

# THE PUPPY PLACE

PEPPER



SCHOLASTIC INC.

For Holly, with many happy memories of visits to Apartment 5B1

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Copyright © 2025 by Ellen Miles

Cover art by Tim O'Brien

Original cover design by Steve Scott

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*.

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or used to train any artificial intelligence technologies, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN 978-1-5461-3153-3

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

Dear Sammy,

New York City (we call it the Big Apple) is the coolest! I almost can't believe I'm here. Today we spent the day in Greenwich Village. I thought it would be like Littleton, you know, a village. But it's just part of the city. A nice part, with trees and parks and cool stores and restaurants. You'd like it. See ya!

Charles

“Who are you writing a postcard to, Charles?” asked Mom's friend Joy. She sat next to Charles on the subway, and she'd been watching him as he wrote a message on the back of a postcard.



“Great picture of Washington Square Park,” she added, pointing to the picture of a big stone arch.

“Yup! It’s to Sammy,” said Charles. “My best friend back in Littleton. I promised to send him a postcard from the city.” Charles and his mom had come to visit Joy in New York City—kind of a surprise trip, since Charles’s older sister, Lizzie, was the one who was supposed to go. The trip had been planned as a girls’ getaway: Mom and her best, oldest friend, Joy, plus Lizzie. Instead, Charles had lucked out when Lizzie decided that staying home to be with her friends on Halloween was more important. Charles was excited to be in the big city, and he liked Joy, who was small and round and loved to laugh. She was an artist, and she always dressed like a rainbow, in wildly colorful clothes.

Joy nodded. “Cool,” she said. “What was your favorite thing you saw today?”



Charles thought for a minute. “The chess guys,” he said. “Definitely the chess guys.”

At first, he didn’t know what they were doing, sitting across from each other at stone tables in a corner of a busy park. He had stopped to watch, fascinated by the way they moved their black and white pieces.

Joy, who’d lived in New York forever, had explained. “They’re playing chess,” she said. “There are always people playing here. Have you ever played?”

Charles shook his head. “I’d like to, though,” he said. Right away, he’d noticed that there were all kinds of different pieces on the board. Joy told him that each piece moved a different way across the black and white squares. He watched closely, trying to figure out which type moved which way.

“Maybe Dad can teach you when we get home,” Mom suggested. “He’s much better at chess than I am.” She was flipping through a book she had bought at Joy’s favorite bookstore. She put it back in her purse. “I’m so glad you came with me, Charles. Joy and I planned so many fun things for this trip. Museums, a visit to the Russian Tea Room, some shopping . . .”

“Here’s our stop!” Joy stood up as the subway screeched to a halt. Charles picked up his backpack and followed her through the sliding doors. Mom grabbed his hand as they walked through the crowded subway station. Charles still couldn’t get used to how many people there were in New York. Young people, old people, people of all sizes and colors, people dressed all kinds of ways. Floods and floods of people. It was amazing—and a little bit overwhelming.

“I can’t believe I used to ride this subway line every day to go to work,” said Mom. “It seems like a whole lifetime ago.” Mom lived in New York when she was just out of college. Charles knew that his mother was happy with her small-town life, working as a reporter for the local newspaper. But he could tell that she also had a lot of good memories from her time in the city.

“Back when we were young and carefree!” said Joy.

“And broke,” said Mom. “I remember eating a lot of beans for dinner in your tiny apartment.”

Joy laughed. “I still eat beans, even though my current apartment is a little bigger.”

Joy lived in a tall, brick building just off Broadway, which was a very busy, very wide avenue full of traffic: buses, taxis, cars, bikes, fire trucks, scooters—you name it. If it was on wheels,

it was zooming down Broadway. Charles and Mom had stopped at Joy's place when they first arrived, just to drop off their suitcases in the lobby. "Pete will take care of them," Joy had said when she introduced them to her doorman, a tall man in a dark blue uniform with shiny brass buttons.

Now, as they walked into the building, Pete held the door wide open for them. He had a nice smile, and he treated Charles just like he treated the grown-ups. "Your baggage is right here, sir," he said, waving a hand at Charles's duffel bag, which he'd kept behind his chest-high reception desk along with Mom's suitcase. "Did you have a good day in the Village?"

Charles nodded. "We saw guys playing chess," he said.

"Oh, sure," said Pete. "In Washington Square Park. I used to play down there, back in the day."





“You know how to play chess?” Charles asked. “Can you teach me?” He couldn’t wait to start learning.

“Sure thing,” said Pete. “I taught my son, Gary, when he was just about your age. Now he’s pretty much grown up and he beats me every time. He even does pretty well at tournaments sometimes.”

“That’s a really nice offer,” Mom said to Pete. She put a hand on Charles’s shoulder. “We’re going to be pretty busy while we’re here, but maybe we can find some time for that. Right now, let’s get settled in upstairs before we head out for dinner. Joy picked out a Chinese restaurant for us.” She picked up her suitcase and followed Joy to the elevator, talking excitedly about noodles and dumplings.

Charles lagged behind to grab his duffel, then stopped in his tracks when he heard a whimper from behind the STAFF ONLY door in the lobby. He

knew that sound! Only a scared or lonely little puppy sounded like that. “Pete,” Charles said. “Is that a puppy I hear?”

Pete’s eyes widened. He put a finger over his lips. “Shh!” he said. Then he looked at Charles. “Wait—do you know anything about dogs?”

“Sure!” said Charles. “I know a lot. I mean, not quite as much as my sister, Lizzie. She knows everything. But my family fosters puppies. We—”

“Quick, come take a look at this.” Pete cracked open the STAFF ONLY door and pointed inside.

Charles gasped. There, sitting on top of a bed made of old towels, was the cutest little puppy.

