



## Chapter 1

# Meeting Bo

“I’ll be right there,” Mrs. Barnett promised, returning the receiver to its cradle and snatching up the local senior citizen’s report Pat exclaimed she needed, “Right now. Tonight!”

Since this was Mrs. Barnett’s only involvement with a community project, she felt compelled to answer Pat’s urgent request. Hurriedly she combed her short, wavy hair and threw a jacket over her shoulders. As she rushed out the door, Bo, her son’s eight-month-old Labrador retriever, ran to her with a stick in his mouth. “Not now,” she told the black pup, shoving him aside.

He followed her to the car, and as she slid her slender form under the steering wheel, he tried to get in with her. She pushed him aside yelling, “SIT!”

Her son had told her the dog would obey a stern command, but as she drove off Bo followed. She backed the car up to the house, rolled down the window, and shouted, "SIT!"

He did, but only as long as the car wasn't moving. After her third unsuccessful attempt, she decided she was in too much of a hurry to continue this argument. Instead, she ushered him into the house and led him into the kitchen. She gave him a few dog biscuits and then quickly left closing the door behind her.

She reminded herself that Bo was extremely special to her son. He had left on a government job to Alaska two days after he brought the six-month-old pup home, and his parting words were, "Take care of him, Mom. He's going to be a famous retriever."

The dog began to show signs of being a good retriever almost immediately. One morning before she had gotten out of bed, he brought her an uprooted rubber plant from the flower pot in the living room. Then when he ran off with his dog bowl, Mrs. Barnett told him he would have to do without until he brought it back. A couple of hours later, Bo appeared at the door with some

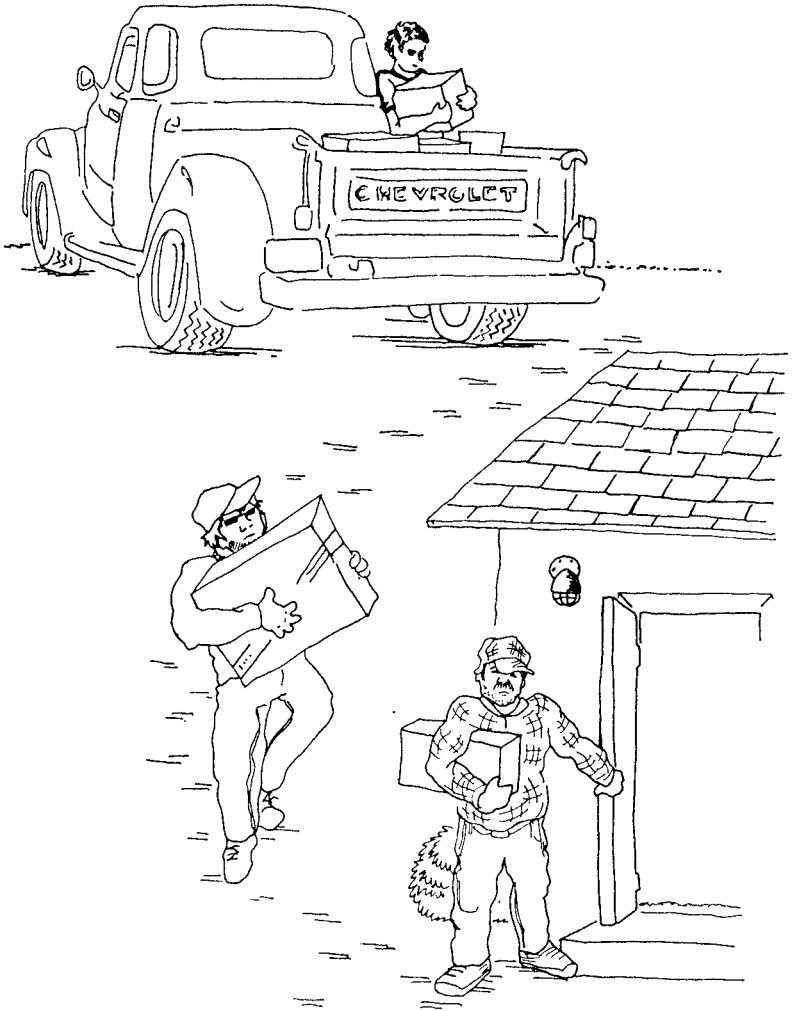
child's sand bucket clenched between his teeth.

Now that Bo was confined to the kitchen, Mrs. Barnett left the house. Before traveling very far she realized she needed to turn on her headlights. Almost instantly, they spotlighted an old, blue pickup truck parked in front of a small rent house on Old Justin Road. Mrs. Barnett noticed a newer black truck parked at the side as she strained to see if she recognized any of the men. Two men were unloading boxes from the old truck while another man was holding open the screen door. Shaking her head, she realized they were not people she had ever seen before.

When she arrived, Pat was waiting for her. Mrs. Barnett's light blonde hair, blended with strands of gray, shined under the porch light as she handed her friend the report.

"Thank you, May," Pat said. "I'm sorry I sounded so urgent, but there is some information in this report I need for my letter to the newspaper."

Pat was accustomed to meeting deadlines for she often wrote letters to the editor on subjects she thought needed the public's attention. Her latest concern was the Argyle Angel Tree. She



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wanted more people to participate by donating gifts to the children who needed them. Anne Crain, who was in charge of the program, was asking residents to take a paper angel from the Christmas tree at the Argyle School. On the back of the angel was a gift number and information about the child. The local senior citizen's organization supported the effort. Mrs. Barnett wrote in her report additional information given to her by Dr. Koonce, the school district's superintendent, and she assumed Pat needed it for her letter.

Handing Pat the report, she assured her that bringing it by had not presented a problem. All at once her thoughts changed to Bo, and it worried her that he might be tearing up the kitchen. Immediately she ended the conversation and left the porch.

Mrs. Barnett's tall, slim frame drifted into the shadows as she rushed to her car. While driving home, she began thinking about the burly looking men she had seen taking boxes into the small rent house. As she passed by, it almost looked deserted except for the black pickup parked at the side and strips of light coming from behind the curtains.

Upon arriving home, she hurried into the house to encounter whatever Bo had chewed up while she was away, but as she inspected the kitchen, surprisingly, she found nothing disturbed.

“He must have slept the whole time,” she thought, turning out the kitchen lights before letting Bo outside for a run.

“Maybe he’s outgrown his bad behavior,” she yawned.