

Because of Winn-Dixie
by Kate DiCamillo
Chapter Two



That summer I found Winn-Dixie was also the summer me and the preacher moved to Naomi, Florida, so he could be the new preacher at the Open Arms Baptist Church of Naomi. My daddy is a good preacher and a nice man, but sometimes it's hard for me to think about him as my daddy, because he spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or getting ready to preach. And so, in my mind, I think of him as "the preacher." Before I was born, he was a missionary in India and that is how I got my first name. But he calls me by my second name, Opal, because that was his mother's name. And he loved her a lot.

Anyway, while me and Winn-Dixie walked home, I told him how I got my name and I told him how I had just moved to Naomi. I also told him about the preacher and how he was a good man, even if he was too distracted with sermons and prayers and suffering people to go grocery shopping.

"But you know what?" I told Winn-Dixie, "you are a suffering dog, so maybe he will take to you right away. Maybe he'll let me keep you."

Winn-Dixie looked up at me and wagged his tail. He was kind of limping like something was wrong with one of his legs. And I have to admit, he stunk. Bad. He was an ugly dog, but already, I loved him with all my heart.

When we got to the Friendly Corners Trailer Park, I told Winn-Dixie that he had to behave right and be quiet, because this was an all adult trailer park and the only reason I got to live in it was because the preacher was a preacher and I was a good, quiet kid. I was what the Friendly Corners Trailer Park manager, Mr. Alfred, called "an exception." And I told Winn-Dixie he had to act like an exception, too; specifically, I told him not to pick any fights with Mr. Alfred's cats or Mrs. Detweller's little yappie Yorkie dog, Samuel. Winn-Dixie looked up at me while I was telling him everything, and I swear he understood.

"Sit," I told him when we got to my trailer. He sat right down. He had good manners. "Stay here," I told him. "I'll be right back."

The preacher was sitting in the living room, working at the little foldout table. He had papers spread all around him and he was rubbing his nose, which always means he is thinking. Hard.

"Daddy?" I said.

"Hmmm," he said back.

"Daddy, do you know how you always tell me that we should help those less fortunate than ourselves?"

"Mmmmm-hmmm," he said. He rubbed his nose and looked around at his papers.

"Well," I said, "I found a Less Fortunate at the grocery store."

"Is that right?" he said.

"Yes sir," I told him. I stared at the preacher really hard. Sometimes he reminded me of a turtle hiding inside its shell, in there thinking about things and not ever sticking his head out into the world. "Daddy, I was wondering. Could this Less Fortunate, could he stay with us for a while?"

Finally the preacher looked up at me. "Opal," he said, "what are you talking about?"

"I found a dog," I told him. "And I want to keep him."

"No dogs," the preacher said. "We've talked about this before. You don't need a dog."

"I know it," I said. "I know I don't need a dog. But this dog needs me. Look," I said. I went to the trailer door and I hollered, "Winn-Dixie!"

Winn-Dixie's ears shot up in the air and he grinned and sneezed, and then he came limping up the steps and into the trailer and put his head right in the preacher's lap, right on top of a pile of papers.

The preacher looked at Winn-Dixie. He looked at his ribs and his matted-up fur and the places where he was bald. The preacher's nose wrinkled up. Like I said, the dog smelled pretty bad.

Winn-Dixie looked up at the preacher. He pulled back his lips and showed the preacher all of his crooked yellow teeth and wagged his tail and knocked some of the preacher's papers off the table. Then he sneezed and some more papers fluttered to the floor.

"What did you call this dog?" the preacher asked.

"Winn-Dixie," I whispered. I was afraid to say anything too loud. I could see that Winn-Dixie was having a good effect on the preacher. He was making him poke his head out of his shell.

"Well," said the preacher. "He's a stray if I've ever seen one." He put down his pencil and scratched Winn-Dixie behind the ears. "And a Less Fortunate, too. That's for sure. Are you looking for a home?" the preacher asked, real soft, to Winn-Dixie.

Winn-Dixie wagged his tail.

"Well," the preacher said. "I guess you've found one."