

# THE PUPPY PLACE

OZZIE



SCHOLASTIC INC.

For Shantala, Edgar, Béla, and Milan, with love.

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ISBN 978-1-5461-3151-9

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 25 26 27 28 29

Printed in the U.S.A. 40

First printing 2025

# CHAPTER ONE

“Okay, a half cup of flax seeds, we already added that. And . . .” Lizzie Peterson drew her finger down the list of ingredients in the recipe she was following. Then she gasped. “Oh, no, I forgot about the dried blueberries!”

“Blueberries? In dog biscuits?” Lizzie’s friend Béla looked shocked. “Really? That sounds kind of—”

“Weird, I know,” said Lizzie. “But that’s the secret ingredient. Buddy absolutely loves them.”

Béla laughed. “I wonder what Ozzie would think of blueberries. He’s more into meat. He’ll do anything for a piece of hot dog.”



Lizzie hadn't met Ozzie yet, but she was hoping that would happen very soon. She had never met a miniature Australian shepherd before! Béla had told Lizzie all about her puppy: he loved to chase people and other dogs and birds and—well, just about anything that was moving.

Béla was sort of a new friend; this was her first time over at Lizzie's house. Lizzie was glad she had invited Béla over to make dog biscuits; she sure needed the help. Especially since Lizzie's usual baking buddy, her best friend, Maria, was busy with her riding lessons. She had a big horse show coming up.

The mess in the kitchen was proof that Lizzie and Béla were having a great time. The counter was strewn with open bags of flour and oats; bottles of molasses and vanilla flavoring; and apple and banana peels.

Lizzie knew she would love Ozzie when she met



him. She loved all puppies! Of course, she loved Buddy best of all. Her little brown pal was the cutest, smartest, sweetest puppy ever—and Lizzie had met a lot of puppies. The Petersons were a foster family, which meant that they took care of puppies while they were looking for their forever homes. The best part about fostering was getting to know each puppy: Lizzie had learned that every dog has a special personality all his or her own. The worst part was missing them once the Petersons had found the perfect forever home. That was always so, so hard—but Lizzie and her brothers knew that it was all part of being a foster family. And at least they'd kept Buddy. Lizzie was so grateful that the Petersons had turned out to be the perfect forever family for him.

“Do you think Ozzie and Buddy would get along?” Béla asked as she scooped out a cup of oats, the next ingredient on the list.



“Absolutely,” said Lizzie. “Buddy gets along with all our foster puppies. He’s always friendly, and he’s really generous about sharing his toys.”

Béla nodded. “That’s good,” she said. She stirred the oats into the mixture in the big yellow bowl, looking thoughtful. “And do your foster puppies get to sleep, like, in your room?”

“Sure,” said Lizzie. “As long as they’re potty-trained. Some of them even sleep on my bed with me.”

“And they get lots of playtime?” Béla asked, still mixing.

“Tons,” Lizzie said. “We have that big yard out back, and it’s all fenced in so it’s totally safe.” She glanced at Béla, wondering why her friend was interviewing her this way. “Is your family interested in fostering?” she asked.

“Oh, no,” said Béla. “Nope. That’s not going to happen, especially now that—”



“Hold that thought!” Lizzie interrupted. The timer had just dinged, which meant that their first batch of biscuits, the peanut butter and banana recipe, was done. She grabbed a pair of pot holders and opened the oven. “Perfect!” she said. “See how they’re all golden brown? That means they’re cooked just right.”

“They smell yummy,” said Béla.

“I know,” said Lizzie. “Too bad they don’t taste like they smell. Once Charles grabbed one and took a huge bite, even though I warned him not to. He spit it out right away—and then he blamed me because it tasted like sawdust!”

Charles was Lizzie’s younger brother. He loved puppies almost as much as Lizzie did, though he didn’t know quite as much about them. Nobody knew as much about dogs and puppies as Lizzie. She had a whole bookshelf of books about them, she watched endless training videos, and she had just

about memorized her Dog Breeds of the World poster.

Lizzie's youngest brother, the Bean, also loved dogs. And dinosaurs. And tractors. And flags. And "neigh-neighs," his name for horses. The Bean loved pretty much everything. Except naps. And bedtime. The Bean always wanted to be on the go.

"Brothers," said Béla, shaking her head. She had a brother named Milan, so she understood.

"Right?" Lizzie asked. She pulled off her apron. "We still need those blueberries for our next batch." She went to the bottom of the stairs. "Mom?" she called. "Mom!"

"What is it, Lizzie?" Mom called back. "I'm working!"

Lizzie's mom was a reporter for the local paper. She worked from home, unlike Lizzie's dad, a



firefighter and EMT, who spent a lot of time at the fire station.

“I need dried blueberries!” Lizzie said. “Can we go to the store and—”

“They’re in the bottom drawer of the baking cabinet,” Mom called back. “I got them yesterday.”

Lizzie sighed with relief. “Thanks, Mom,” she said. “You’re the best.” She went back into the kitchen to find Béla still stirring, frowning down into the bowl.

“Did we forget something else?” Lizzie asked. “What’s wrong?”

Béla looked up and gave Lizzie a little smile. “Nothing,” she said. “It’s just that—” Before she could finish, Buddy came trotting into the kitchen.

“He must have smelled the peanut butter

biscuits,” said Lizzie. “They’re his second favorite. Want to see his best trick?”

She broke off a small piece of the freshly baked biscuit, blowing on it to make sure it was cool enough to eat. Then she put both hands behind her back. “Sit, Buddy,” she said. He plopped his butt down right away; he knew what was next. Lizzie brought her hands out front, fists closed. The treat was hidden in her left hand. “Which hand?” she asked her puppy.

Buddy lifted a paw and tapped Lizzie’s right hand. She opened it up so he could see that it was empty. “Nope,” she said. She closed that fist and held out both closed hands again. This time, Buddy tapped her left hand. “That’s a good boy!” Lizzie said as she opened her hand to give him the treat. Buddy gobbled it up, tail wagging.

Béla laughed. “That’s great! Maybe I can teach

Ozzie how to do that.” Then she stopped smiling. “Or maybe not,” she said quietly.

Lizzie was just about to ask what Béla meant when the doorbell rang.

“That’s my mom,” said Béla, looking up at the clock. “She said she’d pick me up at five, and she’s always exactly on time.”

She followed Lizzie to the front door. Béla was right; when Lizzie opened the door, Béla’s mother stood on the porch, smiling. But she wasn’t alone. In her arms was an adorable puppy, who squirmed and wriggled when he saw Béla.

“Ozzie!” Lizzie said. She knew it had to be him. He was so cute. His long, glossy coat was a black-spotted silvery gray, with brown and black accents. His chest and tummy, three of his paws, a stripe up his face, and the tip of his tail were all white. The most striking thing about this puppy,

though, was his eyes. They were the most beautiful light blue.

“Oh, Ozzie, your eyes are amazing,” Lizzie said. She knew that Ozzie’s coloring was known as merle, and that many merle Aussies had blue eyes. But knowing that fact and seeing an actual blue-eyed dog were two different things.

“Aren’t they? His eyes are what everybody notices first!” said Béla’s mom. “I decided I might as well bring him along,” she went on. “I thought your family would want to start getting to know him as soon as possible.”