

# CHAPTER 16



SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2005  
RIVERSIDE PARK, NEW YORK CITY

Barry sat on a bench in the shade. Mom and Dad were standing a few feet away, watching Cleo climb up the jungle gym. Cruz was snoozing at Barry's feet. Barry had a sketchbook open on his lap, and he was looking at his new drawing of Akivo. He'd finished that morning, keeping his promise to Jay. It had been Jay's idea that they

could still enter the contest. Jay had even called the Acclaim offices from his grandma's house in Birmingham.

"I told them the whole story," he said. "The man said we can still enter. And they want to meet you!"

Barry wasn't surprised to hear that.

Even four weeks later, Katrina was the biggest story in the country. Every time Barry turned on the TV or got into a taxi with Mom or Dad, another voice was talking about the hurricane.

"This is the worst disaster ever to hit America."

"This is a national tragedy."

"A great American city has been destroyed."

And everyone wanted to hear their story.

The kids at Barry's new school. The man who made their sandwiches at the deli on the corner. Strangers who overheard Mom talking at the bank. They all wanted to know about Katrina. They listened with wide eyes. And then they all



said pretty much the same thing: They said the Tuckers were lucky.

Barry knew that was true.

Mom said it was a miracle that they'd found Barry on the bridge. Some families had been separated for days or weeks. Some still hadn't found each other.

And of course there were people who had died—more than a thousand. They were still finding bodies in attics.

Barry had nightmares about the storm. He didn't sleep much. Even the sound of Dad turning on the shower in the morning made Barry's heart jump.

But yes, he knew he was lucky.

Luckier than the tens of thousands of people who'd been stranded for days in the hot and terrifying Superdome. Or the people who'd been stuck on bridges and highways and rooftops.

The Tuckers hadn't gone to the Superdome.



They had gone to Lightning's. They'd stayed with Dave for two days and then caught a bus to Houston. Dave boarded up the club and went to Baton Rouge. By then even he realized that the city wasn't safe.

The cousins in Houston spoiled them rotten for one week. Mom and Dad talked about moving there, finding an apartment nearby. But then a call came from the president of that famous music college in New York. There was a job for Dad if he wanted, teaching about New Orleans music. There was an apartment too, with furniture and room for the whole family.

A week later, they were here.

Cruz too. He was part of the family now. The Red Cross had helped Dad track down Abe and his grandma in Little Rock, Arkansas. Abe and Barry had talked on the phone. And Abe—the old Abe—had asked Barry if he would keep Cruz.

"He's not a killer," Abe said.

"I figured that out."

They had a good laugh.

And they cried a little too, when they talked about their neighborhood.

Barry hoped he would see Abe again one day.

Mom and Dad came over and sat next to Barry on the bench. Cleo waved from the top of the slide.

Dad looked at Barry's drawing of Akivo.

"That is really something," Dad said.

"Thanks," said Barry, who liked this one even better than the original. Akivo had a sidekick now, a mutt with floppy ears. And he had a guardian angel—a beautiful fairy in a yellow rubber raft.

"He looks like you," Mom said.

"That's right," Dad said. "I see it too."

Barry stared at the picture, and he saw what Mom and Dad meant. Akivo's face—it did look something like Barry's.

"I guess you feel a little like a superhero yourself," Mom said.

"Nah," Barry said, his cheeks heating up.

But really, he did.

Out there in the flood, Barry had discovered some powers of his own.

When it was time to go back to the apartment, Barry went to pluck Cleo off the jungle gym. He heard her singing, "On Blueberry Hill . . .," and he smiled. Dad told Barry he'd sung that song a million times when they'd been on the roof. Dad had jumped into the floodwater after Barry, but the current had been too strong. He'd fought his way back to Mom and Cleo. The three of them had waited out the storm. Mom said that Dad had called Barry's name so many times that he'd lost his voice.

They walked back to Broadway, Barry pushing Cleo in her stroller.

Mom pointed out a bakery with a HELP WANTED

sign in the window. Dad said they should go to the Bronx Zoo later. Or the American Museum of Natural History.

"There's so much to see," Mom said.

"We have plenty of time," Dad said.

It was true. They had time.

But not forever.

Barry knew they would go back to New Orleans, where they belonged.

When would that be?

When would their city be healed?

Barry didn't ask Mom and Dad those questions.

He already knew the answer.

One day.

One day.