

# **Lacey's Story**

**A Puppy Tale**

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**W. Bruce Cameron**

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A PUPPY TALE

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**W. Bruce Cameron**

Illustrations by  
**Richard Cowdrey**



**A Tom Doherty Associates Book  
New York**

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed  
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LACEY'S STORY

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*Dedicated to Betty Bennett,  
Bob Clearmountain,  
and Marlene Passaro,  
who, along with all the talented people at  
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to support my work and success.*



# **Lacey's Story**

**A Puppy Tale**





# 1



I was having the most wonderful day with Wenling. We were out in the fields where we had spent the morning romping and trying to scare up rabbits. I could smell those rabbits, but they were wisely hiding from me. They know that I am a great hunter dog who has almost caught rabbits many times.

My name is Lacey, and Wenling is my girl. I love her dark hair and how it smells after a day like today, when we have been outside playing. Today she was on her hands and knees digging in the dirt. I could tell she was happy, so I kept running up and jumping on her. A dog needs to do whatever is necessary to make her humans even happier than they already are.

“No, Lacey,” she would say with a laugh.

The word *no* has many different meanings. When



it's said with a laugh, it means something like *Let's keep having fun!*

Wenling had carried a box with her out into the fields. She was pulling up stinky grass and throwing it into the box. Soon the inside of that box smelled wonderfully of dirt, but also of something else—something so strong it made my nose crinkle. The odor grew more powerful as she pulled the plants from the earth and tossed them in the box.

“It's such a great time to be harvesting wild onions,” Wenling told me. I wagged because she was talking to me, but I hoped she wouldn't throw the plants for me to fetch. Each clump of grass had a sort of ball on the end of it, and I've chased after balls of many kinds. But it was these balls that were giving off that eye-watering odor.

I love a vivid odor as much as any dog. Almost nothing beats the scent of a long-dead animal lying in the sun. Rolling in that kind of bouquet paints my fur with an irresistible smell. Often, though, my girl will pick the very day I have slathered my body with such a perfume to give me a bath, washing away my efforts to smell beautiful. It's such a strange coincidence!

Wenling stood and wiped a hand across her forehead. Then she looked around, beaming. “I love living here. Do you love living here, Lacey?”

I heard my name and the joy in her voice, so I wagged.

“I love my friends at school, and I love the fields and going with Dad to the farm. And my favorite place of all is the orchard. We’re so lucky to live here!”

I play-bowed, stretching out my front legs long on the ground while my rump stayed up and my tail kept wagging. I was ready to romp or wrestle or even, I supposed, chase the stinky balls—though I couldn’t be sure I’d pick them up with my mouth after I ran them down.

“Onions are so sweet in the fall,” Wenling told me as she struggled to pick up her now-full box. I trotted happily behind her, and we returned home, crossing fields of long, dry grass. The rabbits remained hidden. They probably didn’t come out for a long, long time, because they were so scared of me, Lacey the Rabbit Hunter.

I scampered ahead of Wenling when I smelled home and was at the door whining to be let in as Mom opened it. Mom looks a lot like Wenling, with the same very dark hair and the same smile. Now she gave that smile to both me and my girl.

“What’ve you got there?” Mom asked.

“Wild onions!” Wenling exclaimed, showing Mom her box. “Don’t they smell wonderful?”

Mom looked into the box but hid her disappointment that there was nothing inside but a pile of stinky, dirty balls.

“I’ll wash them for you,” Mom said.

ZZ came into the room, and we both turned. It was

unusual for him to be home before the sun was lower in the sky, but I trotted up to him agreeably. When it comes to comings and goings, the minds of humans are unknowable to a dog. All we can do is accept people's decisions and have fun in the process.

"Why were you outside looking for onions?" ZZ demanded. "Don't you have homework?"

Wenling frowned. "I do have homework, Father," she replied a bit stiffly, "but it's such a beautiful day." Wenling often calls ZZ *Father*, but everyone else calls him ZZ, and it's just easier for a dog to remember. Sometimes Wenling's word for him is *Dad*, a word other people also sling around carelessly. I long ago decided that *Dad* means "man" the way *dog* means, well, "dog." So someone can say "good dog" to another dog and not be talking about me, even though obviously I am a good dog and they *should* be talking about me.

ZZ nodded. "Yes. I know it's a nice day. I am not telling you that you have to remain indoors. I'm telling you that you could easily take your books to the picnic table in the backyard and study there."

"But, Father—" Wenling started to say.

"No," ZZ responded sternly.

"The onions will make a delicious soup," Mom offered cheerfully.

ZZ scowled. "We discussed this."

"Yes," Wenling replied. I jerked my head to stare at

her because her tone was so sharp. “And I like to grow things. I like to harvest plants. What’s wrong with that?”

“What’s wrong with that?” ZZ repeated wearily. “I work hard to put a roof over our heads, and I do it by—” He gestured to the box. “By picking things like onions and cucumbers and zucchini. It’s hard work, and I’m exhausted when I’m finished. I want more for you, Wenling. You’re a smart girl, and you can succeed at anything you put your mind to. I want you to be a doctor or a lawyer—a good career. But you’re not going to get there if you get your hands dirty every day.”

Wenling folded her arms. “I like getting my hands dirty. I love gardening.”

ZZ stared at her. I sensed that he was angry. Maybe he didn’t like the stinky balls any more than I did, but he shouldn’t have been mad at my girl just because she filled up a box with them. She didn’t know any better.

I guess ZZ figured that out, because suddenly his shoulders slumped. “Oh, Wenling. I have not wanted to tell you this, but I’m afraid I can’t promise you that we’ll be living here much longer. We may have to move.”

*“What?”*

I went to my girl and sat in front of her. I could sense her distress and wanted to make her happy again.

“Chase told me today he can’t afford to pay me anymore.”

Mom gasped, and I looked at her in alarm. Now no one was happy!

"You told us he can't run the farm without you!" Wenling protested.

ZZ shook his head. "No, he can't. His sons are too young."

"I didn't realize it had come to this," Mom murmured.

ZZ shrugged.

"I can see if they'll let me have more hours down at the store," Mom said decisively.

Wenling was staring at ZZ. I felt a whimper building in my throat, and she seemed to sense it, because she reached down and stroked my head. "Are we really going to have to move?" she asked plaintively. "When?"

ZZ shrugged again. "I don't know. Even though he can't afford to pay me a salary right now, Chase made me an offer. He said I can be his partner if I want. He'll put it in writing, even, that if the farm ever goes back to making a profit, he'll deed me half ownership."

"Wait, ZZ!" Mom shook her head. "That's so like you, to bury the good news and only talk about the bad. This isn't as if you've been *laid off*. You still have a job, and now you own half the farm."

"Half a *money-losing* farm," he corrected. "Doesn't make any sense to try to claim half of it right now. That would just mean taking on half the debts."

“But still,” Mom protested. “The farm has made money before. Times are tight, I know that, but you and Chase are the smartest people in the business. You’ll figure something out. It’s not like it’s the end of the world. You’ve said it before—farming is a cyclical business.”

“Cyclical?” Wenling asked.

“Meaning there are regular cycles,” Mom explained. “Sometimes the farm does really well to make up for the tough years. And there’s a good balance. The crops from the fields make more money some years, and other years the fruit from the orchard does better.”

“Orchard did okay last year,” ZZ noted.

“Exactly,” Mom agreed with a nod.

“I love the orchard. It’s my favorite place in the world,” Wenling declared. “We can’t move away from the *orchard*.”

“I’m not saying we have to move now, Wenling. We’ll give it another year or so,” ZZ went on. “Also, I talked to my friend Jason—he’s going to take me on to close down his restaurant each night, clean up after all the customers have left, lock the doors, take out the trash. I’ll make a little money that way.”

“Oh, ZZ,” Mom moaned. “You already work so hard.”

ZZ ignored whatever Mom had just said. He was focused on Wenling. “But I want you to know, Wenling, this is our last try. We can’t go on like this much longer.”

“Why would we have to *move*?” Wenling asked. She



sounded so unhappy that I felt another whine building up in my throat. “Couldn’t you just get a job doing something else? Something here, in town?”

“Wenling,” Mom warned.

ZZ sighed. “There’s no work for me here. There will be better opportunities in a city farther south. Grand Rapids or Lansing.”

Wenling’s eyes were wide. “But all my friends are here. My whole life is here!”

“Wenling,” Mom interrupted gently. “This isn’t just about you. Listen to what your father is saying. Nobody wants to move. We’re both going to work hard to try to make sure that it doesn’t happen. But if it’s what we have to do, it’s what we’ll do.”

“Now do you understand?” ZZ asked gently. “That’s why I want you to study. Go to college. Get a good job. So you’re never forced to make decisions like this. I’ve worked that farm since you were born. We had five hands when I started, and now it’s just me. But no matter what Chase and I do, it doesn’t seem to be good enough. So you will not be a farmer, Wenling. I won’t hear of it.”

There was a moment of silence, and then ZZ turned and left the room. Soon I could hear running water from the back of the house.

“It’s not fair, Mom!” Wenling insisted.

My girl was unhappy. I didn’t know why we didn’t

go back to her bedroom and lie in bed and cuddle. That always made both of us feel better.

Mom came over and put her hand on Wenling's shoulder. "I know this is hard for you to understand," she told Wenling. "But you'll make new friends wherever we go."

"We've lived here since I was born! I don't want new friends; I want *my* friends."

"I know. But we can't always have what we want, Wenling."

"What about your job, Mom? You can't just quit."

"Well . . . someone always needs retail workers. I won't have any problem finding a new job. And ZZ says the factories in the cities are hiring." Mom shrugged. "He doesn't want to leave any more than you do, honey. It would break his heart to abandon Chase's farm. The two of them are like brothers—that's why Chase wants to give him half the place. But there's only so much we can do. We have no savings, and if ZZ isn't going to make a salary . . ."

"I'll help. I'll get a job!"

Mom's smile was sad. "You're too young to get a job, and anyway, your father would never allow it. He wants you to study, get good grades."

Wenling was still unhappy, so I nosed her hand to let her know she should go back to petting my head. "Yes, so that I can be a doctor or a lawyer. But I don't want that! He doesn't listen to me, and he doesn't understand me."

“Maybe there is a way to combine both things,” Mom suggested. “You love farming, and you love to grow things. He wants you to go to college. Perhaps you could get a horticultural degree.”

Wenling’s sadness was more than I could bear. I threw myself on the floor, sticking my legs up into the air and twisting my back on the carpet, knowing that a happy dog was what my girl needed.

I expected her to giggle and rub my tummy, but she didn’t. Mom left the room, and Wenling knelt down to whisper to me. “We can’t let this happen, Lacey,” she told me solemnly. “I don’t want to move. I have to think of something.”

I was grateful that her sadness was leaving her. Something else was taking over. It wasn’t happiness, exactly, because her mouth was still set in a firm line, but the heartbreak was gone. I sprang to my feet and licked her full in the face.

“Okay! Okay!” she spluttered. “You crazy dog.”