




Chapter 1

The only reason I ever spoke to Salma Santiago was because my dog ate her lunch.

Sometimes life is like a long road leading from one “if” to another. If Lucky hadn’t slipped out of his collar, I wouldn’t have been running across the blueberry barrens in late July, yelling, “Lucky! No! Come! Treats!” trying every phrase that dog knew, praying one of them would slow him down long enough for me to grab him.

“Leash! Bacon! Go for a ride? Cheese!” But for a blind, old, black Labrador retriever, Lucky’s really fast.



Especially on those wide-open barrens where there's nothing to bump into and every which way to go.

Wild Maine blueberry bushes grow less than a foot high, but they're thick and pokey. My ankles were scraped up and stinging as I sprinted past another WINTHROP BLUEBERRIES. NO TRESPASSING sign.

On Sundays, I always see Mr. Winthrop at church, dressed up and sitting in his family's pew. I hoped he'd remember the whole "Forgive those who trespass against us" part of the Lord's Prayer if he saw me. I was praying, too, but with my eyes open, afraid if I closed them, Lucky would be gone.

Please stop Lucky. Please stop him. No, not the road! I begged, terrified Lucky would get hit by that big Winthrop truck coming, carrying tall rainbow stacks of plastic bins of blueberries.

Brakes squealed. "Hey!" the driver of the truck shouted at me. "Get off those bushes!"

"It's my dog!" I yelled.

If that driver hadn't slammed on his brakes, and if we hadn't yelled at each other, the girl might not have noticed me running after Lucky. I saw her from the corner of my eye: a flash of long black ponytail and orange T-shirt

leaping over the strings that marked off the blueberry fields into lanes for raking. She ran as fast as a gale wind across those barrens, dropping her blueberry rake and grabbing a backpack off a pile. As she got closer to Lucky, she pulled a sandwich and a little bag of chips out of her backpack.

Lucky wasn't listening to "come" or any of his favorite words, but the crinkle of that chip bag pulled his ears right back.

If she hadn't given him her lunch, Lucky would probably still be running across Maine—maybe all the way into Canada by now.

When I caught up, I was so out of breath that I couldn't even speak. All I could do was nod at the girl giving Lucky her sandwich. She looked about twelve years old, same as me. Her hair was wispy around her face where it was coming loose from her ponytail and she had a smear of dirt on her cheek. Even so, she was pretty. She was probably from one of the migrant families that drive here for a few weeks every summer. They come in old trucks, campers, and cars from Mexico and Florida and other far-off places to rake the blueberries that grow wild in the barrens. I don't usually talk to those kids and they don't

usually talk to me. They don't stay here long enough for us to be friends.

As Lucky licked peanut butter from his mouth, I wrapped the collar around his neck—a tighter fit this time. By the time I had it buckled and the leash clipped on, the girl was walking back to her blueberry lane.

“Thanks!” I yelled. “And sorry about your lunch. I didn't mean to let him eat your whole sandwich!”

But I guess no one would want a half-eaten-by-a-dog sandwich anyway.

Surrounded by people in other lanes, she swept the bushes with her aluminum blueberry rake. A blueberry rake looks like a metal dustpan with teeth. The back end is an open box with a handle or two on top. The front end has a row of sharp tines. You push the tines through the low-growing bushes and then tip the rake up and back so the berries are scooped off and roll down to collect in the back. It's hard, tiring work. A man near the girl yelled something in Spanish and she laughed. She didn't look up, though. Just kept scooping and tipping.

Walking home, I scolded Lucky, but he didn't seem one teeny bit sorry for all the trouble he'd caused.

Maybe because he got a sandwich out of it.

Or maybe because it felt so good to run wild again; full-tilt across those wide-open barrens the way a blind dog barely ever gets to run anymore.

Or maybe because Lucky can sense things people can't. Dr. Katz, our veterinarian, says that when a dog loses his sight, the other senses get sharper to make up for it. She may be right, because Lucky sure heard that chip bag and smelled that peanut butter.

But I think it's more than that.

If Lucky hadn't led me over those blueberry barrens, we might never have met that girl, Salma Santiago. And I think Lucky knew that we needed her, maybe even more than she needed us.