

LOST BUT FOUND By Antonio Otero

Lost but Found is a story about a man named Martin and his dog Marty. Martin lives in a one bedroom apartment in NYC with his dog Marty and he owns a food truck. His life has had many ups and downs so he struggles with finding his purpose in life. One day a terrible storm came and Marty got swept away. Martin was devastated but stopped at nothing to find him. He goes on this long journey all across North America to find him. During this trip Martin battles with nature and is put to the test for his will and determination. Along the way he learns many new life lessons and advice that help him to understand how he should live his life and what gives him purpose.



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Writing a book is something I never thought I would ever do. Honestly I never enjoyed reading or writing in school or anywhere else. Whenever I would have to read a book for school I would just try and see if there was a movie I could watch. It's not that I couldn't understand or comprehend the books, I just would get bored too fast or uninterested. When SAY asked me to do this book project I wasn't sure what my response was going to be. After thinking it over I chose to do it and it has definitely been a learning experience not only literature wise but mentally. I learned a lot more about myself while writing this book. I wouldn't say the process was too hard but there definitely were many bumps along the way. Having to sit down and think of ideas for your own story made me lose my mind at times. Luckily I had my great co-writer Brandon Garegnani and some of my friends to help me spark up ideas. Personally my favorite part of the book is when Martin has to get out of the tunnel in the mountain to escape the wolves. That scene had so much suspense and I had a lot of fun trying to think of different ways he could escape. This is my first book but hopefully not my last.

DEDICATION

In December of 2020 my cousin Christian Hall was sadly killed by the Pennsylvania state troopers on Pennsylvania route 33. He was 19 years old and he had big dreams in his life. He didn't deserve to be killed that day. Christian was a kind, loving person with a good soul. I dedicate this book to him.

In February of 2022 my great aunt Mirtelina Fuentes aka "Titi Chubby" passed away due to health complications. She was only 69 years old and had a heart of gold. Throughout most of my life she was sick but that never stopped her from being the life of the party. Titi was a person who could put a smile on anyone's face. I dedicate this book to her.

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Chapter 1:

Pilot



BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!

Damn right now? I have to get up now?

He got up from out of his twin sized bed, shuffled on his slides and walked to his bathroom. He completed his daily hygiene but not with the best attitude. He passed by his bed ready to jump back in, but knew that he had to get dressed to start heading to his truck.

You know what, 5 more minutes won't hurt.

And as soon as his head hit the pillow

'BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!'

Oh my god it's 9 already?

Martin threw on his Todo Español work uniform, blue jeans and a grey hoodie. Martin wasn't the flashiest dresser but you'd never see him in some 50 dollar corner store shoes. Martin had one of the cleanest shoe catalogs featuring Jordan's, Yeezys, New Balances, and even some designer brands. Once Martin finished putting his fit together he hit the kitchen looking for a quick bite before heading out the door.

Gatorade for electrolytes, chips for sodium.

Clearly not the most nutritious breakfast. As he grabbed the doorknob he heard a little whine coming from behind him.

"Shoot", he said.

He turned to Marty, his husky with big blue eyes and his black spotted fur.

I forgot to take Marty out on his walk.

His friend had actually named him because he said Marty always wanted to do everything Martin wanted to do so it was like they were the same person, hence giving him the

same name. Martin put the leash on Marty and took him around the block to use the bathroom.

Marty always loved messing around with Martin by purposely not using the bathroom the first two times around just so he can spend some more time walking with him.

“Marty we’ve been circling the park for almost 10 minutes and you still haven’t used the bathroom? Cmon I have to go to work!” Marty peers up at Martin with his puppy dog eyes, practically begging him to stay home. “Ok buddy I can’t stay mad at you, but I have to work today. We can play fetch for a few minutes then you need to pee mister.” After they played fetch, Marty finally used the bathroom so Martin can bring him back upstairs then head to work.

Martin had to walk about 10 minutes which was about 4 or 5 city blocks to get to his food truck. The truck is called Todo Español. Martin had loved cooking ever since he was a kid and he always dreamed of owning his own food truck.

The truck itself was white with streaks of blue, orange, and green. The name, Todo Español which stands for “Everything Spanish”, was in big lettering below the window. Below that is “Food cooked by master chef Martin Johnson and crew.” The Menu was on the side of the food truck on a big rectangle with beautiful black white squiggly borders, framing the corners. Menu text going down and on the top left side is breakfast options. On the opposite

right side of the menu was finger foods. Mostly for lunch. Little empanadas, tacos wings, stuff like that. On the bottom left side would be our dinner and our meals section. On the bottom right section are drinks and sides. A bit below that on the right side is our dessert.

He got to the truck around 9:00am to open it up and then waited for his workers until around 9:30. One guy named James is sometimes there even before Martin because he's such a good worker who just wants to help his family. He even worked at another job after he got off at 5. Martin tried his best to help out whenever he could. Once 9:30 hit Kevin, and Miguel show up and then they get the truck on and rockin. When Martin was at the truck his energy was different from when he's at home or other places. He was always energized, ready to work, always happy to put a smile on a customer's face.

"Hey how are you doing, what would you like to order?"

"Hey can I have 2 carnitas and a chicken burrito."

"Got you, that'll be \$10." Martin turned to Kevin and said, "Kevin I need 2 nitas and a rito."

Martin served the customer and was ready for the next one.

"Hey how are you doing, what would you like to order?"

"I know this is very American of me but can I please have a burger and fries."

"Don't be ashamed, that's why we have it on our menu. That will be \$8." Martin turned to Kevin and said, "Kevin I need a burger and fries."

MENU

BREAKFAST ***LUNCH***

BREAKFAST TACOS

BACON/SAUSAGE EGG AND
CHEESE (ROLL OR BAGEL)

CROISSANT

CARNITAS

CHICKEN BURRITO

BEEF BURRITO

EMPANADAS
(BEEF, CHICKEN, MODURO)

QUESADILLA (BEEF, CHICKEN)

TACO (BEEF, CHICKEN)

PASTELES

BURGER (SERVED WITH FRIES)

HOTDOG

CHICKEN FINGERS
(SERVED WITH FRIES)

DINNER

PERNIL (SERVED WITH WHITE
OR YELLOW RICE)

ARROZ CON POLLO

SANCOCHO

ROPA VIEJA

DESSERTS ***SIDES***

TRES LECHES

FLAN

CHURROS

ICE CREAM (CHOCOLATE,
VANILLA, STRAWBERRY)

FRENCH FRIES

YUCA FRIES

TOSTONES

BEANS



The truck isn't doing too bad but it wasn't great either. There were big inconsistencies with customers. Some days the line is around the corner and other days it's a ghost town. They needed consistent loyal customers that would come and get food everyday. There was always one person though, who would come almost everyday to buy some food. She was this beautiful girl who was always in a hurry but made time to stop for a second to eat here. Martin never asked her for her name or anything, but he always admired how she was the one person who really supported the business.

The shift of James, Kevin, and Miguel will switch to the night shift at 5:00 which includes Larry and Angel. Once the shift changes Martin will head home for about 30-45 minutes to feed Marty and walk him again. Marty will always make Martin stay an extra 5-10 minutes to play around before going back to work. Martin most days would stay at the truck from opening until closing which is at 11:00pm unless he's too tired and then Angel will close up shop. After the truck closes Martin always would go to the bar at the restaurant up the block where he orders vanilla ice cream and tequila on the rocks and just chills for a bit before going back home.

“Angel!”

“Yeah.”

“I'm out to the bar. Before you close up can you just make sure all the fryers are off because yesterday when I opened the truck fryer number 3 was still on.”

“I got you boss. Be safe.”

“You know I will. Have a goodnight man.”

Every night arrived home he'd be greeted with Marty sitting right at the door waiting for his buddy to come home so they could hop on the couch and watch a movie before falling asleep.

“What's up buddy. I've had a long day at work and now I'm all yours for the night.”

Martin and Marty played with his toys for a while and then watched their movie, before falling asleep and doing it all over again the next day.

The next day Martin completed his regular morning routine then he headed down to work like every other morning. As Martin got there he remembers that today was the Fourth of July. He texted his work group chat to let everyone know that they are off from work today. Everyone else expected to be off so they didn't even bother responding. Martin was so pissed off because he would much rather be in bed sleeping right now.

Dammit I could be asleep right now. I might as well make something to eat for breakfast.

Real quick Martin whipped up some eggs and bacon on the stove real quick, threw it on some toast and topped it off with some arugula, olive oil, and tomatoes.

“Ahh, the perfect breakfast.”

While Martin was sitting there eating, he saw someone walking up to the truck. He looked up and realized it was his most valuable customer. No matter how up or down the day is with customers, Martin knows he can always

count on this girl to be here to get some food. What Martin also always noticed was how beautiful she was. She approaches the truck and Martin said,

“Hey, how are you doing? We actually aren’t open today.”

“Awe man really. I was so ready for my breakfast tacos.”

“Oh we are closed but I’ll definitely whip those up for you right now. I see you come here a lot and I really appreciate your business.”

“Yes of course. Your food is amazing.”

“Thank you very much. I appreciate that a lot. I work really hard to keep this place going. You can have a seat if you want while I finish getting those tacos ready for you.”

“Oh I don’t mind. You can sit.”

Martin was trying to be smooth by taking this opportunity to finally get to talk to her even though he had his nice big sandwich before.

“I never got your name?”

“It’s Jessica. What’s yours?”

“I’m Martin.”

“So where you from Martin?”

“Well I’m from Minnesota but I moved here about 4 years ago to the city. I live a few blocks from here. What about you?”

“I live in Queens right now but I’m originally from the city.”

“What street?”

“5th avenue. My parents still have an apartment

there.”

“Whew, I wish I had parents with that money, you guys are living very nicely.”

“Yeah it’s nice but I like to look at that as my parents’ money. Not mine. So even though they help me out I try to make an honest living myself.”

“Where do you work? You’re usually in a rush whenever you come by the truck.”

“Yeah I’m always really busy. I’m an interior decorator at Decor Express on Canal st.”

My dad owned a car dealership and my mom stayed at home. I would work there with him to help out but I never hated anything more than being there.” Martin ironically received a text from his mother right after saying this, which said. **“Sorry for texting unexpectedly, I was just checking in and making sure you knew about the Hurricane that’s supposed to be heading towards the city in a few weeks. Stay safe and I hope you’re doing ok.”**

“Have you seen everything about this Hurricane that’s supposed to be coming in a few weeks?”

“Yeah they said it’s supposed to be just as bad or worse than Sandy was.”

“Shoot I hope it’s not. That was terrible for NY. I remember seeing it on tv.”

“Yes it was. But let’s not talk about that.”

“Ok, what are you doing for the Fourth of July today?”

“Oh I will be in bed doing absolutely nothing. My roommate’s probably going to have people over so that will be annoying.” Martin with an unsure response, “Well if

you have nothing to do and want to get away from your roommate, we can hang at my place.”

Jessica with a smile on her face says, “You know what I think that sounds like a plan.” After Martin and Jessica finished their tacos they headed to Martin’s apartment. Marty was ecstatic to see Jessica, since she was probably the first person other than Martin to walk through that door. They walked to sit on the couch and Jessica sat where Marty usually sits and it confused him so he jumped to sit right on her lap.

“What are your favorite chips?” he asked.

“I love Lay’s sour cream and onion chips, but what’s funny about it is I hate sour cream and onions.” Martin started laughing because he felt the exact same way.

“Hey, do you wanna watch the fireworks special on tv.”

“Sure. I’ll just be here cuddled up next to my new best friend Marty.”

“HAHA yeah he’s a cuddler.”

Martin then took a second and realized this may actually be the first person he’s ever had in his house. Then he took another second and realized how messy his apartment was.

*Sh** I didnt even clean up my desk or put away those clothes*

But he soon relaxed because it seemed as if she was comfortable being there.

Jessica checked her phone and saw that the Mets are playing the Braves today. She then yelled in excitement for Martin to turn it on, “OH MY GOD, the Mets play the

Braves in 2 minutes we have to put the game on.” Martin turned to her in happy confusion, “You watch baseball??” Jessica replied, “Just because I’m a girl doesn’t mean I can’t watch baseball. I’ve been watching the Mets since I was able to carry a bat.” Martin laughed and said, “Well I’ve been a Twins fan since I came out the womb and they’re going to make a comeback this season.” Jessica says, “The Twins??? I used to think that was a minor league team.” Right as Martin was about to hit her with a smooth reply there was a loud deafening BOOOM. Marty jumps up barking at the top of his lungs and goes crazy.

“What the hell the fireworks are starting already?? They are terrifying Marty.” Jessica runs over to console Marty by gently giving him a hug and speaking to him softly telling him it’s going to be alright. Martin then realized what’s going on and ran to the closet to grab some treats to calm him down. As he came back he saw how affectionate she was towards him and it made him smile. He then gave Marty some treats and it seems to have helped everything. Martin laughed and said, “With this guy food is always the key. He’ll never be sad when food is around.” They both started laughing together and right before Jessica was about to say something the fireworks started again, so they put Marty in Martin’s room. After putting him away they walked to the window to watch the beautiful fireworks together with all the colors and formations. It was a moment where Martin didn’t feel alone. He was happy to be here with Jessica and so was she. A few minutes later Jessica’s phone went off, ‘BZZD BZZD’.

“Oh that’s my alert for the train, it’s 15 minutes

away so I guess i'll see you tomorrow morning.”

“I can walk you to the train if you want.”

“Oh I'm fine Martin thank you.”

“I have to go that way anyway to get some more dog food for Marty so...”

“Ok Mr. Chef let's go. But first I need to say bye to Marty.”

Martin opened the door and Marty ran out of the room all jumpy with his tail wagging.

“Bye buddy I'll see you next time, can you give me your paw?” Marty gave her his paw and they shook hands goodbye while Martin just looked and smiled.

He walked Jessica to the station and said goodnight and that he'll see her tomorrow morning. As Martin walked home he had a big smile on his face that he couldn't even try to hide.

In the morning Martin had felt a little different than usual. He finally had a reason to go to work other than cooking.

Ima ask her to go see the new Fast & Furious movie tonight.

Martin got ready and even remembered to take Marty for a walk with time to spare to get to the truck. He honestly was just hype to see Jessica again today. She always works in the morning so Martin gets a chance to see her every breakfast. Martin got inside the truck to set everything up and it was on and rockin from there. When

Todo Espanol gets busy, it's really busy. Especially in the Tribeca, Soho area of NYC. Martin is always very focused at work but he kept thinking about when he's going to see her. As he was thinking about when she'd show up, he saw her walking down the street towards the truck. He decided this would be a good time to ask her to go see the movie. Martin asked Miguel to watch the register while he jumped out to ask Jessica,

“Hey you here for your breakfast tacos?”

“You know I am.”

“Perfect, I'll have them ready for you in a second.”

Martin walks over with the tacos.

“Here you go.”

“Thanks Martin. I gotta eat quickly then head out to this meeting.”

“Ok good luck.”

As Martin was walking away he said, “Hey after your meeting ends if you weren't busy I was thinking about going to see the new Fast & Furious movie and grab a bite to eat if you want to come?”

“Is this a date?” Jessica said with a grin on her face.

Ok just say yes or she won't think you're serious.

“Yes, this is a date.”

“Ok sounds like a plan to me.”

Martin and Jessica went to see the new movie and they had a great time. Martin hasn't been on a date in a few years and was really happy that Jessica was willing to go with him. Little does he know that Jessica has always thought he was attractive ever since she first started eating

at the truck. They went back to Martin's place and had more fun with Marty and with each other.

In the morning they went to get some coffee with a bagel then Martin brought her to the train.

"I hope we can do this again sometime?"

Jessica grinned and said, "Yeah I would like that. See you later chef."

Once again Martin turns around to head back home with that big smile on his face that he couldn't even try to hide.



Chapter 2:

Joe?



The food truck hadn't been doing well recently and Martin was missing payments and not bringing in enough profit. Eventually he got hit with an eviction notice for not paying rent. This of course came at the worst time when there was a hurricane currently heading towards the Tri-state area. Martin and Marty were forced to head to a shelter down the street. Martin had to throw all his belongings in garbage bags and pile them in the front of the truck.

The next day Hurricane Joe was barreling through the City and it started to get closer to the evening time. Marty gave Martin the signal that he had to use the bathroom. So he went to the window to check if the rain was still pouring and it looked as if it had stopped. Martin checked his phone to be sure and it said the rain wasn't going to come back for another 2 hours and that the winds were still pretty fast but not how they were earlier in the day. So he took him for a walk. It was pretty warm and damp outside but it was calming because no one else was out there. It's been maybe 15-20 minutes and they started to feel the winds pick up a lot quicker than before. Almost to the point where Martin couldn't stand up. Then as they looked ahead there was a huge black cloud coming towards them and then BOOOOM.

*Oh my god that is the scariest sh** I have ever seen.*

Loud Thunder cracking, lighting and then all the rain you could ever imagine. Martin and Marty ran as fast as possible to try to get back to the shelter.

“Come on Marty we gotta run.”

The winds were too strong and it blew the leash out

of Martin's hands letting Marty go.

"Marty No!!"

Marty then vanished into the winds and rain that was blowing through the city. Martin was also blown away into nearby bushes on a street divider where he hits his head and is knocked unconscious. Martin was then woken up by civilians who saw the whole ordeal happen. The lady explained to Martin that he and his dog were separated by the storm,

"Sir, are you okay?! I saw the wind blow you and your dog apart. I already got my friend trying to look for him down Franklin st." Martin, while dazed, then exclaimed his gratitude toward them, "Thank you so much, but please we need to get inside somewhere safe. I don't know where Marty is but we need to be alive to find him." Martin and the women who helped him ran to find her friend who was searching in the storm for Marty. They came down Franklin street and they found her friend sitting there with a defeated look on his face. Martin asked,

"Oh my god thank you so much for trying to find Marty. Do you have any idea where he might be?!" The friend almost crying replies,

"I don't know! I just saw him flying through this thick cloud in front of me and I heard him squealing."

"Marty!! Marty!!" Martin yelled while tears were flowing down his eyes.

The storm was so intense that it came up through the New York Bay and was still so powerful. It spawned a baby tornado that then formed into a giant one that started ripping through the city. Martin and his new

acquaintances realized and went back to the shelter to wait for this catastrophe to end. The shelter wasn't too big. Only about 60 people were currently staying there. Martin was contemplating what his next move is to try and find Marty. But he then realized the truck had been outside in the storm the whole time.

“Holy sh**!” Martin yelled. He ran out the door and down the street towards the truck. He got there and saw that the truck was still there but with a huge tree that fell right in front. Martin was greatly relieved that the truck is still intact.

‘BZZZZD, BZZZZD!’

Martin hears his phone buzzing. “Mom?” Martin answered the phone confused because his mom had already texted him a few days ago for the first time in years, so he was wondering why she would call again.

“Hey Mom how you doing?”

“Oh I'm fine, I heard about the major storm that hit the big city so I wanted to make sure you were ok.”

“Yeah I'm fine thanks for the concern.” Mom angrily replies, “Why do you have to talk to me like that? You're the one who wanted to run off and leave your family to become some cook.”

“Thanks for calling mom.” Martin's hurt that he can't ask his mother and family for help to try and find Marty because they don't have a good relationship. Especially since she's the one who got Marty for him before he decided to leave for New York. The only person Martin really connected with was his father Moses but after Martin and his mom had a falling out his dad just stopped

speaking to him.

Martin headed back to the shelter to begin his plan to find Marty. The city was torn to pieces after the storm subsided. Martin texted the work group chat to let everyone know that Marty is missing and that he will be closing the truck until he can get answers. Larry and James were angry at first because they needed the money but they eventually were ok with it. After, he texted Jessica the same thing and she called Martin immediately.

“What the hell is going on? Where is Marty?!”

“I don’t know Jessica, I’m trying to figure out what to do to try and find him. The storm really hit the city badly and everything is in shambles right now.”

“I’m coming right now, I’ll be there in 30 minutes.”

“No, do not come here, I’ll deal with it on my own.”

“Are you crazy Marty is my family too, what’s the problem with me coming there”

Martin was majorly embarrassed at the fact that he’s currently staying at a shelter and doesn’t know what to say. “Look I’ll explain later but do me a favor and call your cousin who works for Clear Channel. I have an idea.”

A few hours later as Martin is dozing off he gets a call from Jessica’s cousin Rob. Rob is the head director of Billboard Design Selection. Martin picks up and Rob asks,

“Is this Jessica’s friend Martin?”

“Yes that’s me, thanks for calling.”

“Hey, what can I do for you?”

“My dog Marty was lost in the Storm a few days ago so I was thinking I can maybe design a lost dog billboard for you to put up so people can be aware.”

“Look I would love to help but that’s out of my hands unless you have the money to fund it.” Martin was determined and said, “There are a lot of people who were missing after that storm. What if we include others on the billboard and have it be a missing person warning. That way Clear Channel will look at it as news and not a random statement.”

“Ok I’ll think about it and get back to you.” Martin sended Rob his picture of Marty and said that it would be the right thing to do and then he went to sleep.

The next morning Martin was woken up to calls and texts from his family. They all said the same thing. “WHERE IS MARTY!!” Martin then gets a call from Jessica and she says,

“Did you see it?”

“See what?”

“Look outside.” Martin went to his window and saw a huge 20 foot billboard with Marty’s face on it saying lost dog. Martin’s mouth dropped.

*Holy sh**!! He did it.*

Martin picked the phone back up and told Jessica,

“Now we just have to hope that someone sees it and has seen Marty. If they can give us some ideas of where he can be then I can take it from there.”

A few days go by and there’s no calls, texts, emails, posts or anything. They had started to lose hope until that phone rang.

‘BZZZD! BZZZD!’ “Hello this is Martin, who am I speaking with?”

“Hey Martin, this is Nick. I saw a billboard for a

lost dog with a number so I called because I recognized the dog.”

“You’ve seen Marty?!”

“Yes he was at the Oceanview Dog Adoption Festival near my apartment. I went to get my niece a puppy and I saw your dog Marty with this couple and other huskies.”

“Thank you so much for contacting me. Wait, where’s Oceanview?”

“Ontario, Canada.”

Once Martin got off the phone he immediately started packing essential things he would need on this trip.

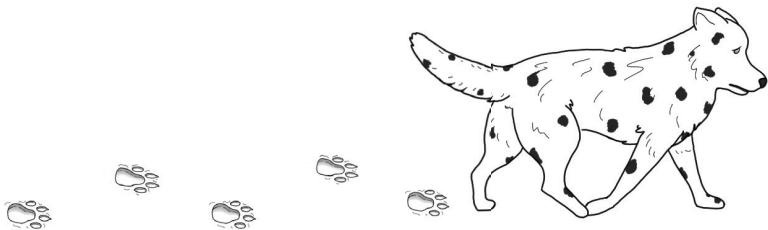
I gotta get ready to get out of here today. I need my travel bag, clothes, tooth brush, Kitchen Knife kit, and dog treats.

After getting all packed up and ready Martin started searching for plane tickets to Ontario. The cheapest one he could find was for \$250. He then checked his bank account and realized he only had \$300 left to his name. Without thinking twice, Martin bought his ticket and was off to the airport.



Chapter 3:

Trees



DING!

“We are now aboard Air Canada and will be landing in Ontario in 6 hours and 15 minutes.”

Once Martin boarded the plane he instantly called Jessica,

“Hey Jess.”

“How are you holding up Martin? Did anyone reach out yet about Marty?”

“I’m doing ok and yeah a guy named Nick called and said he saw Marty at this adoption festival near his apartment. Only problem is it’s in Ontario.”

“That’s ok we can head out today. We have to get him.”

“Jessica I’m going to go but I want you to stay here and please watch the truck for me. I won’t be gone for long.”

“No, I’m coming with you. I love Marty and I know he’s really scared right now without you and that breaks my heart.”

“I know Jess but I would feel a lot better knowing someone was here watching the truck after all the chaos that’s been happening in the city. Also I don’t know this guy Nick and whoever he’s bringing me too and I can’t have you getting in any trouble over my problems.”

“Alright I’ll watch the truck. But is there anything I need to know like how do I watch the truck? Am I sitting there watching it all day or popping in occasionally to check in?”

“Ok. First this is what you have to do. You walk

inside the building and buzz on the office door. Tell Herbert that I'm leaving and you need to park the truck inside the garage. He's going to get all pissed off at first then you tell him that you're going to give him the taquitos I usually give him when I park the truck. You're going to be giving him free taquitos whenever you see him while I'm gone. He might try and sell you this diamond that he claims his grandmother gave him but don't bother, it's a scam."

"Ok? Just please get Marty back and be safe."

"I will, I promise."

After the phone call Martin the plane took off and Martin was out like a light.

"Once again thank you for boarding Air Canada and I hope you had a wonderful flight. See you next time!"

Martin had taken the red eye so he could get there in the morning. He headed to this cafe to meet up with Nick and discuss in person what he saw and get some directions. Nick explains what he saw, "I had seen the billboard on my Instagram and it instantly hit me because I had a Husky too when I was younger. Then the next day I had stopped by the adoption festival to potentially adopt my niece a puppy. But when I got there I saw this odd looking couple with a bunch of huskies in front of their trailer. They had a table with a price sign for \$200 each dog. I was confused at first because I thought this was just for adoptions but there were dogs being sold as well. I walked over to pet the huskies and I saw your dog Marty

laying there in the corner. I didn't make the connection until after I had left to go get a bite to eat. So that's what happened." Martin responds by saying, "So you're not even 100% sure that was my Marty that you saw? Do you have any clue where they might be now?"

"No I don't but I got their names and number down. They told me to take it in case I was interested." "Yes I'll take that. Thank you again for helping me try and find my Marty."

Martin called the number and a woman picked up. She first asked if Martin was interested in buying a Husky. Martin declined and asked if she had his dog Marty who was lost during Hurricane Joe that hit New York City. He described him as having black spots on his white coat and his big blue eyes. The woman immediately gets defensive and tries to move one from the subject. The woman says, "We don't have that dog here. If you're interested in buying adult male and female huskies let me know if not don't call this number. CLICK!"

Nah something's up because why would she go from so nice to so defensive like that.

Martin had their names and number but not their location so he's pretty limited on what he can do.

I can try and file a police report but they're not gonna listen cause I don't have the evidence. Or maybe I can call whoever setup the adoption Festival and try and see if they know more about these two.

Martin looked up the festival and called but no response. The address to the main office was only a 15 minute walk so Martin got going. The directions say he

had to pass through this dog park because it's on the other side. As Martin was walking through he saw a beautiful big husky in front of him catching a ball thrown from the owner. He then saw the tag on the collar which read Josh & Chloe's Huskies. Those were the exact same names that Nick had given Martin. Martin walked up to the owner and asked him if he knew Josh & Chloe which he responded yes and said they're good friends of his. Martin then thought about the smartest way to approach this situation.

I'm gonna say that I was interested in buying a husky and if maybe he knew where they lived or stayed at because my phone was broken. Hopefully he doesn't think I'm lying.

"Oh really they are. I was actually interested in buying a husky for my niece and people told me they have a beautiful one with nice black spots."

"Oh yeah that boys gorgeous but you better be ready to cash out quickly because I heard there are 2 buyers going to see Josh in a week that are willing to pay some hefty cash. I mean a husky with that fur is rarer than a blind person being able to see."

"Yeah you're right he sure is a beautiful and special dog." Martin was heated and scared at the same time that at any moment Marty could be sold and wind up in a completely different part of the world or worse. Dead. Martin then asked the key question.

"So do you know where they happen to live or stay? I just want to meet with them and be able to see the dog in person so I can make an offer that they hopefully will not refuse."

"Yeah sure their address is 29-16 34rd. Now I would

be prepared before going to see them. They live in the Taiga so it's definitely a lot of work getting there, especially on foot."

"What's the Taiga?"

"It's only the world's largest land biome. A Boreal forest so it's nonstop trees, creeks, snow and animals."

"Damn ok, thanks for the tip. I appreciate your help."

"No problem."

Martin got back to his hotel to check out and get himself ready for this trip he's about to embark on. The house on google maps said it is 320 miles away and Martin is only 5 minutes away from where the forest begins. The temperature outside was 24 degrees and it was set to snow the next day. But Martin was determined to get Marty and didn't care about what he was about to go through to get there.

Hooo this is going to be tough. Let's go.

The trees were so tall unlike anything Martin had ever seen before. The smell was really wet and piney. He hadn't seen any animals yet which was a little weird because it had been almost 30 minutes that he'd been walking.

I wonder why I haven't seen no animals yet. Wow the sky once you're in the forest looks so much clearer.

Martin obviously thought to himself about the sky, he didn't even notice the 5 foot tall reindeer that stood right in front of him. As Martin kept walking and looking up he looked straight and immediately froze once he saw the deer.

Oh shoot it's Rudolph

He noticed how brown and fluffy the fur looked. It was almost as if it had on a nice big coat like Martin did. The antlers were so long and intertwined. He stood there minding his business not worried about Martin. Martin thinks to himself,

Wow what a beautiful animal. He doesn't even care that I'm so close. I wish I could see these guys all the time. Hey I guess the Taiga ain't so bad.

As Martin got a little closer to the deer it took off into the bushes. The encounter was really something special for Martin but he remembered that he has to keep moving.

A few hours later Martin was still walking through this maze of trees and bushes and it started to get a little dark out. Martin had realized, then he remembered that he hadn't eaten at all today. So Martin tries to find food around him. He found these yellow berries hanging around this little plant.

I wonder if I can eat these? I've seen a lot of movies and they all tell you to not eat the berries in the forest so I think I might pass on these.

Martin decided to pass up on the berries and keep looking even though his stomach was now grumbling. After about 2 hours of searching for maybe a river with fish, a fruit or a vegetable he came up with nothing. Martin had thought about hunting for his food but he's never killed anything so it was pretty hard for him to picture himself doing that.

Nightfalls and Martin had to find a place to sleep

where he can be warm and not vulnerable to whatever is out here in this forest. He found these two bushes that were pretty close together and some big branches. So he layed in the bushes and covered the other side with the branches. Martin used his bag as a pillow. Throughout the night he can hear all the bugs and noises of wind in trees. Martin finally fell asleep until he was abruptly woken up by a loud cracking noise. The noise almost seemed as if someone or something was walking towards him and stepped on a stick making the noise. Martin nervously tries to turn his head to see through the bushes without making a sound. Martin noticed this huge black thing just walking around his bushes.

I really don't know what this thing is. It's really big but it's so dark it just looks like a black blob walking around me.

In all the darkness there was some light on the right side of Martin coming from the moon. Martin quietly turned his head to the right to see that it was actually a large black bear that was walking around him.

“That’s a black bear. What the hell am I supposed to do right now.” Martin whispered to himself.

Martin had seen a black bear before in his life when he went camping as a kid. He was trying to remember what his counselors had told him to do in a run in with a black bear.

Ok first thing Mike used to tell me was that black bears aren't aggressive and that you shouldn't worry. Second was that if you want the bear to leave try and make yourself big. I don't think I can jump out of these bushes fast enough though. But why is it here though. Maybe because... Oh I know why. The bushes

are blackberry bushes.

Martin realized that's why the Bear wouldn't leave. Since Martin knew why he was there he decided to go back to sleep. Definitely a bold move but Martin had faith that he was ok. The next morning Martin got out of his little hut and continued on his journey. This was Martin's second day in the Taiga so he was almost close to half way. Martin still had not eaten since he set out on this voyage and it wasn't starting to look good. Martin knew he would have to start hunting. So he grabbed a large stick and tried to sharpen the end with a rock. After about 10 minutes of sharpening he set out to find anything he could possibly eat. Martin found squirrels, rabbits and birds but couldn't catch any of them. After about 5 hours of searching Martin dropped to his knees in exhaustion and hunger. Also with yesterday morning being the last time he drank water he was in desperate need of some hydration. But Martin couldn't bear to walk anymore. After 30 minutes Martin started to think to himself if he's going to die. He had no way of eating food and there was no water for him to drink.

Am I really going to die here searching for something that might already be gone. I love Marty but he wouldn't want me to die trying to find him. I mean what is my family going to think. I haven't talked to dad in years and last time I spoke to mom it was a huge fight. I can't end like this.

As Martin began to slowly faint an old man sees him from atop the hill. The old man makes his way down the hill and started dragging Martin up the hill. About 30 minutes later they wound up back at the old man's shack.

The old man kept trying to yell and pour water on Martin's face so he could wake up. It didn't work so the old man decided to smack Martin as hard as he could and then POOF he was awake. Martin, dazed and confused, asked where he was. The old man explained that he had passed out and needed to drink the water he gave him and he would go fetch him some fish to cook for him. Martin was so thankful to have been saved out of the middle of nowhere. The old man asks Martin,

“What are you doing out here in the Taiga?”

“I'm on a journey to find my stolen dog Marty.”

“Really, well I hope you find him. But ah is that the only reason you're on this trip?”

“Why would you say that?”

“Well I just kind of get the feeling that you came here for a different reason as well.”

“Nah I just really love my dog and no one else was going to get my Marty or make sure he was safe. So if no one's going to care I'm going to care!”

“Well you sound like you have a lot of pent up anger. It seems as if you are speaking upon other individuals. Perhaps your family?”

“What are you some kind of sidekick wisdom guy? I don't have time for this sh** ok, my dog is about to be sold away to some dog traffickers or whatever the hell they're doing with my dog and you have me sitting here talking about why I'm here!”

“Ok. I understand. Just know that it's ok to ask for help sometimes. But you have to honor the help and respect it don't just take their food and water then leave

them high and dry. I don't like being disrespected in my shack especially when I helped you! I hope you find your Marty."

Martin took in what the old man just said to him. He made him really think about his family and Jessica. He also realized how disrespectful he just was to this man who helped him.

Martin grabbed his things, gave the old man a stern head nod and said "Thank you sir." He headed out the door back onto his trip to find Marty. As Martin was walking he heard the old man yell from behind him, "Josh & Chloe are up the hill to the left all the way down past the creek." Martin thinks to himself,

This old geezer knows Josh & Chloe? Should I ask him if he's seen Marty? Nah ima just let him be. He helped me enough, I mean the guy saved my life so I'll just leave him alone.

Martin listens to the old man's directions and heads up over the hill towards the left. Martin was now determined more than ever to get his Marty back. It had started to snow really hard but that wasn't going to stop Martin from getting through this forest.

Martin didn't stop walking for hours and hours until he eventually got tired and found a small cave. He laid there with his bag and tried to make a fire to see so he did it with some sticks, rocks, and paper from the bag. Martin got the fire to eventually spark after 5 minutes but it wasn't enough to make a fire. At that point Martin was super tired and passed out right there without the fire. The snow started to come down even harder and harder and Martin was asleep. It was already almost 2 in the morning

at this point, and by 8 o'clock when Martin woke up the whole forest was under 4 feet of snow and ice.

Martin got up from his sleep to the sounds of the high speed winds flying through the air.

“Are you kidding me? Now I have to deal with the damn snow.”

I gotta get moving

Martin grabbed his bag and climbed out of the cave. He started heading towards the right all the way down the pathway. As Martin was walking down he just started to get this weird feeling. Like a feeling that somebody was watching him. Martin kept turning around to look over his shoulder or above his head and he noticed a face peering out of a crack on the side of the rock.

“What is that? Wait, is that a Cougar!?” Martin said to himself.

As Martin said that the Cougar sprang into action and jumped off the cliff, landing right in front of Martin. Martin didn't know what to do so he just tried to run through the snow as fast as he could but the cougar was faster. The cougar pounced, grabbing and biting Martin's shoulder then took off running back up the rock. Martin laid there horrified and in pain but he was lucky because he was wearing 2 sweaters and a thick North Face jacket. Martin slowly got up and fixed his jacket.

*F*** that. I gotta get out of here. This cougar is going to come back and kill me. I'm so lucky it's teeth barely broke my skin cause I don't feel like I'm bleeding.*

Martin kept steady walking and did not stop until he finally hit that creek. He was lucky that the cougar never

decided to come back and finish him off.

As Martin was headed toward the creek to pass through he saw a Reindeer next to it drinking water.

Is that the same Reindeer I saw when I first came in here? I swear it's gotta be he has the same chest pattern as the one I first saw. Damn that's crazy, is it following me? Maybe it's a good sign that I'm close?

Martin kept going toward the creek to pass through to get to the other side. The creek wasn't too big so he made his way through. On the other side of the creek was a little more grass and flat land. Martin kept a steady pace because he knows he's got to be close because the old man said once you get over the creek you're close. Martin sees around the corner from this big rock a cabin looking home with a big yard surrounded by large bushes. Martin's phone had lost service a while back so he couldn't tell if this was the house but it was the first one he'd seen since before he came into the Taiga so he was sure it was this one. Before Martin marched in there he checked his bag to see if he had anything he could use as a weapon to protect himself. He found a pocket knife at the bottom which he just remembered he could've used to catch food but of course he forgot. So he went around the house to try and find a backdoor or the dogs. It had only been 4 days since Martin stepped foot in the Taiga and the husky owner from the dog park said they had a buyer coming in a week. So Martin knew the dogs had to be there.

If I can just find Marty I'll dip out but if not I'll bust into this house and make them give him to me.

Martin couldn't find Marty outside so he decided

to kick in the backdoor. Chloe was sitting at her desk right in across from the doorway where she jumped up out her seat to the sound of Martin's kick.

"Where the hell is my dog Marty!!?" Martin yelled.

Chloe stood there in shock when Josh came in and yelled, "What's going on out here? Who are you!!?"

"I'm Martin and I'm looking for my dog Marty. He has white fur with black spots and big blue eyes. I had lost him in Hurricane Joe that hit New York City a few weeks ago. I got a giant billboard in the city with his name and face on it with my number. I got a call from a guy at the Oceanview adoption festival who said he saw him with you guys and now I'm here."

Josh and Chloe both looked at each other then Chloe said to Martin, "I'm sorry but we already sold that dog to our active buyers. I didn't know that he had a home. Josh had found him when he went to New York for the weekend to see his parents."

"So you just thought you were gonna steal my dog and sell him for all this money and not give a damn where he went too?."

"No, we just find and like for strays to sell to homes so they can be taken care of. We thought your dog didn't have an owner."

"So when I called you one the phone a few days ago asking about him, you're telling me Marty doesn't have an owner? Don't lie to me, you knew that I was searching for him, why didn't you return him to me?"

"Look, we're doing real bad money wise. On the phone I did know about the dog. I just didn't want to give

him back because he was like our golden ticket out of here. He was so rare with his black spots and we really need the money right now. We will try our best to help you get him back.”

“I understand. I too am not in the best spot financially and never really was. I honestly would have done the same thing if I was you. And thank you for agreeing to help me get him back.”

“You’re welcome. Let me check my files to pull up his record and the transactions with our buyers.”

Martin realized he would have done the same himself if he needed the money and had the opportunity.

I don’t even have money myself and if I had the opportunity like that to make serious money I woulda done the same thing too. I really judged them before I ever got to meet them in person.

Chloe went to the other room to find the files while Martin and Josh waited in the living room. Josh asked Martin, “Why did you break in here with a knife?”

“I mean ever since I’ve been in Canada it seems as if everyone has a gun on them so I wanted to have at least something to come in with.”

“You mind putting it away?”

“Got you. So who are these buyers you guys sold Marty to and where are they?”

“We don’t actually meet our international buyers.”

“Ok, well that’s just great. How am I supposed to find them?”

Chloe stepped in hearing the conversation and intervened saying, “Alaska. Their address is 54-124

Chuckabee drive.”

“Thank you so much Chloe and Josh. I’m going to head there now.”

“Wait, you think you’re going to walk out of the Taiga?”

“Yeah.”

Josh and Chloe bursted out laughing then Josh said, “You can’t walk out of the Taiga like you walked in. If you keep going you’ll have to pass through the thick snowy mountains and that’s where the packs reside and you don’t want to run into them. Also be careful of that when you’re near the mountains in Alaska. We’ll drive you out of here.” Martin responded, “Well thank you I appreciate that.”

Martin hopped in the back of Josh and Chloe’s truck and they drove him to the closest nearby airport. During the ride Martin realized he had no money to even buy a plane ticket. He first thought to ask Josh and Chloe but then he wondered how he would ever repay them. If he asks Jessica he can repay her when he gets back to New York. So he called her,

“Hey Jess.”

“Oh my gosh Martin I haven’t heard from you in days.”

“I know I’m sorry but I don’t have much time to speak. I need to ask you for a huge favor Jess. Marty was in Ontario, then he was sent to Alaska. I have to fly there now to get him but I don’t have enough money to buy a ticket. I haven’t been wanting to tell you but I’ve been really short on money lately because the truck isn’t doing too well so me and Marty were evicted. Look I know this is a lot to ask

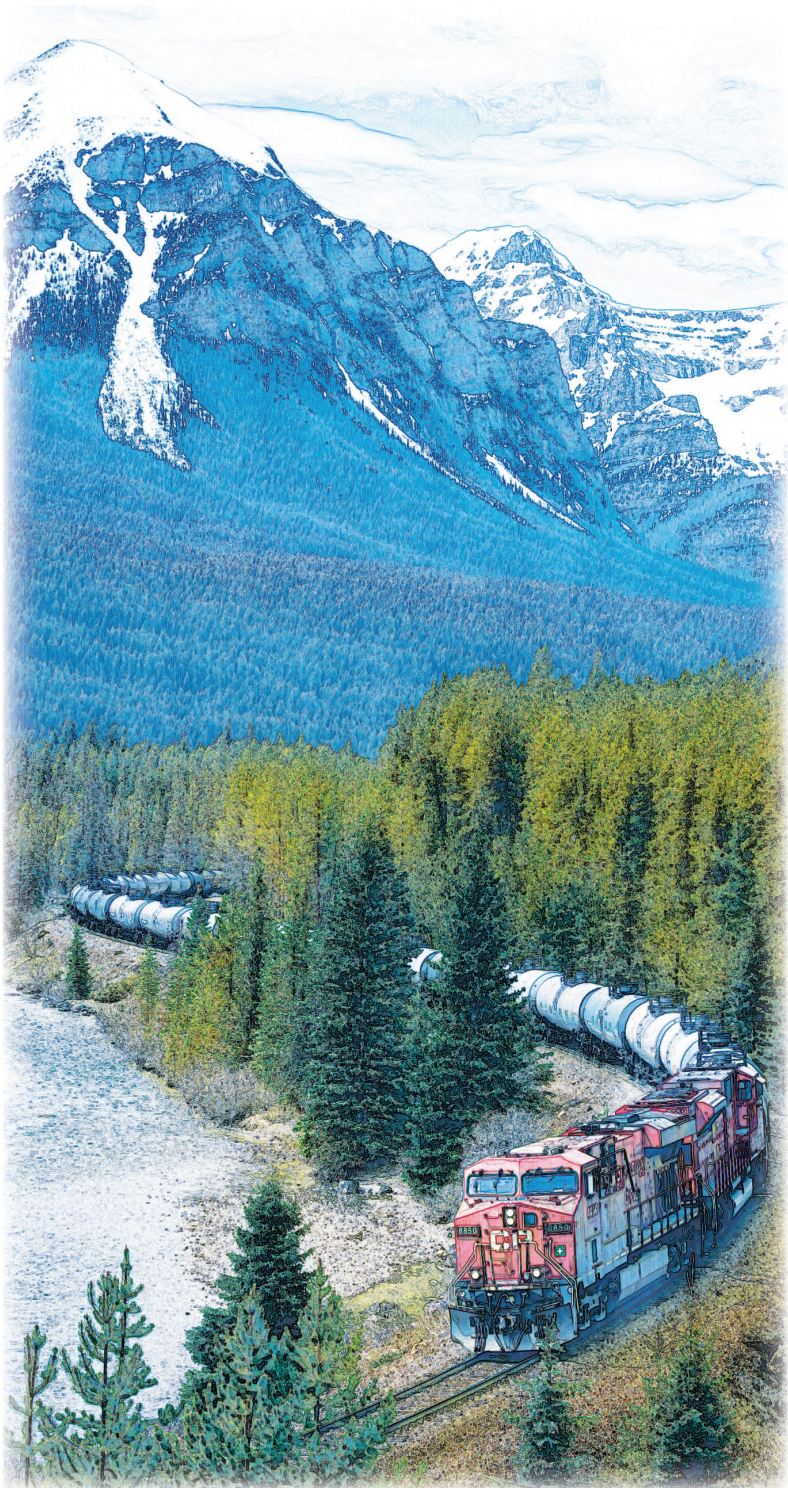
but can you please send me \$500 for this plane ticket. I will pay you back the moment I get the money. I promise.”

“I’ll send you \$1000 for the ticket and to have money if you need it for anything else. You don’t need to be sorry. Look I love being with you and I love Marty so you don’t need to worry about asking me for money. You just worry about finding Marty and bringing him home ok.”

“Thank you Jess. I’m going to make it up to you. I’ll see you when I get home.”

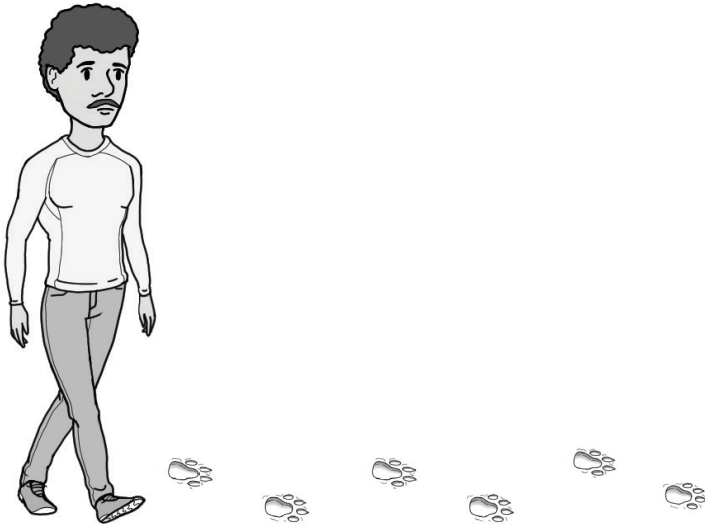
After the phone call they arrived at the airport. Martin hopped out and said goodbye to them but before he turned to go inside Josh reminded him, “Remember to stay clear of the snowy mountain sides to avoid the pack.” Martin made sure to remember where to stay clear from. As the plane was ready to ascend Martin said to himself,

Well I always wanted to go to Alaska in my life and now I’m finally going. I know I’m going to find you Marty. I can feel it.



Chapter 4:

Grey



DING!

“We are now beginning our descent down into Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. We hope you all have enjoyed your flight and hope to see you soon.”

The plane landed and Martin was now in Alaska. He didn't know where he was at all but all he knew was that he had to make it to this address that Chloe had given him. Martin checked his gps on his phone to see how far the residence is and how to get there. He looked and saw that the place was a 4 hour drive away in Denali State Park near Mount Denali. Martin thought to himself,

Wow this should be an experience. I've always seen pictures of Mount McKinley or Denali which I guess it's called now, and I always thought it was the most beautiful mountain.

Even though Martin was excited to know he'll be headed towards Mount Denali he also remembered that this National Park is home to many large wildlife, strong winds, rivers, snow, and most of all, mountains. Martin got an Uber to drive him to Denali State Park which is where he'll continue his journey on foot. During the 4 hour Uber ride Martin asked his Uber driver about Denali National Park and showed him where the house is supposed to be. The Uber driver's face looked confused. He told Martin, “There's no way anyone lives at that location. It's too cold and dangerous to live there.” Martin then asked,

“What do you mean?”

“What I mean is, you see all that white around the area. Those are glaciers that surround the mountain. So that would mean they either live on or near a glacier. Now I don't know about you but I ain't ever seen people living

on a glacier. I mean there are patches of land all in those areas that they may have built on but they would have to be some risky people.”

“Damn, how do you know all of this?”

“Because I’m an Alaskan boy, born and raised. I’ve been in and out of that park ever since I was a kid. So I know all the rough areas.”

“Well thank you, for real. I’ve just been on such a long and crazy trip through the Taiga in Ontario to here, all just to get my dog Marty back.”

“You went through the Taiga?”

“Yeah.”

“Wow, that’s impressive. You should be ready for what’s coming to you then. The Taiga can chew people up and spit them out, but I’m guessing you got the easier end of it.”

“Ha if you call getting attacked by a cougar the easier end, I guess so.”

“Damn that’s tough. Hope ur good.” The driver said sarcastically.

“Real funny huh.”

Martin ate the chicken sandwich he got from the airport and took a nap throughout the Uber ride so he could be ready for the hike. The hours went by and they were finally there. Martin thanked his Uber driver for his hospitality and his advice.

“Hey thanks man for everything. I really appreciate all the tips you gave me.”

“No problem man, I just hope you find your dog.”

“Thanks and by the way I never got your name.”

“Moses.”

This caught Martin off guard because his dad’s name is Moses and he’s never met anyone else with that name. It was also ironic to him because the guy was so much like his father, giving him advice and cracking jokes with him. This gave Martin some more sense of hope. As if his dad was just there with him.

Martin started heading down the grasslands to enter the forest. His GPS says the destination is 570 miles North West, toward the Ruth Glacier.

Damn it. It’s going to take me like a week to walk all the way there. I gotta do it though. This is my only hope.

Once Martin hit the forest the snow was unbearable. It was up to Martin’s shoulders at certain points, at least 5 feet high. He would try and find the little hill areas to give him a lift out of all the tall snow. For the most part Martin was able to maneuver his way through the snow. It was already practically pitch black outside because the sun sets around 4 during this time of year and it was 6 o’clock. Martin decided to try and find some shelter either in a bush or cave. There were some lodges around the National Park but Martin didn’t want to go inside in case they made him go home at some point.

Martin passed through the copse and it revealed a little cave that he could lay in to stay warm through the night. The cave was on the side of a smaller sized mountain. As Martin slept he could hear footsteps trudging through the snow. He didn’t move because he didn’t want whatever it was to notice him so he just simply opened his eyes to see what it was.

A pack of 7 wolves were standing right in front of him just walking around the area. Martin gasped with fear but made sure to keep his mouth shut incase they heard him. He said to himself,

Are you kidding me? How am I going to get out of this without being attacked?

As Martin was thinking of how to get out he heard a little sound from inside the cave. It was the sound of a pebble dropping, but it seemed far away. Martin heard and said to himself,

That sounded like a pebble or rock falling. Maybe it was from the top of the cave and fell to the floor of the cave. It sounded kind of far away though. What if this does go further back into the mountain. Maybe there's another opening that I can get out from? I mean I should try, I guess it's better than potentially being eaten. Which could also happen depending on what's deeper inside this cave.

Martin got his flashlight from his bag and shined it down into the cave. There was nothing to see but a few rocks and the tunnel that continues into the mountain. Martin started second guessing himself because the tunnel was very thin. It's radius was maybe only a little wider than a sewage pipe. But he had no better option than trying to get through to another side. So Martin started crawling into the tunnel with his bag in front of him since he couldn't have it on his back. Martin was slightly claustrophobic but he tried to look past that because he knew it was his best chance of surviving.

At this point Martin had been in this tunnel for over 30 minutes and it seemed that it was just staying

straight and not really turning much. This leads Martin to believe that he's still really far away from exiting the tunnel. It was surprisingly really cold in the tunnel considering the fact that it's such a tight space. Martin was also surprised that he hadn't seen anything in the tunnel like any rats or dead animals, which was a good thing.

As Martin kept advancing closer and shining his flashlight, he saw what looked like a bigger opening in the tunnel. There's no light coming from it, but it looked like a bigger area to be in. Once Martin got almost all the way to the opening he realized it's a cliff drop into a cavernous area inside the mountain. There's no telling how big the area is or how far down it goes, but Martin had no choice at this point. So he stood up out of the tunnel onto the ledge to try and also see what was above him. Martin shined his flashlight revealing thousands of bats looking right down at him and millipedes crawling all over the slimy, wet walls. He said to himself,

Wow, ok that's intimidating. And I hate freaking bugs. Damn it. Let me see how far down this thing goes.

Martin shined his flashlight down and the floor was maybe only 4 feet down. As Martin kept moving his flashlight he saw another hole on the other side of the wall closer to the floor. This was maybe another tunnel for Martin to keep going through. But as soon as Martin was about to jump down he heard moving from above him. He said to himself,

Ok, the moment I jump there all going to come crashing down on me from the noise and I don't feel like being attacked right now so let's try and do this quick and quietly Martin. You

You can do this.

Martin's plan was to jump as close as he could to the hole and spring his body out immediately to start crawling arms first into the hole. Martin got ready, braced himself, then jumped.

BAMM!

Martin's feet hit the floor making a loud sound causing every bat to swoop down and try to attack him. But Martin was about to have no part in that whatsoever. He sprung his legs and arms out immediately and jumped straight into the hole with his bag tied around his ankle so he could get his arms in quickly and the Bats won't get him.

Martin kept crawling through this tunnel going left and right and up and down for another 2 hours. As Martin kept making his way through, he saw in front of him that the tunnel stopped about 10 feet ahead. Martin, now sad and frustrated, said "No. No. There's no way it can end here. I can't go back." Martin kept going forward and started hitting the wall in front of him out of anger. As Martin keeps hitting the wall it starts moving back. Martin then realized it was a large rock in the way. So Martin kept pushing and pushing until it fell out of the tunnel revealing the star studded night sky. Martin was ecstatic that he was finally able to exit the tunnel as he climbed out of the hole and jumped down into the snow. It was still only about 3 in the morning but Martin was so happy and energetic that he escaped, he continued on his journey through the park.

Martin had been walking for about 3 hours by now.

He was starting to get very close to where the location is supposed to be. Up ahead there's a river that he has to pass through to get to the other side where the location is. Martin had dealt with water before during this trip but the current in this river was moving very quick and strong. As Martin came up close to the river before going in, he saw human-like footprints in front of him and across the river. A few hundred feet ahead of him past the river there were wood structures built into the ice. It had seemed as if people lived in the glacier. It wasn't a cabin like the other places that he had seen. Martin said to himself,

That's got to be it. There haven't been any other signs of human life since the first cabin I saw near the beginning of the park. It's pretty insane that whoever is in there lives in a glacier. They are like the ice people from the movies.

Martin excited and ready to get there to see Marty, he jumped into the river. As soon as Marty jumped into that river, he got swept away by the powerful current. Martin yelled out loud,

"Somebody please help!!"

He gets tossed and thrown under water by all the waves and rocks in the river. After all his struggling Martin had finally got his head above the water and saw that he's getting pulled further from the destination, and every time he swam toward it pulled him back. Martin then thought to himself,

I remember dad telling me that you can never beat a current but you must use it to your advantage.

Martin had done exactly that. He had let the current take him and as he was flowing away he had seen a large

branch in the water coming out from two rocks. Martin flung his arms up in the air to grab onto the branch, he pulled himself out of the water enough to grab the top of the rock. Once Martin had his body out of the water he climbed around the rocks to get back on the land. After Martin got back on land he started searching everyone around him for any type of resource that he can use to get across. Martin looked behind this large tree right next to the river and it had a big wooden board leaning on it.

It would've been great if I saw this before I almost died trying to swim across.

He snatched that board and layed it across the river and it worked perfectly. Martin smoothly made it across and was now able to finish his journey to the destination.

Martin had to find a way to try and get up the ice to see if people were up there. Martin still at this point didn't even know if anyone was still here or even if Marty was here but it was his only hope. As Martin kept taking a few steps he felt someone behind him. He turned around and BAM! Martin got hit in the head with a wooden club by a man fully covered in animal skin and fur. The man dragged Martin up into his fortress in the ice. As the man came into the home he was greeted by his wife who was frantically asking who the man was that he just brought into the house. The man says, "Calm down honey, I found this guy out in our front yard. I swear these damn bastards keep coming to get my damn fish and I knew I would catch one of them!"

As the man was saying this Martin kind of regained consciousness and heard what he was saying. Martin all

groggy says,

“I didn’t come to take any fish. Why did you hit me so hard man? Damn that hurt. Look, I’m just here to get my dog.”

“What dog are you talking about? We already moved and sold all of our dogs to our distributors.”

“What distributors? What kind of people are you, trafficking dogs are you f***ing joking.”

“Look, since you have this idea in your head of what we do, let me explain. We get hundreds of dogs every year that we use for our sled transportation program. Many people like us still live among the ice and use dogs and sleds as transportation. So we take in huskies and try to see if they are ready to become snow dogs. Many of them aren’t so we try to sell them to good homes to keep our program running. We try our best to make sure all our dogs are safe while they are being moved and where they are going.”

“Alright I understand your little operation but my dog Marty innocently got caught up in this whole process when he was mistakenly taken after a hurricane hit our city. He was a male husky with white fur and black spots an...”

“I know exactly which one you’re talking about.”

The man says.

“That dog was a beauty. We sold him to one of our buyers in Hawaii.”

“Hawaii? You’ve got to be kidding me. I mean, do you have the guys’ information?”

“Yes, she is actually a mother of 2 kids and they

have many different breeds of dogs that they work with. We had only sold your dog about a day and half ago so he'll definitely be there."

"Thank you so much for giving me this information. Do you have an address or phone number?"

"Yes I have the address but no number because we don't believe in technology."

"Ok the address will do. Thank you again."

The man then showed Martin how to properly exit the park without getting lost or dying. Martin with the information he now got called Jessica immediately.

"Jess before you say anything I don't have him yet but I know where he is. While I was searching for him I was taken by this couple who lives in the ice. They thought I was going to steal from them but that's not important. I asked the man if he had Marty and he explained that he had bought him for his dog sledding operation but Marty wasn't good enough for it. He then sold Marty to one of his buyers in Hawaii who runs a dog adoption business, so I'm going to fly to Hawaii right now to get him."

"Wow that's a lot but I'm just happy that he's ok. The truck is doing just fine by the way, Herbert is definitely a character but he's not anything that I can't handle."

"Yes I forgot. Thank you so much for keeping the truck safe."

"Of course. Do you still have enough money for the ticket or do you want me to send you some more?"

"Nah, I'm fine, I'm gonna get a flight for \$100 with Sky Rocket."

"Sky Rocket? Isn't that the cheap airline that had 2

plane crashes a few years ago?”

“Yeah but ima be fine.”

“Nope, I’m sending you \$300 for you to get a ticket with a real airline.”

“Jess, I can’t keep taking your money, it’s too much.”

“Martin, it’s ok. I told my parents about what happened so they’re willing to help out.”

“Dammit now I look poor to your parents.”

“It’s fine once they get to know you it won’t matter. Just get on that plane and I’ll talk to you tomorrow, love you and be safe.”



Chapter 5:

Beauty



“Hello all passengers, welcome to Honolulu, Hawaii. We thank you for flying with us today.”

Martin was really happy to finally be going to a place where he doesn't have to almost die to get where he has to go. The airport was right on the beach and very colorful with lots of flowers and sunlight. As Martin was leaving he was approached by a beautiful hula girl that handed him a nice lei. Martin caught an Uber ride to his destination. During the drive Martin can see all the big buildings and homes. There were all different types of cars, shops, and culture all over. It truly was paradise. The drive was about 3 and a half hours so it'll be a nice ride. Martin's Uber driver didn't speak English but that was a plus for him because he wanted to just chill and take in the beautiful island.

As Martin looked out into the distance during the ride, he started thinking to himself about everything he's been through during this journey. All the obstacles he's been through in so many different parts of the world and his food truck back home, his family and especially Marty.

Damn it's been a lot these past few weeks. Definitely the most difficult but spontaneous days of my life. I wish I could tell my family about everything I've been through.

After the long ride Martin finally got to the house. It was a one floor home that has a nice big yard. He hopped out of the Uber and rang the bell. A tall man opened the door

“How are you doing?” The man looked Martin up and down, taking in his dirty clothes. “Are you alright? Can I help you with something?”

“I’m here for my dog Marty.”

“Ooh we don’t have any dog named Marty here. There are plenty of dogs here but there’s no Marty.”

“Are you sure? I came all the way from Denali National Park and they said he was here.”

“Is he a husky?” Martin heard a voice from in the house. He peers around the man and sees a nice older woman. That woman was the mother that the iceman was talking about in Alaska.

“Yes he is. He has big blue eyes and black spotted fur.”

“I know exactly what dog you are talking about. I have him right outside in the back. How did your dog end up at the National dog sled program?”

“There was a huge hurricane that hit New York and Marty got taken away from me by the winds of the storm. After that he was missing and he’s been moved from place to place because they all thought he had no owner. But I’ve been chasing him for weeks to try and get him back, so I’m so happy that I’m finally here!”

“I’m very glad that I’m able to help you be reunited with your dog Marty. Come on in, he’s in the back.”

They walked outside to the yard and as soon as Marty saw Martin he ran and jumped in his arms.

“Hey Marty, I missed you so much buddy. You can’t ever leave again ok. Never.”

Martin started tearing up as Marty jumped all around him, licking his face. This was such a great moment for both of them. Martin had been searching so long and hard to make it to this moment.

“We are going home, mister, and I definitely don’t mean the shelter. Because I can’t go back there again.” Martin said while laughing.

The Mother whose name was Rosa stopped Martin and said,

“Oh you’re not leaving yet. I already started cooking dinner and the rule is, if you’re at my house and food is cooking, you have to stay and eat.”

“Ok if you insist. I’ve never turned down a free meal in my life and I’m not going to start now.”

He then went into the house and saw Rosa was already in the kitchen cooking up a storm. Martin walked in and said,

“Hey if you need any help just let me know. I run my own Spanish style food truck and I haven’t cooked in a while so I’m ready if you need me.”

“Oh really wow that’s amazing. Well then you definitely have some of this on your menu.”

“Yes for sure I do. I love me some pernil.”

Rosa continued to cook while Martin went back outside to play with Marty and the other dogs. Once Rosa had finished she called Martin inside and her sons. They all sat at the table and ate together. Martin was amazed at how well Rosa and her 3 sons all got along together. They talked to each other about their day, the news, sports, and just about everything else. Rosa’s son George started telling them about this club he booked to play his music.

“Mom remember the club near Stan st.”

“Yeah they have great food there and the music is good too.”

“Well next time you go there you’re going to be hearing me perform my music.”

“No way they booked you to play there?”

“For 6 months. I’m going to be the main act every night.”

“Oh my gosh I’m so excited for you baby.” Martin thinks

Damn mom would’ve laughed at me if I said that to her especially while being as grown as they are. This lady Rosa really is a great woman. She cares about their dreams for real.

Rosa and George stood up to give each other a nice big hug while his brother and Martin congratulated him. Martin never had that freedom to just talk to his parents about whatever he wanted to and have them listen.

Everyone had finished eating and the sons went outside to play around with the dogs. Rosa was in the kitchen cleaning all the dishes, so Martin went to go help her.

“I’ll help you with drying these plates.”

“Oh thank you. That’ll be a big help.”

As they were cleaning Rosa asked Martin about his life and where he’s from. Martin explained how he lived in Minnesota and then moved to New York to start his life as a chef. Then she asked about his parents. Martin thought for a second then said,

“Look I know we only just met Rosa but I feel like I can tell you almost anything.”

“Yes of course you can sweetie. What’s on your mind?”

“I see how well you and your sons get along and I really want to have that same relationship with my mom.

After I moved away to New York City my mother resented me because I didn't follow in the path that she wanted me to go down. "

"I see. So have you spoken to your mother about it?"

"Not since I left 4 years ago."

"Well what was said before you left?"

"She was screaming about how I'm the last hope in my family to be successful, my brother and sister fell out of college and are now working low paying jobs that they hate. But I said that school is not for me and not what I need to be what I want to be. My mother didn't want to hear it anymore so she told me to just go and that if I fell on my butt to not call her for help. So that's exactly what I did and I haven't called her since."

"Martin, you can't fault your parents for trying their best to keep you out of trouble and on the right track. Family is the most important thing you can have. They're the only people you can rely on."

"I know but my mother never cared about my plan to be a chef and be my own boss. She just cared about her and my dad's aspirations for me."

"Talk to your mother. Face to face not over text or on the phone. She needs to understand how you feel and you need to show her what you've accomplished. After that a good mother would see the future you are trying to build for yourself. If things get intense just take a deep breath, calm down, and then speak with your heart."

"You're right. I really do want to make things right with both of them. I really appreciate you caring for Marty

and treating me with this great meal and advice. You truly are a great person Rosa.”

“My pleasure. Now you get going and don’t forget what I told you.”



Chapter 6:

Home



“Good evening all passengers, welcome to New York. We are now arriving in LaGuardia airport, thank you for flying with us.”

Martin and Marty slept the entire plane ride. As they headed outside, Martin saw Jessica out there waiting for them. She ran up to Martin and gave him a huge hug and kiss and said how much she missed him. Martin wasn't expecting that at all, but he was so happy that she missed him just as much as he missed her. Marty barks, “ROOF, ROOF!” He wants some of the attention as well. Jessica then crouched down to give Marty the biggest hug as well. They all hopped in the car and started heading towards the City. Martin had told Jessica to head to his truck so he could get his belongings that he left after the eviction. He was so relieved to finally be back in New York after his journey.

They all headed to Jessica's house in Queens to drop off Martin's bags and Marty so they could head out to get lunch. After they went to grab a bite to eat on their way back Jessica asked about his trip and Martin said he'll explain at the house. When they got home Martin explained everything about his trip and Jessica was blown away. After all his stories she asked if his parents and family knew if he was ok. Martin said,

“Me and my mom haven't really spoken in a while. Actually I haven't spoken to either of my parents since I left.”

“Are you serious? You have to speak to them.”

“I don't know if I should yet.”

“Martin I couldn't even imagine not having my

parents in my life. They raised you and made you who you are. Call them.”

“Jess...”

“I don’t care Martin. Call them.”

After they got done talking Martin decided to call his mother and asked if her and his father wanted to come over Jessica’s. She insisted that they come over so they can end this problem.

Martin’s parents came over the house. This was the first time Martin had seen either of his parents in a few years so this was a big moment. Jessica greeted them at the door since Martin was in the bathroom, still thinking about what he was going to say. Jessica said,

“Hi. I’m Jessica, I’m Martin’s girlfriend.”

Martin overheard Jessica and was surprised but really happy that she said they were officially a couple. Martin came out of the bathroom all happy but was met with fire. Martin’s Mom shouted,

“4 years!! You never once wanted to see how your brother and sister were doing? How I was doing? Your father?”

“Who are you yelling at? You basically told me to leave and to never speak to you again. So I didn’t.”

“Well...”

“No. This is Jessica’s house and I’m not going to have you screaming and making a whole fight in front of her.”

Throughout this whole time Martin’s dad Moses was just sitting there not saying a word. Martin realized and tried to get a word out of him too.

“Do you have anything to say Dad? Instead of just sitting there doing nothing.”

“I don’t know who you think you are disrespecting me like that. Talking with that attitude. Now let me explain something.” Martin took a breath and calmed down like Rosa said and just listened to what his father had to say.

“Me and your mother love you with all of our hearts and we grew up a certain way that we were taught would make good, successful people in this world. I know now that me and your mother made the mistake of not letting your brother and sister follow their dreams and try to build their own lives. They just didn’t have as much fire about their passions as you did and maybe that’s why they just followed what we told them. But you, you never let us get in the way of your dream. To be honest me and your mom were afraid that you would never listen to us and would wind up flipping burgers at McDonald’s. But I heard you got a nice spot going on. I know I haven’t seen it yet but I hope you’ll be willing to show me around because man I’ve missed you. I just want you to forgive me for not being there when I should have been.”

Martin was so relieved to hear his father say that. He missed him so much but never knew how to speak about it. Until now,

“I thought you were so mad at me that you would never speak to me again, so to hear you say this really means a lot. I went through a lot trying my best to make my food truck work and it was all thanks to everything you used to teach me when I would help you do your files for the business. You used to always tell me to work hard

because someone is out there working harder and to go out there and get it because no one is going to give it to you. Those two things kept me ready for anything and I still am now, thanks to you.”

“I guess I never taught you anything huh,” Martin’s mom budged in, stewing in her anger. “You’re talking all this about your father but I’m the one who would bring you to every basketball practice and game. I also held you for 9 months and give birth to you. Did your father do that?”

“Why are you so competitive all the time? He gets his good looks from me anyway so there’s nothing that’ll beat that.”

“Ok you two can calm down!” Martin shouts. His parents were surprised and turned around to face him. “What happened since I left Minnesota?”

“Oh nothing it’s just your father here is about to close the dealership because we don’t have any damn cars to sell.”

“Listen, I said if I can just get this loan we’ll be able to have a new shipment of the brand new Chevy Spark hybrids.”

Wow it’s failing. Damn, maybe if I stayed, I could have caught some errors or been able to fix a few things. Or even if I was speaking to them they could have asked me and I could have helped out. I have to do something.

As Moses and Christine were arguing Martin interjects and says, “My food truck. You guys should invest in my food truck.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I should have come back to help with the dealership. But I can help you guys now with my food truck. If maybe you guys can invest in it, we can advertise more and fix it up better so we can have more customers. You both would be able to retire and I’ll send you checks monthly.”

“Wow you sure have thought of this. Now tell me. Where are we getting this so-called money to invest in your little food stand.”

“My food truck Dad, and you can get the money from selling what’s left of the car dealership.”

Moses turns to Christine, “Hah this guy thinks he’s funny. Son, I know you’re a great cook but will you be able to make real money with this thing?”

“Let’s go down to see the truck and you can see for yourself.”

Martin opened the door and directed his parents to head down the stairs of the apartment while Jessica and Marty followed behind him. They hopped in his parents car and headed to the city.

Once the parents arrived at the truck they fell in love with how it looked. Christine said, “Martin, this truck is beautiful but why did you put it here?” Martin had always parked the truck right in between these two apartment buildings because right behind it is a garage and it’s low key. If he wanted to keep the truck out all night he could because not many cops pass that block. He responded and said, “I can use this garage whenever I want because I give the landlord free taquitos and no one bothers my truck over here.”

Moses grabbed Martin and said, "Let's see what you got."

Martin jumped in the kitchen and got to work.

He was ready to finally prove to his parents that his work has paid off and that he seriously is a worthy chef. Martin decided to make some empanadas and chicken quesadillas, just something quick. His plan was to wow them with the delicious finger foods he would be serving everyday. This way they get to taste what their customers would be eating.

"Here you go. These are your carnitas and chicken quesadillas."

The parents both take a bite of each and instantly look at each other, then at Martin. Moses smiles and says, "It looks like we're in business kid."

Epilogue:

5 years in the future

“In your hit book *Lost but Found* you touch on some of the struggles you faced during the earlier years of your food truck. The fact that you were able to turn it around into this successful 5 star restaurant today is just marvelous. So tell us, how did you do it?”

“You can’t do everything alone. Throughout your life you’re going to need people to help you and it’s good to value that. Being strong independently is a great quality for everyone to have but always be willing to not only lend but accept a helping hand.”

“This is a fantastic story Martin and I think I speak for everyone when I say we can’t wait to see what happens next in this journey.”

“I really appreciate you guys for coming and giving me the opportunity to speak about my restaurant and book.”

While I finished my interview Jessica was there watching me in the restaurant. She walked over to me and said, “oh my gosh. You’ve done so well.”

“No, we’ve done so well.”

“I remember when I used to come and pass by on my way to work. Breakfast tacos at your little food truck.”

“Yep. I remember you being my only loyal customer.”

“Yeah until your parents came and then everything flipped around.”

“True. With their business skills, my cooking skills, and your artistic skills we were able to make the best 5 star restaurant in all of NYC.”

“We’re living the dream now.”

“Not just yet.” As I said that I kneeled down on one knee and proposed. “Jessica from the day I first got to sit down and speak to you I knew you would be in my life forever. I realized that you’re the person I want to wake up to everyday and the person I want to go to sleep with. Seeing you embrace my family, this restaurant, and most especially Marty has been a huge blessing to me. Not only do I know how much you love me but I know you’ll always be my ride or die. So with that being said, will you make me the happiest man in the world and marry me.”

“Yes Martin.”

This moment was one of the best moments of my life. I got a new wife in my new restaurant. It truly was magical. I just wish my buddy could have been here to see it all. Marty got sick a few months back, right before we opened up the restaurant. He fought hard but it wasn’t enough. I’m going to miss those big blue eyes that he would look at me with. That dog truly was a lover. He would be by my side everywhere I went. We went through it all together. A man’s best friend. Family.

I will honor his life with this book as he will continue to motivate me into the next chapter of my life. Martin & Marty. Lost but Found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would thank everyone at SAY for everything they have done for me over the years and everything they have taught me. I learned how to not let others get in the way of me being myself and my stutter. When I was younger I never knew why I spoke the way I did. SAY taught me to not be ashamed of the way I spoke but to honor it and cherish it. We are all different in many ways and that is what makes us unique. From walking into the google building in NYC when it was Our Time too going to camp and creating plays and songs and games. It truly was a great experience and I'm really happy I was able to grow up around such amazing people. I would also like to thank Brandon Garegnani for being the best co-writer I could've asked for. You taught me a lot about how writing stories work and we had fun talking about all the crazy ideas for this book. It was always a fun time whenever we would meet to work on this book and I'm really happy about what it has become. Lastly I would like to thank Aidan and Kate for giving me the opportunity to make this book and go through this whole experience.

PRAISE FOR THE AUTHOR

Lost but Found is the ultimate armchair adventure, penned by an author with an uncommon combination of skills. Antonio Otero is a gifted storyteller who writes with intelligence and heart, and has an unparalleled grasp on the elements that make up a beautiful life: food, connection, and family. But *Lost But Found* is not only a poignant love letter to these humanistic pillars. No - Antonio also writes with precision and clarity about rugged international adventure, bringing us along as his protagonist journeys from the streets of NYC, through icy forests, past snow-capped peaks, and into the heart of a mountain - to name just a few. Antonio's debut novel is an incredible illustration of a folk hero for our time, building new relationships, restoring old ones, and making some darn good food as he goes. - *Kate Detrick, Director of Confident Voices*

When you read *Lost but Found* for the first time, you will be witnessing the launch of a superb new writing talent into the literary world. Antonio Otero writes with heart, creativity and with an intensity born from a deep and meaningful attention to detail. Reflected in this book is the voice of a writer who believes in hope, in friendship, and

in the transformational power of relationships. More than just a rollicking adventure (though it is that as well!), *Lost but Found* will tug at your heartstrings and make you smile. As a writer, Antonio has excellent clarity of vision and oozes imagination. As a person, he is kind, open, smart, hard-working and laugh-out-loud funny. Read this book for a glimpse into Antonio's heart, and be prepared to likely find yourself looking into your own as well. - *Aidan Sank, Artistic Director of Confident Voices*

Antonio Otero is a true wonder. He's a cook, world traveler, family man, basketball player, dog-lover, writer, and all-around incredible human being. His curiosity, passion for life, and vast range of interests have all converged into this debut book, *Lost but Found*. A story about one chef's journey as he moves through the harsh wilderness to rescue his lost friend. With an engaging hero and landscapes so specific they feel like characters themselves; Antonio weaves a poignant tale about leaving home and the lessons we learn along the way. His words conjure vivid images, active storytelling, and as the reader you find yourself swept up in the beautiful environments and dangerous adventures. Antonio is an author who has the bravery to challenge what a traditional book is by infusing it with a relatable and modern voice that pulls you in. He has certainly left an indelible mark on the world, and he's just getting started. - *Brandon Garegnani, SAY Writing Mentor*