

CHAPTER ONE

“Are we ready, then?”

Charles rummaged through his backpack, trying to find the navy blue folder. He was sure he had put it in there, but where was it?

“Mr. Peterson?” The booming voice thundered even more loudly. “Are we ready?”

Ah! There it was. Charles pulled out the folder.

“Hello? Charles Peterson? I’m talking to you.”

Charles felt his cheeks growing hot, a sure sign that he was blushing. Knowing that his cheeks were bright pink made him feel even more self-conscious, which only made his cheeks pinker. “Yes, Mr. Green . . . I mean, okay . . . I mean, I’m

here. And I have my script.” He waved the folder in the air, and a bunch of papers fell out of it. They fluttered to the floor, creating a snow-drift around his feet. “Oh.” He squatted down to scoop up the papers, juggling the folder as he tried to grab as many sheets as he could. The girl standing next to him bent to help.

The man at the front of the room — Mr. Green — sighed loudly and rolled his eyes. “Okay, people,” he said. “This is exactly the kind of thing I was talking about. We’re actors, but we’re really more like a sports team. To do well, we have to depend on one another, and everybody has to do their best. This play is going to be wonderful — but only if every single one of us works hard. We don’t have much time left before opening night, so we need to come prepared and ready to work together. And by now, we shouldn’t need our scripts anymore. We should all have our parts



memorized. Does everyone understand?” He folded his arms, waiting.

Charles closed his eyes. How had he gotten himself into this? He hadn't, that's how. His mom had gotten him into it. “I signed you up for something really special,” she'd told him one day after school a few weeks earlier. “Remember that time I interviewed Mary Thompson about a play she was writing, about the history of Littleton?”

“I guess,” said Charles. His mom was a reporter for the local paper, the *Littleton News*. She had interviewed just about everybody in town, including Mary Thompson, who was a famous writer. (She was the author of one of Charles's favorite picture books ever, *So Many Puppies*.)

“Well, she finished the play, and now the Littleton Players are going to put it on,” Mom said. “It'll be part of the big birthday celebration for our town. There are some parts for kids in it,

so I signed you up for auditions. I thought you'd like to try out for a role."

Charles stared at his mom. "You did? Why?" An actor was about the last thing Charles wanted to be. "I don't even like to give oral reports at school," he reminded her.

Mom nodded. "Exactly. Being in a play will give you so much self-confidence. You know, I was shy, too, when I was your age. Then my best friend convinced me to be in the Christmas pageant one year. We were both angels, and we had such fun. Somehow, after that, I was much less shy." She smiled encouragingly at Charles.

"I'm not that shy," Charles said. "It's just that there are a lot of other things I'd rather do." He looked down at the puppy by his side. "Like play with Buddy."

Buddy glanced up at Charles and thumped his



tail, the way he always did when he heard the word “play.” His ears perked up hopefully.

Buddy was the best friend Charles had ever had. He was a little brown-and-white puppy with a huge personality. Buddy had come to stay with the Petersons as a foster puppy (Charles’s family took care of puppies who needed homes). Most of the puppies were only with them for a short time, but Buddy had never left. Everybody had fallen in love with him: Mom, Dad, Lizzie (Charles’s older sister), Charles, and the Bean (their younger brother) all adored Buddy. He was part of the Peterson family now.

“You’ll still have plenty of time with Buddy,” said Mom.

By the way she said it, Charles knew her mind was made up. He was trying out for that play whether he liked it or not.