



One

There are two kinds of people in this world: dog people, and people who still need to meet the right dog. That's what Amelia said when she brought me home to Miguel. "That may be, but I'm happiest being a *you* person," he replied. Then he kissed her and went back to reading a novel.

Amelia, of course, was a dog person. She spotted me in the shelter and saw something other than a yippy mutt who'd licked the fur clean off his belly. I was nervous, nervous, nervous. Even though the shelter gave me a nice big space to pace in, those metal bars were too much like my crate. My first owner bought the crate for training, but an hour usually turned into all day. When he wasn't busy working at a place where I couldn't be, he and his friends hollered at the television and ignored the sound of my barking from the basement. And still it took him a whole year to realize I wasn't going to be the dog to make him a better man.

I feel sad when I think about all that time I spent alone. But then along came Amelia. She didn't look me in the eye.

She just sidled up next to the pen so I could sniff her, all espresso and ink and old books.

It was like inhaling heaven.

I was not cool about meeting her. When the shelter woman let me out, I jumped on Amelia. She was a small human, so it wouldn't have taken much to knock her over. But she just laughed and squatted down in front of me.

"Don't worry, you silly beast. I'll come to you," she said, gazing over my head so I wouldn't feel threatened. Not that I would have been, not by her. "I hear you go by Harold. Do you like that name?"

I licked her cheek, and she laughed again. "Well, that's a funny thing to call a dog, but you're a funny dog, aren't you? All right, Harold," she said as I tried to burrow my way into her heart through her armpit. "I'm Amelia. I'm going to be your person."

And oh, was she ever. She gave me a soft, fluffy bed that reminded me of my mother. She found a dog park, too, and although I'm not much of a dog's dog, I do love that leashless freedom. She even took up running for me, because she knew I needed more exercise to be my best self. I'm sorry to say that despite the miles we covered, I remained a creature of habit; I'd catch a breeze and dart out the door like I was trying to escape my crate. Then I'd sprint through the streets like a greyhound at the track (poor things). Amelia never yelled at me when I came back. She'd just hug me and press her wet cheek against my head and say, "I'm not ready to lose you, Harold. Please stop doing that."

I did try. I ran away less and less, until one day Miguel left the back gate open while he was hauling in groceries, and I

was just so sad that I didn't have it in me. I'll be honest: That was a rough afternoon.

But not nearly as bad as the ones that he and I had recently been through.

Now it's just me and Miguel. Amelia's been gone for almost six seasons, and Miguel's still intent on staying holed up in our house. He doesn't return calls and hasn't flown home to Puerto Rico once, even though his sister warned him that their Aunt Ceci doesn't have much longer to live. Worst of all, he barely goes into Lakeside Books, which he and Amelia opened right before she rescued me. Miguel's an obsessive reader—or at least he was—who'd dreamed of owning a bookstore; Amelia claimed he'd sleep in the stockroom if she let him. These days, he heads back there if he doesn't feel like talking to customers, which is pretty much any rare occasion we're at the store. "Harold, the fewer people I have to interact with, the less life sucks," he tells me.

I miss the way things used to be.

Of course, Miguel does, too. Maybe that's why we both sleep in most days. On this particular morning, however, I'm startled awake by him clapping his hands over my head.

"There you are!" he exclaims, peering down at me. "Welcome to Tuesday, Harold! Now, up and at 'em—we've got things to do."

Do we? If memory serves, said things will be walking around the block and me watching him bicker with bill collectors at the kitchen table. The prospect's so enticing that I cover my eyes with a paw to block the light streaming in through the window.

But then my brain turns all the way on, and I remember

that I have a duty to fulfill. I promised Amelia I'd take care of Miguel, and I can't exactly do that while I'm unconscious.

"You good, dog?" Miguel asks, frowning at me.

I raise my head in his direction, hoping to convey that I'm *fine*.

If only it didn't take so much effort to scramble onto all fours. I can still tear through the backyard like I did in my prime, pretending that I fully intend to dispatch a squirrel. Afterward, though, I have to walk slowly; sometimes I need an extra nap. Customers no longer ask if I'm a puppy or try to figure out if I'm more of a Brittany or a setter. Now they pet me softly and laugh at the light patches over my eyes, which they say look like eyebrows. Just last month, the vet had to take out two of my teeth. These are not the problems of a young dog. That's what's troubling me.

Still—another day is another chance, and I'll be darned if I'll let this one pass me by.

"Good boy," says Miguel, ruffling my fur as we head into the hallway.

His praise is almost enough to make me forget that I really, really need to pee. When he starts for the bathroom, I whimper and look pointedly in the direction of the staircase.

"Right," he says quickly. "Sorry, Harold. Showering can wait."

Can it, though? I don't want to tell Miguel how to live his life, but he really should have bathed and tended to the rug on his face days ago. Still, my bladder's ready to burst, so I clamber down the stairs behind him, trying to mask how difficult it is to do so. When we reach the kitchen, he opens the back door and steps onto the deck. He's yet to put on pants, and

Raina, our next-door neighbor, is on her patio watering her flowers.

“Go run,” he commands, pointing at the yard. Raina’s looking at him now, and he lifts his chin to acknowledge her instead of acknowledging that, you know, there’s one thin layer of cotton between his jiggy bits and our neighborhood. Is there an acceptable window for random acts of grief? If so, I worry Miguel has exceeded it. “Do your business,” he adds before stepping into the house and leaving the door ajar.

I do as I’m told, naturally, then come trotting back inside. Miguel has made no indication he intends to fully clothe the bottom half of his body, but he’s smiling into a bowl of cereal at the counter.

The smile’s a rare sight, one that’s probably owing to the upcoming event with Jonathan Middleton-Biggs. JMB, as he’s known, is Miguel’s favorite novelist, and he’s been trying to get him into the store for as long as I can remember. Jonathan is a very important author, and Lakeside is just a random bookstore in a small tourist town in Southwest Michigan. So, Jonathan’s answer was always the same: no.

But Amelia used to say that the universe delivered gifts at the most unlikely times. Maybe so, because a few months ago, Jonathan’s assistant called to say he’d like to do a ticketed signing at Lakeside. I heard Riley, our book buyer, tell Dane, who’s a clerk, that JMB’s event will help offset the margins and keep our doors open a little longer. Now, I don’t know a margin from margarine, but I can’t imagine life without the bookstore.

Then again, I couldn’t imagine either without Amelia. Mostly I’m happy that Miguel’s excited about *something*. He

sets his bowl on the floor for me, and he's even left a few marshmallows floating in the milk! I wag what's left of my tail in gratitude and slurp down his leftovers.

"Don't overdo it," he warns, squatting to wipe my splatter with a paper towel. Then he pats my back and says the same thing he tells me nearly every day: "I need you, Harold. You're all I have now."

Listen, I'm no dolphin. But even *I* know this isn't the kind of dog person Amelia wanted Miguel to be.

I wish I could believe Lakeside will keep him going once I'm gone. After all, it wasn't just his dream; it was theirs. But a bookstore, no matter how splendid, is not a companion.

"Help Miguel find someone to love," Amelia murmured to me at the end. She was the only one who understood what was happening; I couldn't comprehend it myself, and everyone says that dogs can sense these things. She was too weak to scratch my ears, so she stroked the top of my head gently. "He won't want to, but love's the only thing that can heal a broken heart. You're such a good dog, Harold, and while I've asked the impossible of you, I know you'll find a way. I love you."

I look at Miguel, who's heading for the stairs. But in my mind, I only see Amelia. *I love you, too*, I think, just as I did on that terrible morning. *And I will do everything I possibly can to help your person find another person.*

I just hope I figure out how—and soon. Because forget new tricks.

What this old dog's really worried about is time.