a writing contest. He had probably been to

busy thinking about his stupid bad day, and how Sammy had teased him, and all that stuff. “That sounds cool,” he said. ~~Charles liked to write, and he knew he was pretty good at it. He was a better speller than Lizzie, even though she was older. That was another reason it had bugged him so much to fail that spelling test.~~

“Well, there’s still plenty of time,” said Mr. Mason. “Entries are not due until the end of the week.” He stood up and brushed off his pants. “That’s it for morning meeting, kiddos. We’d better get a move on or we’ll be late for Reading Buddies.”

Charles jumped up, too. He liked Reading Buddies time, when his whole class trooped down the hall to Mrs. Schubert’s kindergarten room. Each kid in Charles’s class had a kindergartner for a reading buddy, and they would spend a quiet half hour looking at books together. Charles’s reading buddy was Oliver, a serious little boy with big glasses. Oliver loved dogs as much as Charles did, but his family didn’t have one because his mom said their lives were too busy for a dog. Oliver always picked out books about dogs for Charles to read to him.

“This one,” he said that day, shoving a book into Charles’s hands before he had even said hello. “Read this one.”

Oliver could be a little bossy at times.

Charles sighed as he looked down at the book. It was Oliver’s favorite, the one with “Ten Thousand Dog Facts!” He had read lots and lots of those facts to Oliver, week after week, and honestly, he was just plain tired of the book. Plus, sometimes squinting at the tiny writing on each page ended up giving him a headache.

“Okay,” said Charles. “But first, would you like to hear about the new puppy my family is fostering?”

CHAPTER FIVE

When Charles got home from school that day, he raced into the living room. “Did you find Mr. Duck yet?” he asked his mother. She was sitting on the couch, looking tired.

“No,” she said. “In fact, I can’t even search for him anymore.”

“Why not?” Charles asked, plopping down on the floor to pet Lucy and Buddy. It looked as if Mom was having a bad day. Charles knew what that was like.

“Because now I can’t find my glasses.” Mom rubbed her eyes. “I am positive that I had them on earlier today. Then I must have taken them off and put them down somewhere and...” She shrugged. “They’ve disappeared.”

“You’d lose your head if it wasn’t attached,” Charles said, hoping to get a smile out of Mom. He had got one, but it was a very tiny one. He cleared his throat. “I think I’ll take the dogs out in the yard,” he said. He grabbed his backpack. “Come on, Buddy! Come on, Lucy! Who wants to go out?”

Charles played with the puppies for a while, throwing a ball for them. But Lucy seemed more interested in sniffing things, and Buddy seemed more interested in trying to get Lucy to wrestle. Charles finally gave up. He sat on the back deck, watching the dogs play. He thought about the writing contest that Mr. Mason had talked about that morning. What was it that he loved so much about dogs? What was inspiring about Buddy and Lucy? He pulled a notebook out of his backpack and began to write.

Dogs

by Charles Peterson

Dogs are the best. They always make you smile. If you feel sad, a dog will always make you feel better. My dog, Buddy, is a perfect example. He always knows just how to cheer me up, with a wagging tail or a lick on the cheek. Another funny dog is Lucy, the puppy my family is fostering. She is a bass mix, like a big sausage dog with long, floppy ears. She likes to sing along when you sing to her....

Charles wrote for three straight pages, but somehow he didn’t feel as if he had come up with anything worth entering into a contest. He needed something special, something nobody else would have thought of writing. Maybe Mom could help.

Charles got up. “Come on, you guys,” he called. “We’re going inside.” Lucy and Buddy charged up the stairs and followed him into the house. Mom was in the kitchen, opening and shutting drawers and bending low to look under cabinets. “Didn’t you find your glasses yet?” Charles asked.

Mom shook her head. “Not yet. Dad just got home, and he’s helping me look, too. Where could they have gone?” She put her hands on her hips. “This is ridiculous.”

“I guess that means you can’t help me with my essay,” Charles said.

“Not now,” Mom said. “Maybe later.”

Charles nodded. It would probably be better if he just stayed out of the way. “Buddy!” he called. “Lucy! Let’s go back outside.”

Both puppies followed him back out the door. Charles sat on the back deck again, working on his essay as he watched Lucy and Buddy race around.

Dogs

by Charles Peterson

What do dogs think about? Do they have emotions, like we do? I think so. I can always tell when my puppy, Buddy, is happy. He wags his tail and his ears stand up straight. It almost looks as if he's smiling sometimes....

No, that was no good. How about:

Dogs

by Charles Peterson

Some dogs have lots of nicknames. I like to call my dog, Buddy, all sorts of things, like Bud-a-roo, Big Bad Bud, Mr. Bud, and the Budster. My friend Sammy sometimes calls his dog Rufus the Great Rufusini. My aunt's friend used to call her dog Captain Hook, but I don't know why....

Charles looked up to see Lucy coming toward him, her nose all covered with dirt. "What have you been doing?" he asked. "Sniffing a little too hard?" He brushed the dirt off, and Lucy sneezed and wagged her tail.

Then her long ears perked up and she turned toward the back door. Charles could tell that Lucy had heard something. Now Charles heard it, too. It was Dad's beeper going off. That meant there was a fire somewhere, and he would have to jump into his pickup and race to the fire station.

But Charles didn't hear the pickup start. Instead, he heard Dad's voice. "Where are they?" Dad was yelling. "Where are my car keys? I just put them down for one second, and now they're gone."

Charles sat up straight. First Mr. Duck. Then Mom's glasses. Now, the keys to Dad's truck. What was everything disappearing lately? Charles stared at Lucy. He thought about the dirt on her nose. He thought about that nickname, Captain Hook.

Charles scrambled to his feet and raced inside, just in time to hear Mom tell Dad to take the van instead. Dad grabbed her keys and raced out the door.

Charles tugged on Mom's sleeve. "Mom," he said. "I think I know what happened to Dad's keys. And maybe your glasses, and Mr. Duck, too!"

CHAPTER SIX

“What do you mean?” Mom asked. “Did you find my glasses?”

Charles shook his head. “No, but I think I know where to look. I have a theory. I think Lucy been taking things and burying them in the backyard.”

Mom raised her eyebrows. “Really?”

“It just came to me,” Charles said. “She had some dirt on her nose, and then I remembered about Captain Hook, and —”

“Captain Hook?” Mom asked. Now she looked totally confused. “What does Captain Hook have to do with anything?”

“Because he’s a pirate!” Charles burst out. “You know, buried treasure?”

Mom sat down at the kitchen table and put her head in her hands. “I just want my glasses,” she said.

Charles sat down next to her. “Okay, I can explain. See, Aunt Amanda’s friend Bunny used to have a dog that looked a lot like Lucy. And when we went to pick Lucy up, they started talking about how they used to call her dog Captain Hook. But I didn’t hear why. Then, I saw that dirt on Lucy’s nose and I realized she must be digging holes and I thought, Aha. Buried treasure. Captain Hook. So Bunny’s dog was probably a digger, too. Get it?”

Mom rubbed her eyes. “Sort of,” she said. “I guess this means we probably don’t have moles either.”

Now Charles gave her a quizzical look.

“Don’t you remember at dinner last night, when I was telling Dad about all the holes in the backyard?” Mom said. “I thought it was moles and asked him to figure out what we were going to do about it.”

“I didn’t even think of that, but you’re right,” said Charles. He heard someone pull into the driveway. “Hey, speaking of Dad, I think he’s home.”

Sure enough, Dad had returned. “False alarm,” he said. “No fire. Now, back to trying to find my keys.”

Charles tugged on his father’s sleeve. “Hey, Dad, do you remember why Bunny’s dog was nicknamed Captain Hook?”

“Huh?” Dad thought for a second. “Well, I guess it was because he liked to steal things and bury them, just like a pirate. Good old Hookie.”

“Ha!” Charles crowed. “I knew it.” Quickly, he explained everything to Dad.

“What are we waiting for?” Dad asked when Charles was done. “Let’s go searching for buried treasure.”

“But first,” Mom said, “I think we should put Lucy and Buddy inside. Who knows what that dog will steal next?”

Charles went to the back deck and called Buddy and Lucy to the door. “Don’t worry,” he said, giving Lucy a hug as he brought her inside. “Nobody’s mad at you. You can’t help it that you like to dig.”

Lucy looked up at him with her soulful brown eyes. She tilted her nose up and let out a howl.

I didn’t mean to do anything bad!

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