

THE PUPPY PLACE

GOLDIE



A
LITTLE APPLE
PAPERBACK

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For the original Sammy, my best reading friend

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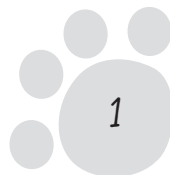
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CHAPTER ONE

Charles woke up with a bad feeling in his stomach. Why? For a minute, he couldn't figure it out. Then he rolled over and looked at his clock. It was 3:46 A.M., and Charles could hear the loud "deedle-deedle-dee" of his dad's pager going off. Mr. Peterson was a volunteer fireman. When his pager went off, there was a fire somewhere in town.

Charles listened to his dad's footsteps going downstairs. Then he heard the slam of a truck door and an engine starting up. He lay there for a while, worrying a little. He decided to stay awake until his dad came home.

But he must have fallen asleep, because when he woke up again, the sun was shining and his



clock said it was 7:16. Charles rubbed his eyes and climbed out of bed. Then he raced down to the kitchen and looked out the window.

Dad's red pickup was not in the driveway.

Mom was making French toast while the Bean—Charles's little brother—crawled around on the floor by her feet. The smell of cinnamon made Charles's mouth water. "Is Dad—" Charles began.

"Dad's fine," Mom said. "He called a little while ago. There was a big fire, but everyone is okay."

Charles let out a big breath. It was cool to have a fireman dad, but scary sometimes, too.

"He'll be home soon," Mom told Charles.

"Where was the fire?" asked Lizzie, scuffing her slippers as she shuffled into the kitchen. She rubbed her eyes and yawned. Lizzie was Charles's older sister. It always took her a long time to wake up.

"Out at a farm in Middletown," Mom said.



At this, Lizzie's eyes popped open. "Were any animals hurt?" she asked.

Mom shook her head. "I don't think so." She flipped a slice of French toast. "Set the table, okay?" Mom asked.

That *proved* that everything was okay. What could be more normal than doing chores?

Since there was no reason to worry, Charles decided to ask his favorite question, the one he asked every single morning.

"So *why* can't we have a dog?" he asked.

His mother sighed. "Again?" She pulled the orange juice out of the fridge and filled four glasses and the Bean's purple sippy cup. "Do we have to talk about this every day?"

"Only until we get a dog," Lizzie said, with a sleepy smile.

"First you said we couldn't have a dog because our apartment was too small," Charles reminded his mom. "Then we moved to this big old house,

and now there is plenty of room.” He followed Lizzie around the table, putting a fork onto every napkin she laid down. “But instead of adopting a dog, we adopted the Bean. ”

Charles looked down at the Bean. Sometimes Charles could hardly remember the Bean’s real name. It was Adam. But they had called him the Bean ever since he came to live with them when he was a tiny squirmy baby. “Just a little bean,” Mr. Peterson had said, and the name had stuck.

The Bean grinned up at Charles and made a little woofing noise. “Even though he *thinks* he’s a dog, he’s *not*,” Charles pointed out. “He’s just a kid who likes to crawl around on the floor, beg for food, and sleep on a fleece dog bed.”

“And carry his stuffed toys in his mouth,” Lizzie added.

“It’s a phase,” their mom said, the way she always did. “He’ll get over it by the time he’s —”

“Seventeen,” Charles finished, the way their

dad always did. It was their dad's favorite joke. Their mom didn't think it was so funny.

"Anyway," Charles continued, "back then you said a baby and a dog were too much at once. You said we had to wait until the Bean was older. Well, now he *is*. He's two and a half! He's not a baby anymore."

"No, he's not," agreed his mother, a little sadly. She loved babies. And kittens. Just not puppies. Mr. Peterson always joked about his wife being a cat person, not a dog person. Mrs. Peterson always said she didn't see anything wrong with that. She had grown up with cats and she was used to cats. But the other family members were not interested in cats. The rest of the family loved dogs.

"So, why can't we get a puppy?" Charles and Lizzie asked together.

"Jinx," Charles said to Lizzie. "Owe me a favor. You clear the table after we eat."

Lizzie stuck out her tongue. Charles grinned. He *always* said "jinx" first.



“We *will* have a puppy,” their mother said. “Someday. When the time is right, and the puppy is right.”

“But when will that be?” Charles asked. “When *I’m* seventeen?” Sometimes he felt as if he’d waited *forever* for a dog. It wasn’t fair. Everybody *else* had dogs. And nobody wanted one more than Charles and Lizzie and the Bean. Nobody would take better care of a dog, or teach it as many great tricks, or love it as much as they would.

“We’ll know,” Mom said. “When the time is right, we’ll know.” She had that tone in her voice, the tone that meant it was time to change the subject.

But Lizzie didn’t seem to notice. “If we had a dog, we’d all feel better,” she said. “Did you know that dog owners are happier, healthier, and more relaxed than people who don’t have dogs? Plus, having a dog teaches kids responsibility. And a dog can help to protect the house and save people from fires.”

