

Now Lizzie sat there, feeling like an overstuffed sofa but still determined to show that she was the pancake champion. “That’s okay,” she told Mr. Santiago. “I can manage.” Slowly, she wiped another bite of pancake through the syrup and put it into her mouth. Too bad Buddy wasn’t lying under the table, the way he would be at home. Buddy would be happy to secretly help her out with finishing her food.

Buddy was the Petersons’ brown and tan puppy, the cutest, most wonderful puppy ever. Of course, it was against family rules to feed Buddy from the table, but sometimes Lizzie just couldn’t resist his sweet, soulful brown eyes. Sometimes she would let a tiny scrap of pork chop or a crumb of corn bread fall to the floor. Buddy would gobble it up happily while Mom frowned and shook her head at Lizzie. “It was an accident,” Lizzie always claimed. Her younger brother Charles

and her toddler brother the Bean (his real name was Adam) also sometimes had “accidents.” Lizzie suspected that even her dad slipped the puppy a bite or two once in a while. Buddy was a lucky dog.

And Lizzie knew she was lucky, too. Lucky to have a dog of her own, and lucky to be part of a family that fostered all kinds of puppies. The Petersons helped puppies who needed homes, taking care of them until they could find the perfect forever family for each one. The puppies could be a lot of work, and it was always hard to give each one up when the time came, but Lizzie loved fostering.

Now Lizzie looked down at her plate. Was she lucky to still have so many pancakes left, even after she had eaten more than her stomach could really hold? She burped. “Oops.” She covered her mouth, and she and Maria giggled.