BECAUSE OF WINN-DIXIE by Kate DiCamillo Copyright © 2000 Kate DiCamillo. Licensed by Candlewick Press, Somerville, MA. My name is India Opal Buloni, and last summer my daddy, the preacher, sent me to the store for a box of macaroni-and-cheese, some white rice, and two tomatoes and I came back with a dog. This is what happened: I walked into the produce section of the Winn-Dixie grocery store to pick out my two tomatoes and almost bumped right into the store manager. He was standing there all red-faced, screaming and waving his arms around. "Who let a dog in here?" At first, I didn't see a dog. There were just a lot of vegetables rolling around on the floor, tomatoes and onions and green peppers. And there was what seemed like a whole army of Winn-Dixie employees running around waving their arms just the same way he was waving his. And then the dog came running around the corner. He was a big dog. And ugly. And he looked like he was having a real good time. His tongue was hanging out and he was wagging his tail. He skidded to a stop and smiled right at me. I had never before in my life seen a dog smile, but that is what he did. He pulled back his lips and showed me all his teeth. Then he wagged his tail so hard that it knocked some oranges off a display, and they went rolling everywhere, mixing in with the tomatoes and green peppers. The manager screamed, "Somebody grab that dog!" The dog went running over to the manager, wagging his tail and smiling. He stood up on his hind legs. You could tell that all he wanted to do was get face to face with the manager and thank him for the good time he was having in the produce department, but somehow he ended up knocking the manager over. And the manager must have been having a bad day, because lying there on the floor, right in front of everybody, he started to cry. The dog leaned over him, real concerned, and licked his face. "Please," said the manager. "Somebody call the pound." "Wait a minute!" I hollered. "That's my dog. Don't call the pound." All the Winn-Dixie employees turned around and looked at me, as I knew I had done something big. And maybe stupid, too. But I couldn't help it. I couldn't let that dog go to the pound. "Here, boy," I said. And maybe I figured that the dog was probably just like everybody else in the world, that he would want to get called by a name, only I didn't know what his name was, so I just said the first thing that came into my head. I said, "Here, Winn-Dixie." And that dog came trotting over to me just like the head employee was the maybe life. The manager sat up and gave me a hard stare, like maybe I was making fun of him. "It's his name," I said. "Honest." The manager said, "Don't you know not to bring a dog into a grocery store?" "Yes sir," I told him. "He got in by mistake. I'm sorry. It won't happen again. "Come on, Winn-Dixie," I said. "Here, boy." I started walking all the cashiers and past all the produce department and down the cereal aisle and past the bakery and the seafood section and the meat department, and I checked the dog over real good to make sure I hadn't forgotten anything. He was big, but skinny; you could see his ribs. And there were bald patches all over him, places where he didn't have any fur at all. Mostly, he looked like a big piece of old brown carpet that had been left out in the rain. "You're a mess," I told him. "I bet you don't belong to anybody." He smiled at me. He did that thing again, where he pulled back his lips and showed me his teeth. It was hard not to immediately fall in love with a dog who has a good sense of humor. "Come on, Winn-Dixie," I said. "Let's see what the preacher has to say about you." And the two of us, me and Winn-Dixie, started walking home. That summer I found Winn-Dixie was also the summer and the year that my daddy, because he spends so much time preaching or thinking about preaching or because that we are prayers and suffering people to go grocery shopping. "But you know what?" as wrong with one of his legs. And I have to admit, the stunk. Bad. He was an ugly ot to pick any fights with Mr. Alfred's cats or Mrs. Dewberry's little yappie "Stay here," I told him. "I'll be right back." The preacher was sitting in t back. "Daddy, do you know you always tell me that we should be right?" he said. "Yes sir," I told him. I stared at the preacher really unate, could be stay with us for a while?" Finally the preacher loo d a dog." "I know it," I said. "I know I don't need a dog. But this d into the trailer and put his head right in the preacher's lap, r e dog smelled pretty bad. Winn-Dixie looked up at the pre more papers fluttered to t he floor. "What did you e his head out of his she ll. "Well," said the p Dixie. Winn-Dixie ld I could hi and patches don't have your mama much any family and ber. ng talking. "I don't eve e was smelling somth raised his eyebr ke he was on

king ab ou ed hi of mut and well, im and he a t pulling his , "I sh ould h Winn -Dixie w ody laugh t a he

Winn-Dixie couch and about an yb und and gr

ixie. For i Winn-Dix me. They heir heads t I couldn't. W going faster a dog," Stevie said. He and Ste aughter to talk." He h, so I went thro after me. By then ard: "This dog sur s dog sure Dixie pe idn't have any teeth ome in Valley Forest and I was in a little company." "M it?" "Yes ma'am," don't you want to tell me everything about teeth in, to eat it; when s ked for a while. And ma had been so good, an ucth had all the preac

ed n Naomi and how I had to re than I ever had in Valley. I told her about nds with Miss Franny Block and got a job workin g for a man owning and saying, "Hmmm," and "Is that right?" I could feel h witch. But I told her they were stupid, mean, bald-headed boys

ose ok her as hampoo. eal hard at all . "See," I said, "y t you don't remem at him and went o ground rs and ng s

d ke ou ve

s d ed hi of mut and well, im and he a t pulling his , "I sh ould h Winn -Dixie w ody laugh t a he

ixie. For i Winn-Dix me. They heir heads t I couldn't. W going faster a dog," Stevie said. He and Ste aughter to talk." He h, so I went thro after me. By then ard: "This dog sur s dog sure Dixie pe idn't have any teeth ome in Valley Forest and I was in a little company." "M it?" "Yes ma'am," don't you want to tell me everything about teeth in, to eat it; when s ked for a while. And ma had been so good, an ucth had all the preac

ed n Naomi and how I had to re than I ever had in Valley. I told her about nds with Miss Franny Block and got a job workin g for a man owning and saying, "Hmmm," and "Is that right?" I could feel h witch. But I told her they were stupid, mean, bald-headed boys

ok her as hampoo. eal hard at all . "See," I said, "y t you don't remem at him and went o ground rs and ng s

d ke ou ve

ose