



CHAPTER 1

I was under the table with my head on my girl's shoes. Her grassy, soapy, and slightly bacon-y smell drifted into my snout. Ah. I loved it under the table. I was hard to see there. I was nearly invisible. Undercover. Not an easy thing to pull off when you're a ninety-pound German shepherd.

And the other great thing? Even though I was hard to see, I could see just about everything. That included any bits of dinner that might "accidentally" fall. *Mmm*. Bits of dinner. I loved bits of dinner. Really, really loved bits of dinner. The only thing better was food I stole from The Cat.

The Cat's food was good. The actual cat? She drove me crazy. The Cat thought she could get away with anything. *Anything*. But I saw her crouching. I saw her twitching tail. I saw the uncovered butter dish on the counter. I gave a small "Whuff," to let her know I was watching. She didn't look at me. But she heard. "Whuff." Her tail stopped twitching.

Cassie heard, too. My girl's hand appeared under the table and she gave me a pat. "Easy, Dodge." I licked her hand. I was easy. Just keeping things in line. I licked again. She always tasted good, but tonight she tasted burger good. Burgers were for dinner. I loved burgers. Burgers were my favorite.

Cassie's hand disappeared and I had to duck fast. The Sister had a sneaker-swinging habit, and her sparkle-crusted shoes were coming close. Too close. I adjusted, putting one paw on either side of Cassie's Converse and leaning to one side.

With my head cocked I could hear better in my good ear. Under the table I could see *and* hear. And what I heard was The Sullivan pack having a meeting. The Mom was chewing her words before spitting them out. My hairs tingled. When The Mom chewed her words, it meant

something. It meant she was working things over in her head. Two words kept repeating: *Verdel Ward*. It was a name. A name that was bugging The Mom like a bad burr.

In the Sullivan pack, The Mom was in charge. Sometimes The Dad took over, but not usually. Me? I only took orders from one human. The one who saved me. Cassie. Cassie would do anything for me, and I would do anything for her. But I'll admit I would seriously consider any request The Mom made. Yeah. I would sit for her if she asked. Maybe even roll over.

The Mom *used* to be in charge of me. When I was on the force, she was top dog — the Chief of Police. She gave *all* the orders. And still does — just not to me. I had to leave the force. But it wasn't because I wasn't good at my job. I was good. I'm still good.

I graduated top of my class from K-9 Academy. I was trained to notice *everything*. Like my girl's heart rate picking up. And her toes curling and uncurling beneath my chin. Cassie was great at noticing things, too. She was noticing right now.

My girl didn't have training, but she had something just as good. Instincts. We both smelled a case, and we kept sniffing. And listening.