

**BONUS READ: What follows is part of *Maxi's Secrets* that was cut from an earlier draft during the revision process. Read it and have a discussion. Why do you think it was cut? Did it add anything to the story? If so, what? If not, why would author Lynn Plourde have included it?**

It was Veteran's Day, November 11, and my mom and Abby's mom wanted to shop at L.L. Bean in Freeport. Mom hoped they'd sell bright orange vests for all of us, plus a dog one for Maxi. Since it was deer hunting season and we lived next to the woods, we'd been staying as far away from them as possible (except for Sundays—NO hunting on Sundays). Actually no one was supposed to be hunting in the recreation land behind our houses *any day* of the week, but Abby's dad said, "Not everyone follows the law," which freaked my mom out. She wanted us to wear orange vests even on the *front lawn* where she made us take Maxi out to do her business. If we didn't get orange vests soon, I was afraid she'd make Maxi stay inside and use a litter box until hunting season was over.

Abby and I invited ourselves on the shopping trip and even got our moms to agree Maxi could go. We didn't care about shopping. We just wanted to get away and do something different. As my grandpa used to say, "Blow the stink off."

On the ride down, I told Abby about L.L. Bean's trout pond and their riverbed aquarium where you could stick your head inside a Plexiglas bubble and take a photo, and it looks like fish are swimming all around your head.

Abby said, "I have my phone camera. Let's do it."

But when we arrived, our "Let's do it" turned into "Can't do it."

"Oh, no," Mom read the sign on the door:

NO PETS ALLOWED. ONLY SERVICE ANIMALS.

“L.L. Bean is so friendly, I just assumed they allowed dogs. But now that I think about it, I don’t remember seeing dogs when we’ve shopped here. Now what?”

I said Abby and I would wait outside with Maxi. It was a warm day for November plus they had a park area right across the street from their “Big Boot” entrance. (Their “Big Boot” looked like a giant L.L. Bean boot that would have made Paul Bunyan feel like a shrimp. Imagine how it made *me* feel?) Our moms weren’t so sure about leaving us alone outside, but in the end their shopping cravings won out.

When they left, I said, “Come on, Abby, let’s head over to the park.”

But Abby said, “Wait a few minutes.”

“Why?”

Abby smiled. “Because as soon as they’re busy shopping, we’re going in.”

“We can’t. Maxi can’t.”

“Oh, yes, she can if she’s my service dog.”

“You’re talking *crazy* again, Abby Winslow.”

“Just hear me out, Timminy.”

I waited (that was my first mistake) and Abby continued. “We’ll be quick. I just want to go in and get a photo at the aquarium. Is it far from the entrance?”

“No, but . . .”

“Good. I’ll hold Maxi like she’s my service dog. We’ll slip in, do the photo, and come right back out.”

“If you want a photo, Abby, we can wait for our moms to get back. They can stay with Maxi out here and then we can go take one.”

“You’re being practical again.” Abby sighed.

“I’m being SENSIBLE and keeping you from getting kicked out.”

“They won’t kick me out—I’m blind.”

“So you’re taking advantage of the fact you’re blind?”

“Yup. There are plenty of disadvantages to being blind. May as well enjoy the few advantages . . . it would look bad for L.L. Bean to BOOT a blind girl out of their store.”

I looked up at the giant LL Bean boot we were standing beside and laughed at her joke (my second mistake).

Abby must have taken that as encouragement. She passed me her white cane, took Maxi’s leash from me, stepped forward until she pushed a handicapped door switch and they were INSIDE just like that!

I hurried after them, went up beside Abby, and trying *not* to make a scene, whispered, “Turn around. We’re leaving.” She didn’t stop walking so I continued, “I’m gonna take Maxi’s leash from you and she and I are going to leave even if you don’t. You’ll be on your own.”

Abby kept following Maxi’s lead and whispered back, “We’re not leaving until we get that photo. Are we heading toward the aquarium?”

I’d been ducking my head trying to avoid eye contact with anyone so we wouldn’t get kicked out and especially so we wouldn’t be seen by our moms. When I looked up, I said. “No! We’re heading the WRONG way towards the . . .”

***SPLASH!***

Maxi jumped into the TROUT POND.

“Ow!” Abby fell against the rocks by the edge of the pond. I tried to brace Abby’s fall at the same time I reached for Maxi’s leash. I failed at *both*.

“Are you okay?” I whispered to Abby (Not sure why I was still whispering—I think our undercover operation had been UNcovered.).

Abby said, “I think so,” as she rubbed her right knee.

“Maxi, come, girl.” But, of course, she couldn’t hear me. And, of course, in my panic, I forgot to make her collar vibrate so she’d know to look at me.

Then all I heard was . . . CHAOS.

“Aaaagh!”

“Eeeeeee!”

“OH NO, NO!”

“A dog!”

“GET OUT! GET OUT OF THERE!”

“Save the fish!”

“Is she BLIND?”

“Call security.”

Someone *did* call security.

And we didn’t even have to use Abby’s phone to call our moms. Their mom-radar collars must have gone off when shouts of “DOG” and “BLIND GIRL” echoed through the store. Abby was lucky—she couldn’t *see* our moms’ faces when they found us.

We were whisked away to a back office. Maxi looked like a giant, drenched, white rat as she *drip-drip-dripped* across the floor. She even had a slight limp (probably landed on one of the rocks in the pond when she jumped in), which made her look even more pitiful. It was the first time I hadn’t heard strangers *ooh* and *aah* over her.

The security guards offered us chairs and even let us use two giant L.L. Bean beach towels to dry off Maxi. Those poor security guards had a lot to piece together.

“Which one’s deaf?”

“Which one’s blind?”

“What’s the other one?”

“Just an accomplice?”

“Why’d the dog jump in the pond?”

“She likes swimming. Really?”

“Or she was making *friends* with the fish like she made friends with a bird. Really?”

“She doesn’t look like a typical guide dog.”

“She’s not?”

“Didn’t you see the sign about ‘no pets allowed’?”

“You did, but then you came in anyway?”

By the end, the guards were grinning about how “Kids will be kids—even blind kids.” (Our moms were *not* grinning.) There was no real damage done. No fish had been eaten. A rule had been broken, but they’d overlook it this ONCE. Then they escorted us out a side door.

Abby started to say, “But what about taking our photo at the . . .”

She couldn’t see so I couldn’t just give her one of those looks Dad uses to shut me up. I elbowed her instead.

“Hey!” she said. “I just wanted to . . .”

I elbowed her a little harder.

“Oh,” she said.

At least she wasn’t *completely* blind.

### *MY SECRET*

It’s not always a good idea to “blow the stink off.”