

INGO

The New York Finest K-9 Detective

-28,087 words

Ingemar von Ulmbach

as told to

Ilana G Holloway

Dedication

To all the good children and dogs of New York City,
To all public servants of the Big Apple,
To all the people who love the City that Never Sleeps,

Ingo

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Preface

In case you wonder how a dog can write a book, I will tell you the truth.

I tried. I did. Take a look at the drawing and see the real mess I made. My paws, the papers, and the table are full of black ink stains. Then, on top of it all, I even spilled the inkwell.



So, forget about the handwriting, I can't do it.

I tried to type my book, but it came out Gibberish. My fingers are too short and thick, and I hit more than one key at a time. Typing doesn't work either.

So, the task to put my stories on paper always falls on my Master Lani. She is my ghostwriter.

It is a time-consuming process because I can't speak; I can only understand human speech.

She knows all my adventures; she was there, she lived them with me.

First, she writes the story down as she remembers it. Then, she reads it to me, and if I am not pleased, she re-writes until she gets the "YES" bark from me.

I will now disclose the reason why I wrote this book.

Sure, there is a bit of bragging going on, but more importantly, I want to make known the remarkable generosity and bravery of New York City children. I also want to express my gratitude to the parents who encouraged and supported the children's initiative.

Dogs don't have to learn that they are more successful in a group and have a better chance of survival. We are born knowing that. It's why—in the wild—we live in a pack.

Human children are much the same—when they are united, it's easier and a lot more fun to achieve success no matter the goal.

Children, who early on learn teamwork, compassion, and the joy of giving, develop into outstanding society members. These children are our TOMORROW, our future.

Chapter One—The Unexpected

-Sunday morning-

It's my favorite time of the week—Sunday morning or Freeday, as I like to call it.

Freedays—when nobody goes to work, and I go with Lani to Central Park—are my only chance to look for Missy.

As always, I nudge Lani's shoulder with my front left paw to awake her. Lani is my young master, and she works hard all week. I feel bad waking her up early on Freedays, but she doesn't mind.

“OK, Ingo, I am getting up. I know, it's our Central Park walk day. I'll be with you in a moment.”

Of course, I hear the same thing every Freeday, and I know better. I usually give her two minutes before resorting to more aggressive methods. I jump up on Lani's bed and start nuzzling her neck and cheek with my wet, cold nose.

“You're right. I must get up. We only have till 9 a.m.”

Half asleep, my Master Lani heats her last night's carry-out coffee in the microwave and jumps in the shower. Meanwhile, her alarm clock goes off, and I smack the button with my paw to stop the noise.

Lani has to work much harder than other people. She needs to earn the trust of her boss and co-workers because she was not born in this country, and in New York there is a lot of competition. She needs to prove herself, but she's always been a hard-worker, like her dad. Speaking of her dad, I am sure he misses her terribly. Instead of having

her family nearby, as she did in the old country, Lani is all alone, and all she does is work and spend time with me.

Yeah, moving to a new country, adjusting to life in the City, and learning a new language takes some doing.

After a few sips of her coffee, Lani grabs an apple, and we are off. We've done this every Freeday since we arrived in New York a bit more than a year ago. I love New York, and I love the fact that we live so close to the big park.

Walking through the City on Freeday is different than on weekdays. The pace of everything is much slower. The people and cars all take their time, and nobody is in the proverbial New York rush. There are fewer cars on the streets, and what people wear is different. All the business suits are gone, and many jeans, T-shirts, and sneakers show up. Fewer people are eating while walking. They are not rushing to work. All terraces and sidewalk eatery tables are full of chatting people having breakfast outside. The Big Apple is a much happier and more relaxed place on weekends.

We must hurry. I can only run freely in Central Park up to 9 a.m. Lani is eating her apple as we walk along. She knows I love apples, and she gives me a few big bites. They are sweet, sour, and crunchy. What's not to like? Lani gets a bagel with a schmear of cream cheese at the corner, a cup of tea from a street vendor, and we head into the park.

It's a beautiful early October day, and we are walking toward our favorite place, the Umpire Rock. Usually, when we arrive, Lani sits on

one of the big rocks to enjoy her breakfast while I run around free. Along the walking path to our destination, I pick up some exciting smells from a bush. I try to pull her in that direction, but Lani makes me wait until she is seated in our spot. She sits on a special part of the rock that is nice and flat, with a little bump behind her to lean against.

It's early, so we have a good hour before she has to put the leash back on me. Lani gives me a big chunk of her bagel. As she says, I "inhale it" and run to investigate the exciting smell in the bush.

"Ingo, Ingo, don't go too far," I hear her behind me. I turn, look back and what I see from a distance makes me sad. She's all alone even here, with only cold, gray, huge rocks around her. She gets out of her pouch the book she is reading.

That tells me I am on my own for a while. I hear something, which stops me in my tracks. In the distance a man is calling,

"Missy, Missy, come ... where are you?"

Am I dreaming this? I must be. There must be hundreds of Missies in New York. Still, I owe it to myself to find out. Every week when we come to the park, I look for my dream girl, Missy. We're pretty sure she lives with her master James somewhere in the City. At least, she did about a year ago when we moved here from Morania. Grandpa John—Lani's father—told us that. He talked to his neighbor in Morania—the sister James had visited with his Missy the previous summer. I have a framed photograph of Missy we received from James' sister, and I stare at it all the time.

I hear again the man calling Missy.

I'm running in the voice's direction, and I see a man with a leash in his hand. He is looking all over for his dog. He's a tall young man with a solid build and some hair growing out of his face's bottom part. He sees me and comes close.

"Oh, wow, what a beautiful Cocker Spaniel. You'd make a great partner and friend for Missy." He bends over, pets me. When he sees the medallion on my collar, he starts talking to me.

"I see your name is Ingo?"

I sit down in front of him and stare into his eyes for a long time. I start walking away slowly, looking back at him every few steps. He's figured out fast that my stare means he should follow me. Good, now we are lightly running, the two of us. As we get to the smelling-bush, I stop. I look at him and he stops, too.

Some tiny noises are coming from the shadows beneath the bush, and I move closer very cautiously. I push a few branches with my nose, and what do I see? Baby kittens, all huddled together for warmth. I sniff them. Two of them catch on to my hairy ears. I gently grab one of the other two in my mouth and pull my head out of the bush.

"Ingo, what did you find? Oh, my goodness, baby pussycats. Let's see how many there are."

DWG 1

The young man gets down on all fours, reaches inside the bush, and pulls out one more little furry ball. There are four in total. One kitty is still hanging onto my ear for dear life.

Another one climbs up on top of my head, and one curls up next to my paw. The man grabs them all, and I continue leading him back to Lani. I check every few steps to make sure he follows.

With his arms full of squeaky puddies—that’s what we call cats at our house—the young man walks behind me, beaming at the fluffy treasure in his arms. We round the bend in the path, and there is Lani. From here, Lani looks like a teenager. In jeans, a white T-shirt, and a red baseball cap, she’s a skinny girl with a blond, short pony-tail. She puts her book back in her leather belly-pouch.

“Ingo, where have you been? You’re bringing a friend, I see,” says Lani, getting up from where she was seated on the rock.

“Hi, my name is Jim,” says the young man.

“I am Lani. Nice to meet you. Why are you walking around with an armload of kittens?”

“Well, Ingo wanted me to follow him, not sure why. I am looking all over the place for my lost dog Missy. She’s a white Cocker Spaniel with golden ears. I’m distraught, and I need to find her and—” He doesn’t get to finish what he was saying because Lani interrupts him. Her eyes are big and round with surprise.

“Do you have a sister in Morania?”

Jim is taken aback by her question. The expression on his face shows an even bigger surprise than Lani’s.

“Now, how on earth would you know that?”

“Jim,” she said, “Ingo, and I know Missy. The truth is we are both in love with her. We met her at your sister’s house in Morania last summer.”

“Yes,” I said in my way by doing a short “bow” bark and lots of tail-knob wagging. This is an incredible development. We lost Missy even before we found her.

It almost doesn’t make sense. What can I do? How are we going to figure out where she is?

“Well, let me put the leash on Ingo, and we’ll all go looking for her. When and how did she get lost?” asks Lani.

“Listen, what are we doing with the baby cats? I can take one of them home with me,” says Jim.

“I am sure it will be easy to find good homes for them. Let’s walk a little in areas with more people.”

“Lana—”

“Lani, not Lana, please.”

“Sorry, Lani. I’ll tell you how I lost Missy. At about 7:30 this morning, we entered the park near Columbus Circle. I had unhooked Missy’s leash when a man, I think he was Canadian, asked me for directions to an address in the area. I pulled out my cell phone to look it up for him. The whole encounter didn’t take more than two to three minutes. When I looked up, Missy was gone. We walk every morning before 9 a.m. because dogs can run freely, without a leash. We’ve NEVER had a problem before.”

“I know, Jim, that’s why on Sundays I bring Ingo early to the park, too. I doubt Missy is still in the park. Somebody may have snatched her, got in a cab or car, and disappeared. Give Ingo the leash to smell, and let’s see if he can pick up her trail.”

We climb down off the Umpire Rock and start up the footpath. Soon, a lot of folks see us with the kitties and surround us. Two joggers stop, too. The passers-by adopt three of the four kitties before we know it, and Jim keeps the little boy-kitten he had chosen.

“Jim, we need to head back home. Our neighborhood is having a rummage sale today, and I promised to help.

“Okay, where do you guys live?” he asked.

“We only live a few blocks away, on 56th between 8th and 9th Avenues. What about you?”

“I live with my twelve-year-old son, Patrick, on West 58th, between 9th and 10th.

“I’ll take you to where she disappeared.”

After a while, he stops.

“Here’s where that guy stopped me for directions, and I last saw my Missy.”

He lowers the leash to me, and I sniff it at length. Yes, it is without a doubt my Missy’s scent. I know for sure now. I turn around a little and sniff the ground until I get a trace of the smell. I look up and bark once for YES.

“Ingo got the scent. Let’s follow him.”

The scent is leading me out of the park. I reach the end of Missy's smell by the curb of the sidewalk, at the corner. My Lani guessed right, that they took her out of the park and to a car.

There's nothing I can do from here. I start whimpering a little, my heart full of sadness.

"So, here is where they must have put her in the car."

Jim excuses himself. He crosses the street to the median and speaks to a police officer. He returns and tells us the cop had seen a woman with a beautiful dog on a leash getting into a cab at about 7:30.

So, it is a dognapping. Without any doubt, it was premeditated because the woman had brought a leash with her. The Canadian is the accomplice, for sure." Jim is thinking for a moment and says,

"Now, that I think about it, he made sure he kept me with my back to the park entrance. He also wore fancy loafers, not proper walking shoes like a tourist."

It breaks my little dog-heart. Being lost is one thing but being stolen on purpose is another. Missy could be anywhere in this big city.

My Lani sees how upset I am and tries to make it better for me.

"Ingo-Baby, don't be so sad. We're going to find her. We will need to think about how to do it."

Chapter Two—My Gang and I

-still Sunday-

The three of us start walking toward our home. Lani has the kitty in her arms, and Jim is holding my leash.

It's close to 10 o'clock now, and the car traffic on our block is closed. Tables displaying hundreds of rummage sale items are already set up, and the street looks ready for a fair. Everybody is out enjoying the weather, and the human buzz gives the whole event a beehive atmosphere. The sun—peeking over the high-rise tops of midtown—floods the street in a golden light. Kids and dogs who live in our building crowd the entry stoop.

*

I know them all—kids and dogs. They are my friends and my gang.

The two African American boys are brothers and live with their mom and a Golden Retriever named Dona. Lani is friends with their mother, Josephine Hodges, who is also Lani's attorney. Max is nine, and Lee is twelve. Usually, one of them has a dog-brush in his hand while the other has Dona's leash. They must have promised their mom to take good care of her and keep her brushed. If not, they must owe Dona for doing their homework. Ha-ha. I crack myself up.

Matt is a shy boy of twelve. I haven't heard him speak yet. He's a good friend of Lee's, and he has a gentle boxer named Maya. Matt and Maya are my good friends. Maya loves me. She likes to protectively lick

my head which undermines my authority, but if it makes her happy, so be it. Matt's dad is a newspaperman, and his mom works from home for a publishing house. Matt is always neatly dressed and very proud of the new cell phone he got for his birthday.

Suzy is only nine years old like Max and has a Beagle boy named Hiro. She lives with her grandmother while her parents are away working in Japan. The kids like to tease her because she continually has something to say. They say that Suzy "was vaccinated with a record player needle." To tell you what I think, Suzy is lonely and misses her parents. Aside from letting her hang out with our gang, her Granny doesn't let her spend time with other kids. DWG 2

Storm is a big guy, and he's thirteen. He doesn't hang out with us much and he's Trouble—with a capital T. His mom manages a big, fancy restaurant. She works all hours, so Storm is often home alone. He misses school occasionally and hangs with some other bad boys. But he has a big German Shepherd, Rex, a good friend to all of us dogs and children. Rex protects us from strangers—both people and dogs. He looks mean and scary, but he's a big teddy-bear.

We have another friend, Bella, who's not here now. Bella is a beautiful fourteen-year-old Mexican girl with long dark hair. She lives next door with just her mom, Nieves, who's a veterinarian and a jogger. Her parents are separated. Bella has this gorgeous Gordon Setter named Baron. He is so imposing and elegant that people on the street turn around to look at him.

*

"Ingo, stay here with the gang while we take the little puddy inside to feed him. Tell your friends what happened to Missy and see if you guys can figure out a way to find her," says Lani. With smiles on their faces, the kids crowd around to touch the kitty. Jim and Lani have to sidestep their way into the building.

"He's so cute!"

"Miss Lani, is this your kitty?" asks Suzi, the group's chatterbox.

"Hi Suzi, Ingo found four of them in Central Park today. Passers-by in the park adopted the other three pussycats, and Jim is keeping this one.

"Hi Jim, I'm Suzi, and this is my dog, Hiro.

"Miss Lani, what happened to Missy, and who is she?" asks the little boy whose name is Max.

"Yeah, Miss Lani, who is Missy?" adds Lee, Max's older brother.

"I'll tell you more details later, but she is Jim's dog, and somebody snatched her today. I'll show you photos of her, but now I have to go in. Okay?"

Before Lani gets in, I whimper a little to draw attention to myself.

"Missy is also Ingo's favorite girl. We met her more than a year ago in our old country, Morania, where she was visiting with Jim."

Thank you, Lani, I'm thinking. That's much better. Now they all know that Missy is my girl. I'm trying to look both proud and sad, but I guess I simply look pathetic.

"Storm, will you be around for a while?" Lani asks the big boy, whom she sometimes helps with his math homework.

"Yes, Miss, do you need any help?"

"Would you please keep an eye on Ingo? We're going in to feed the little puddy. Buzz me when he wants to come in, please."

"No problem," says Storm.

"Storm, "no problem" is not a polite answer. "With pleasure" is much better." Lani gives him a wink.

"Hi, Storm, nice to meet you. I'm Jim."

"A pleasure to meet you." Storm points to the large German Shepherd next to him and says, "That's my dog, Rex."

Jim caresses each of the dogs on the head and enters the building with Lani.

Lani steps back, and from the doorway, she adds,

"Storm, when you see Bella, would you please ask her to come to see me as soon as possible?"

"With pleasure, Miss Lani," says Storm with a smirk on his face.

*

I told the dogs what I knew about Missy's theft, and then, it was time for me to go in. I walked to the entry door of the building. After he saw me pretending to scratch with one paw on the door, Storm pressed the buzzer of our apartment, and Lani buzzed open the front door to let me in.

The baby cat is asleep on my little white lamb pelt set by the big front window. The sun and the pelt's warmth comfort the fluffy thing, and with a belly-full of milk and raw egg, he is dozing.

I curl up behind to spoon him. I'm grateful to Lani and Jim for saving them and giving them good homes. DWG 3

"Jim, look at Ingo. He's adopting your little boy. Do you have a name for him?"

"I think I have one now, seeing Ingo lick him on the head as if it is his pup. I'll call him Doogie."

"Oh, that's fun. Doogie is a perfect name for him since he'll have "doggies" for mentors. Fabulous!

*

Now might be a good time to tell you the story of how this pack of dogs made me their leader.

It happened on a quiet, late afternoon last year, soon after we'd arrived in New York in 2003. Many of us, kids and dogs, were getting ready for our afternoon walks. When Lani and I came out, we saw all the dogs on the sidewalk in front of our building, leashed up and ready to go. They were still waiting for some of their humans to come down. Lani asked me,

"Why don't we pass by the butcher on our way back? I think we should buy some big bones for all your new friends."

I made a quick single bark and wagged my knob tail in a strong YES response.

As we walked out, I said a doggish hello to my fellow canines and mumbled to them.

"We're going to get you all some big bones for when you come back from your walks."

As we walked away, I could hear behind us a chorus of all types of barks—from small and high to loud and low.

"Yeah, sure," said the suspicious Rex.

"Bow-wow, don't tease us, Ingo," barked Hiro, the small Beagle with a lion's appetite.

"You better be right, pretty boy." That was Maya, who thinks I am handsome.

"Mine should be the biggest," howled Dona, who never missed a meal in her life and gets all she wants from her two boy masters.

We did our little walk and stopped at the Amish Market, two blocks away. Lani bought six big cow bones for all of us from the butcher counter. The entire gang was waiting on the sidewalk in front of the building when we returned. Their masters had had trouble doing their regular walks because they all pulled to come home early. That's unusual for a dog, if you know what I mean.

When we arrived, all the dogs got quiet and started drooling. Lani was confused. **DWG #3***

"Look at them, Ingo. They act as if they know we have bones for them. This is quite strange, don't you think?"

I pretended I knew nothing. What was I supposed to do? Tell her? Even if I wanted to tell her that I'd spoiled their surprise, how would I do that? I don't speak.

As we were all enjoying a good bone gnaw, the dogs asked me, "How did you know, Ingo?" That was Hiro-the Beagle.

"Know what?" I asked with my mouth full.

"That she was buying us bones, you fool." I got that from Rex.

"Oh, that ..." I think what harm can it do if I tell them? "I understand human speech."

"You, what?" asked Maya, the boxer, letting her bone drop out of her mouth.

They all stopped chewing their bones and stared at me in disbelief.

DWG 3**

"See, guys, when I was a baby, I lived at a farm in Morania. Lani came to meet me, and she held me close to her face. I licked little salty drops of water off her cheeks. In my family, some babies get *The Gift* if three things happen to them very early on. Lick the master's tear, smell the petrichor, and don't chase a Queen Bee if she sits on your nose. I didn't chase her, so she and her worker bees did a magic dance over me. That was it. From that moment on, I could understand human speech. I got *The Gift*."

"You're pulling our paws," said Rex.

"What on earth is petrichor?" asked Maya, who's a city-girl Boxer.

"It is the perfume the earth puts out when, after a hot and dry spell, the first drops of rain come," I told them.

"I know that smell," Rex said.

"So do I," said Baron, the Gordon Setter. "One day, Bella was at her father's and I was there with her. Her dad took us to the country for the weekend. After a hot day in the sun, we had a short sprinkle of rain.

I remember asking myself, 'where did that smell come from?' So, yeah, I know the petrichor smell," added Baron.

"If that's the case," said Hiro-the Beagle, "and if you are willing to share with us the stuff humans say, I think you should be our pack leader."

"Yeah, yeah," they all agree.

So, they decided that since I understand foreign languages, I should be their leader.

Chapter Three—The Adventure begins

-still Sunday-

“So, Jim, let’s call the police,” says Lani, getting the phone.

“Operator, may I please have the phone number of the Midtown North Precinct, please? Thank you. Yes, please connect me; thank you.” Lani sits down and grabs a pen and paper.

“Hello, yes, Officer. My name is Lani Bellamy. I live on West 56th Street. I want to report a dognapping. They stole my friend’s dog at the southwest entry of Central Park this morning.”

“Yes, he’s here with me. His name is James Queenan. Yes, I’ll put him on.”

Jim picks up the phone and walks toward the back of the apartment to talk. I can hear Jim getting more and more upset as he is telling the dognapping story. I wish he could understand how upset I am about Missy’s disappearance. It’s been a long time since I met her in Morania, and I miss her terribly. I need to know she’s safe. I want to be her friend, play with her, and protect her. The hope of finding her in New York is what gave me the strength and courage to move with Lani to the other end of the world. She is so precious to me.

Lani comes to sit with Doogie and me. We are on the lovely loveseat in the living room where we always sit when we watch TV. For a coffee table, we have one of those old-time carved wood and glass top

display boxes with legs—Lani calls it a Queen Anne table. She has all sorts of pretty little objects of sentimental value in it, mostly brought with us from Morania. We can see them all the time, but we can't touch them. The dark reddish wood looks nice on the light grayish-green porcelain floor she had installed. On the counter in front of the window, past the Queen Ann table, is my white pelt.

Jim hangs up the phone. I can't wait to hear what the policeman had to say.

“Wow.” Jim seems overwhelmed by the conversation he'd had with the officer. He stops for a moment. He must be thinking about what to tell us.

“We aren't the only ones with this problem. At about 9 a.m. today, they stole another female American Cocker Spaniel on Central Park's east side. I got the owner's name and phone number if we need more details. I'm bothered by the coincidence of two female American Cockers disappearing from Central Park in less than two hours. Something peculiar is going on here. I could see it if they'd stolen a boy and a girl. You would think they'd want to breed them and make some money. But two females? The dog is also registered for the Westminster Dog Show.

The officer told me to call the 20th precinct,” Jim tells us.

“20th precinct ... I know Officer Goodman at that precinct. Ingo helped him capture a purse thief last fall.”

“What? How did he do that?” asks Jim.

“Well, it’s quite a story. I’ll tell you a little later,” says Lani.

Lani is already looking in her contacts for Goodman’s phone number, and she calls him.

Jim goes again toward the bedroom in the back of our tiny apartment to call the other stolen dog owner.

My little dog brain is working at full speed. How can my gang and I help? If we only knew somebody familiar with our area, dogs, and the Westminster Dog Show. My old friend Astor, the black Cocker from Morania, had told me about Westminster. It’s like the hottest thing in the world of dog shows.

I got it. Bella’s mom is a vet. She knows the area, and she’d be able to get information about the participants. Great, if I could only say that to Lani, but I can’t.

The doorbell chimes and Lani lets Bella in. Storm must have sent Bella over here, as Lani asked him. Is it possible that my Lani had this idea to talk to Bella’s mom from the beginning?

I guess so. She’s smart, that girl. With her smarts, my magic Gift, and bravery, we make one heck of a team.

“Hi, Miss Lani, did you want to see me?”

“Oh, Bella. Yes, we need your help. Is your mom home?”

DWG 4a

“Not yet, but she’s due home soon. She volunteers at the American Kennel Club.

“Oh, what does she do?”

“She does the health check,” Bella says.

“For all 2500 of the dogs?” Lani asks.

“Yeah, I guess—”

“Bella, sorry to interrupt you. That’s interesting because it’s precisely the help we need. I don’t know if the kids told you, but somebody dognapped Jim’s dog, Missy, and another female today. They’re both American Cocker Spaniels, and both are contestants in Westminster Show.”

“Oh, wow ... they must be special. Mom says that it’s by invitation only to get into the show.”

“We need to talk to your mom to see if she can get us the list of all competitors in that category. Would you be so kind as to ask your mom if she can get us the list?”

“So, you want the list of female American Cocker Spaniels? What color is she?”

“Why?” asks Lani with curiosity.

“Sometimes, they separate them by color, too.”

“She’s white with golden ears, and she’s in the open age class,” says Jim.

“Okay. Can I get your cell phone number?”

“Sure, here you go,” and Lani hands a small business card to her. And with that, Bella runs out the door.

“Lani, I need to get home,” says Jim. “Patrick is waiting for me. I called him earlier, so he knows what happened. He’s pretty upset. Missy is his best friend.”

“I can only imagine,” says Lani.

“Why don’t you two come over for dinner at our house tonight? Patrick would love to meet you both.”

“Are you sure? We don’t want to impose in any way.”

“No imposition, I’ll get a roasted chicken from the corner—

“Bow!” I rudely interrupt with approval.

“That’s a YES from Ingo,” Lani says, chuckling.

“and mashed potatoes and—”

“Bow!”

“Oh, so you like chicken and mashed potatoes, Ingo?”

Jim caresses my head and laughs.

“He does. Ingo will eat me into poverty if I listen to him.”

“Tell you what. I’ll leave Doogie here with you if that’s okay. I don’t have the heart to wake him up. If you can bring him with you tonight, I’ll take Ingo with me now to meet Patrick and have some fun. He can sniff Missy’s home and toys all he wants”.

“Bow!”

“I see that the two of you agree. Okay. Lani, here is my address and cell phone number.”

“Great, here is mine. I will go out to the rummage sale to see if I can find a few things I need. I also have to apologize to my neighbors for not helping. I’ll see you tonight around 7:30.”

*

The rummage sale is still on, and there is a lemonade stand and freshly popped corn at the corner. Everybody is having a good time.

Still on the stoop while their humans work the street sale, my trusted gang is shocked to see me go with Jim.

“Where are you going, pretty boy?” I hear from loving Maya.

“I’m visiting my Missy’s house,” I answer, half-embarrassed by what I know is coming.

“Ingo has a girl-friend, Ingo has a girl-friend ...” I hear the chorus of teases fading slowly away behind us.

*

Jim and I walk the few blocks from our house to his. He’s a nice man, and he lets me sniff all I want. He’s patient, too. We’ve lived in the City for some time now, but I still can’t believe how many people live here and how crowded the streets are. There’s no grass anywhere, except in the parks, and you have to watch where you go, or people will step on your paws.

We stop, and Jim gets a whole roasted chicken and sides to go before we get to his house.

Jim’s building is much bigger than ours and has a doorman, and he lives on the third floor. Jim opens the door of his apartment, and we walk right in. There is nobody home.

“Patrick, where are you?” Jim opens the door to Patrick’s room and finds a note taped to his computer screen.

“Patrick is out looking for Missy. Oh, boy, he must be drowning in sorrow.”

He goes to the intercom and calls the doorman.

“Fred, did you see Patrick leave?”

“Okay, thank you.”

I find the place where Missy sleeps. It’s one of those fancy, fluffy mattresses that mold to a dog’s body, and you can curl up against its soft rim. I don’t know if I should sleep in it. I’d love to because it smells like Missy. Would she consider that an intrusion of her privacy? I’ll leave it up to Jim.

He puts down a clean bowl of water and a plate of food for me. That helps. If he doesn’t let me use Missy’s bowls, sleeping in her bed is out, for sure.

The buzzer intercom goes off, and the doorman tells Jim that Patrick is on his way up. When he opens the door with his key, he sees me.

“My God, who is this beautiferous English Cocker?”

I sit in front of him with my little knob of a tail trying to waggle, but I’m sitting on it. He calls Jim who answers from the other room.

“Hi, Pat, I have some news. Please, go and clean up a bit, get ready for dinner. We have a guest, actually two guests, coming for dinner. Lani, Ingo’s master, will join us shortly and she’s bringing with her a big surprise for you.

“Cool, but do you have news about Missy?”

“When Lani gets here, and I won’t have to tell the story twice.”

Patrick, a big handsome kid with a great head of hair, like Jim’s, goes to shower.

“Patrick, is all your homework finished?”

“Yes.”

Patrick returns to the room with wet hair, and the buzzer announces Lani.

Chapter Four—The Plan

-still Sunday-

In comes Lani, with two backpacks and a big shopping bag. She has a super heavy hiking one on her back and her black canvas lightweight work backpack on her chest. That one has a tiger embroidered on it. Doogie's adorable head sticks out of the front bag.

"Hi Jim, Hi Patrick, I'm Lani. Please call me Lani."

"Lani, I told you I am getting dinner for all of us. You didn't have to bring anything." Jim hugs her and helps her with the bags.

DWG#5

"It's not food, Jim. It's a good-sized plastic tub from the street fair and a few bags of kitty litter. I also have a bag of special baby cat food."

"That's thoughtful of you. I was going to do all that tomorrow but thank you so very much. You're a real animal lover, aren't you?"

Lani takes off all that weight and gives little Doogie to Patrick, who's making sweet eyes at him.

"Patrick, your dad named him Doogie. After we fed him at our house, the little guy fell asleep. Ingo spooned him and licked the top of his head as if the kitty was his baby. That's how he got the moniker of Doogie."

“Oh, I like the name Doogie. It’s cool—it kind of suits him. I hope Missy will adopt him, too. Dad, now that Lani is here tell us the news.”

Lani settles into the sofa, and I curl up at her feet.

“I’ve come up with a plan, too, but Jim, you go first.” Lani takes out of her small backpack pocket a folded piece of paper, and it puts on the coffee table.

“Well, while you were talking with Officer Goodman on the phone, I called ... let me see ...” and he gets a paper out of his pocket. “Mrs. Abigail Allen, who lives on East 61st, off of 5th Avenue. She’s the owner of the other stolen dog. She told me that a man grabbed Ginger when she was off the leash while her maid was walking her in the park.

“So, what you’re sayin’, Pop, is that somebody stole Missy?” Patrick confirmed with shock in his voice.

“Yes, and I think I know why.”

“Why?” Patrick and Lani ask in unison.

“It has to do with the Westminster Show. Somebody is taking out the competition. Why now, a few months ahead of the show? Because they plan to give all 2500 dogs medical visits and tests between now and the end of January. So, the registrations recently ended, and they probably even got access to the list of competitors.”

“Jim, I think you are right,” says Lani. “Nieves, Bella’s mom, called me before I left. She said she would give me the list of competitors in Missy’s class.”

“That’s great. What’s next? What did Officer Goodman have to say?”

“Goodman said that he would help. He will contact their detective, Inspector Jacob Spade, to get involved with the case.”

Lani stops for a second, and then she says,

“I promised you the story of how Ingo helped Goodman to catch the thief. I’ll tell it to you now so that Pat can hear it too.”

Patrick, amused, says,

“Ingo helped the police? I got to hear this one.”

“It was an early afternoon in 2003 before I’d started working, and we were exploring Central Park, walking all over the place. Every day we’d visit a different area, looking for a unique site to call our own. We walked around the Pond and Victorian Gardens, the Heckscher Playground, and the Central Park Zoo.” Lani stops talking when I sit in front of her and give her my stare. The ‘stare’ tells her I want something. I hear all this, and I know she forgets to mention my favorite place.

“What is it, Ingo? What am I forgetting?” my sweet Lani asks me, waiting for my ‘hint.’

I start trotting like a horse but in place.

“Oh, yes. And we spent a lot of time around the Horse Carriage Rides place, on 59th Street at the south end of the park.”

It’s my favorite place by far, but it’s too close to traffic and too crowded to be our spot. I like chatting with the horses, and they are nice and friendly. The only argument I ever had was with a Palomino girl-

horse who said she was humans' best friend. That's ridiculous. Everybody knows dogs are man's best friend.

But I digress.

Lani continues her story.

“We were walking from the Carousel—after watching the wooden horses—toward the Umpire Rock when we saw this young guy, with a lady's purse under his arm, running like a rabbit. A police officer—in his 40s, on the chubby side—ran as fast as he could after the guy but lost ground with every step. Although I knew better than to interfere in a chase, I figured that with a police officer on hand, nothing could happen to us if we got involved. I unhooked Ingo's leash and told him to catch the thief. Ingo ran like mad, cut across the lawn, got ahead of the guy, and waited for him growling.

DWG4

Still running, the young man got closer to Ingo and slowed down, unsure of what to do. He started running across the lawn, and Ingo caught up with him without a problem. Ingo started attacking him savagely and growling like a lion. He was ferocious. The guy had no escape. Ingo held him in place until the policemen put handcuffs him.”

“Wow, that's amazing,” says Jim, petting me on the head. “Good boy, Ingo.”

“Ingo, you're *mega*, boy,” says Pat. Jim gives him a meaningful look.

“Pat, I thought we talked about this. No slang in the house, please.”

“I had no idea he could be so scary. Officer Goodman was grateful and gave me his ID card and number. He told me if we ever need help, to call him. He is a really nice man, and likes dogs.”

“This little angel can frighten a thief? Incredible,” and Jim says with admiration to the little golden boy.

“You, brave little guy, good on you.” Patrick is caressing Ingo with love.

But I have a plan for Ingo and his gang. The kids, too, of course.”

“What gang, what kids?” Patrick is keenly interested.

“Pat, you need to see this gang. Most of them live in Lani’s brownstone. They are kids and all of them have dogs. Rex is a German Shepherd, Maya is a boxer, Dona is a Golden Retriever, and Hiro is a Beagle. The girl next door, Bella, has a Gordon Setter named Baron.”

“Wow, Dad, can I meet them? I want to be part of this gang, too. I know I can help.” Patrick is all excited.

“Okay then,” says Lani and unfolds the piece of paper that’s on the coffee table.

“Come closer, both of you. Ingo, you, too.”

Lani shows us a map of the south end of Central Park and presents her plan:

“Detective work requires patience and many resources. When we get the list of competitors, we need to locate the ones that live in the

city, especially in the area around the bottom part of the park. These dogs are costly, and participation in the Westminster Show is expensive—trainers, handlers, groomers, etc. Not only did both dognappings happen in this area, but it's also an affluent residential zone. I think that we need to start there. Jim, is Missy microchipped?"

"Yes, she is, and Mrs. Allen told me she also microchipped Ginger."

DWG 5*

"So, the first step, after we get the list and confirm my theory, will be to get teams of children with dogs. They need to patrol the areas I show on this map with the little stars or flowers. It looks like we are going to need more teams. We only have four. Max and Lee with Dona are one team; Suzi, Matt, and their two dogs are the second team. They can do afternoons because they go to school in the morning. Storm with Rex and Bella with Baron will be our morning teams."

"I can get some more kids with dogs from my school," says Patrick. "If you let Ingo stay at our house, I can form a team with Ingo, the fifth team. We can be a morning team."

"That would be great, Patrick. I think the younger kids can do the afternoon shift, and Ingo and I can join them if I leave the office a little early until we solve this problem."

"I work most of the time from home, so I'm available either morning or afternoon. Add me as a team, Lani," said Jim.

“Perfect, and I can ask Officer Goodman to inform the policemen in the area to keep an eye on things,” says Lani as she wraps things up.

I like all I hear, and I am so proud of my Lani. I was thinking of getting my gang to do some of this footwork. I wasn’t sure what to do and how. Now I know.

“What are we looking for, Lani?” asks Patrick.

“If we’re lucky, there should be some competitors living in that area. If there are, we need to watch the buildings and see who is taking them out for walks. We note the address, and we watch from a distance to protect the dog, if necessary, and we talk to the doormen for information. Whoever finds out anything of interest they are to call Jim and let him know. He will be the gatekeeper for the entire plan. I will be in touch with him and take it further.”

“Good. Okay, let’s eat!” Jim set the table for humans and prepared a big plate for me.

I’m not that hungry. I can’t believe I’m in my Missy’s house, and the poor thing is not here. I’m so worried about her.

“Ingo, why are you not eating, baby?” Lani asks me.

I usually jump into the chicken and mashed potatoes with my entire face, ears, and all. I look at Lani with my big, sad eyes and squeal a bit. “He’s worried about Missy. You have no idea how much he cares about her. I have a photo of Missy from your sister, Jim. I framed it for him, or he would have destroyed it by now. He sits and looks at that photo for hours at a time. Poor Ingo.”

“Dad, may I leave the table and help Ingo with his food?” Jim says yes, and with that, Patrick comes and sits next to me on the floor. He gives me small bites of food from his hand. I like Patrick a lot. He has big eyes that let me see down into his soul. He knows how it is to miss somebody you love. I bet he misses his mom, who doesn’t live with them.

DWG 6

I am eating from his hand, and that makes the kid happy. “Lani, Dad, look, Ingo is eating. Good boy, Ingo.”

After everybody finishes their delicious dinner, Jim clears the table, and it’s time for us to go home.

Jim offers to walk us home because it’s late. He is a real gentleman. I like him.

“Good night, Pat, It was great meeting you,” Lani says before leaving.

“Pat, please set up that plastic tub Lani brought us with litter for Doogie. If you put him on the sand, he may get the right idea. After that, you two can watch some TV. And don’t forget to prepare your school bag. Okay?”

Lani kisses Doogie on the head, and we leave.

I listen to them chat on the way home. I think they like each other. Wouldn’t it be nice if ...? I better not think of that now. My first job is to find Missy.

“Jim, you know what? Let’s post notes in the area for a \$1000 finder’s fee reward for the “lost” dogs. We should say lost, not stolen, so we don’t spook the thieves. I will make the posters and print them tonight.”

“No, Lani, I’ll do it. I’m a graphic designer. I do this for a living, plus I have Missy’s photo, and I can call Mrs. Allen for a photo of her dog. You have to go to work in the morning, and I am at home. I’ll post them at Central Park West and east along 5th Avenue.”

“Thank you, Jim, great idea, I am tired, and as you said, I have to work tomorrow.”

We got to our house and said our goodbyes.

“Call me tomorrow when you get off work or if you have any news. Good night, Lani, good night, Ingo.”

My Lani looks happy to have met a wonderful man. We don’t have many friends, and Jim and Pat are “good friends” material. Everybody wants as much as I do to find Missy as soon as possible before any tragedy happens.

I have a drink and sit next to her on the loveseat to watch TV. She likes that. She turns the TV on, but she also pulls out the computer and sends an email to Bella to give her the map and the action plan. The patrols with the dogs start tomorrow morning.

She takes a shower, gets in her jammies, and by 11, we’re both in her bed. Yes, that is more like it.

DWG 6A

Today was such a long day, and so many things happened. I am both happy and sad, which confuses me.

Starting tomorrow, we have a lot of detective work to do.

Chapter Five—Jump into Action

-Monday-

Monday morning. Dreaded alarm clock, short shower, food for me, short walk to the corner and back for my morning business, and off she goes to work.

I take my place in the window. It is entertaining to watch humans, their children, and dogs walking. Our large front window faces south. The sun gets high enough to flood the room with warm light over the towering Midtown high-rises in the late morning.

I don't know what to do with myself. I'm stuck in the house, and I can't do anything to help find Missy. Lani should leave me at Jim's, and we could go looking for Missy. Jim is a good man, and she shouldn't worry about me while I'm with him.

DWG 6B

The front window has screens and metal bars, but Lani always leaves the window cracked open for fresh air and smells.

I see Bella and Baron waiting outside our gate for Storm to come down with Rex. It looks like she's ready to start the detective patrol walk as per the plan. Bella sees the building door open, and first Rex, then Storm comes out.

“Good morning, guys.” I see Bella sharing the printed map with Storm.

They're already on the job. Yes, the bigger kids go to school in the afternoon, so I'm sure the two will head to Central Park to play detective.

The street quiets soon. The going to work and school hour has passed, and I lay down on my pelt. I wait for the sun to come through the window. I look at Missy's framed photograph and wait to fall asleep.

We have a unique apartment because Lani, a talented architect, arranged it with everything we need. It is long and narrow, like all first-floor brownstone apartments. The building entry has a long corridor to the walk-up stairs, splitting the front part into two units. When you come into our apartment, you first see a modern kitchen with all appliances and a large window to the airshaft. We get little light, but we have cross-ventilation of fresh air. On the left of the kitchen are the bedroom, bathroom, and some closets. On the right, toward the front, it widens. We have the dining table with chairs and the living room with a computer work area, a small sofa, many bookshelves, and the TV.

What makes our apartment special is that it's ten and a half feet tall. All cabinets, shelving, and closets only go up to eight feet. Lani has green indoor plants on top of them, leaving the ceiling's whole width visible. She says this trick makes space look much broader. It is a small but airy apartment, and it's in a fabulous location. We can walk to Times Square and the big park.

*

Before I know it, Lani comes home early from work. She knows that I am upset, and I am ready for action, whatever that might be.

"Hi, Ingo, I'm home." She bends over and scratches me as usual behind my colossal ears.

I sit in front of her and stare at her. That's my way of asking her, "What's new? What gives?"

She grabs the phone.

"Hi Jim, I came home early. How are you? Any news?"

She is listening to Jim, and then she says,

"Okay, come right over, if you want. Would you buy me, please, a tuna salad on the way? I'll give you the money when you get here."

"See you ... is Pat home? If he's interested, bring him with you."

Then, as I was waiting for her to talk to me, she makes another call.

"Hello, I need to leave a message for Officer Goodman. Yes, would you please tell him to call Lani, Ingo's owner? Yes, he has my number, and he's expecting my call. It's about some high-value dogs stolen in the Central Park area. Yes, thank you very much."

She finally can sit down with me. "Ingo, we need to have a meeting with the kids and dogs."

"Bow," I agree with her.

"This place is too small for seven kids, five dogs, and two adults. Where could we go?"

"Woof, woof," I go, lifting my snout to the ceiling.

"Ingo, you are brilliant, baby. Yes, the roof. We should meet on top of the building.

The entry door buzzer tells Lani they're here, and she opens the door for Jim and Patrick.

"Hi, guys. Come in. Jim, thank you for the food. I didn't make lunch today, I was very unsettled, and I left work early."

The guys take a seat, and Lani starts unpacking her lunch and asks how much she owes him for the food.

"Nothing, Lani, be serious," says Jim. "So, we posted the \$1000 finder's fee reward notes all around the West and East Side of the park up to 72nd Street. Pat wanted to help and stayed home from school today." Jim takes a few sheets of paper from his bag and shows them to Lani. "I also got an email with a photo of Ginger. Look, she is beautiful. No wonder she won the class last year."

"Yeah, she is. Wow."

Lani gets up and prepares some refreshing drinks.

"What do you guys like? I have cranberry, mandarin and pomegranate, seltzer, and Coke."

"Seltzer for me, Lani" says Jim.

"Mandarin on ice, please, Lani," says Patrick.

Jim's cell phone rings.

"Hello, Mrs. Allen, what a nice surprise. Wow, that's interesting, so the flyers worked. No, don't worry, you don't think we have to pay

them. Yes, of course. A woman? How interesting. Let me call you right back. Okay, bye."

"Oh, my God," Jim says after hanging up the phone. "Abigail Allen received a call from a woman who claims that she found Ginger. She told Mrs. Allen that the dog looks slightly different like she'd had a haircut recently, and Mrs. Allen said she had."

"Does that mean she's not sure the dog is Ginger?" asks Lani.

"Dad, that sounds weird," Patrick mumbles.

"Something doesn't sound right. How would the woman know that Ginger had a haircut unless it's drastic? It's tough to tell a haircut on a Cocker since it's only done under the ears and between the paws' pads. Very bizarre."

"Wow, I hope I'm wrong, but it sounds like they butchered poor Ginger's hair. I hope I'm wrong. Even so, this is great if it's, in fact, her, and she's safe," says Lani.

"Lani, Mrs. Allen wants me to be there when the woman drops off Ginger. Do you want to come? Shall we set it up for tomorrow night?"

"Tomorrow night is good for me. I'll bring Ingo, too."

"Bow." Of course, I want to go.

Jim calls back Abigail Allen and confirms they'll meet at 6 p.m. tomorrow, Tuesday.

"Jim, I wonder if you think it's a good idea to have Ingo spend the day with you at your house for the next few days," says Lani cautiously, not knowing what to expect.

"I was thinking to suggest that. It bothers me, Ingo being alone and locked up these days. He will like it with us, and I can take him with me tomorrow wherever I go.

DWG #6C

"Bow." I bark my approval and rub my face into his leg.

"See, he likes the idea," says Jim.

Right before you guys arrived, I was thinking that we should meet the kids every evening to report and get new instructions for the gang's detective work around the park. My apartment is too small for the whole crowd, and Ingo gave me an idea just before you guys walked in."

"How exactly can Ingo give you ideas? That sounds pretty funny."

"Yeah, how did he do that, Lani?" says Jim.

"I'll tell you, better yet, let me show you how Ingo gives me ideas."

Lani turns to me and starts talking.

"Ingo, we don't fit in this apartment. Where should we meet with the children and the dogs?"

"Woof, woof," and I do again the trick of pointing my nose at the ceiling as I woof.

"That's how he gave me the idea to meet with the dogs and kids on the roof, our tar beach."

"How awesome is that?" says Patrick, almost incredulous.

"Lani, he's amazing, this dog of yours. He looks as if he understands everything you tell him, and he plays charades with you, giving you clues you understand. Unbelievable," says Jim.

"You guys, know what? I'll teach Ingo body language in the few days he stays with us. It will help him a lot. I have a few ideas, too," says Patrick, always full of beans.

It's already seven o'clock in the evening. Lani calls Bella to mobilize all the kids and their dogs to meet up on our roof in 15 minutes.

Chapter Six



The Roof Gang meets Pat

-still Monday-

A New York City roof is a fantastic place. It's where the housetops meet the sky and is all open space. You can run an entire city block and jump from one building roof to another and then to another. Wow, there are no pedestrians, no cars, no nothing, only the pigeons and us.

It looks as if the heavenly evening blanket covering the City has a few puncture holes, and tiny specs of light penetrate the darkness. Humans call them stars.

We are the first to arrive.

Bella with Baron and Suzi with Hiro come from the neighboring building where Bella lives. She helps Suzi sometimes with her math homework. Bella is an excellent student and is one of the few children with whom Suzi's grandmother lets her spend time. From Bella's roof, they step onto ours.

Then, we hear a big commotion on the stairwell. Maya, Dona, and Rex, with Matt, Max, Lee, come running with Storm behind them.

When Maya, Dona, and Rex hit the roof, the pigeons all fly away in a panic.

“Jim,” Lani says, “I have an idea. Get the children with their dogs to visit the roof daily, which will solve the pigeon problem. That might do the trick.”

DWG 7

“Patrick, this is the Gang. They’re all here. Let me introduce you to the kids and their dogs.” Lani introduces all the children and dogs to Patrick, one by one.

“Is Patrick your son?” the always talkative Suzi asks Jim.

“Yes, Suzi. Patrick is my son, and he’s twelve years old.”

“Hi, guys. Someone stole our dog, Missy, on Sunday. If you’re okay with it, I’ll join your gang.” Everyone nodded their heads to welcome him.

“What school do you go to?” asks Bella.

“Fieldstone School on Central Park West, but I may move next year to West End Secondary.”

“That’s where Storm and I go,” says Bella, smiling at Patrick.

“I would love to meet all the dogs. Dad told me all about you guys.” Patrick goes to Suzi, and happy with the attention, Suzi starts talking.

“This is Hiro, my Beagle friend, and I am Suzi, but the kids tease me and nickname me BR.”

“Why BR?”

“Well, it comes from ‘broken record,’ because they think I talk too much,” says Suzy and looks a bit embarrassed.

“Can you read well, Suzi?”

“Yes, I do. Why?” Suzi asks with curiosity.

“Next time, when somebody asks you what BR stands for, tell them Best Reader.” And Patrick winks at her and gets close to Matt.

“You are Matt, right? Patrick shakes hands with the shy boy.

“Yes, Patrick, nice to meet you. I am Ingo’s friend, and this is my Boxer Maya, and these two brothers, Max and Lee, are my friends.” The shy boy knows how to get out of the spot-light and move attention to the other kids.

“Hi Patrick, I am Lee, and this is my brother Max, who’s nine, and this blondie here is Dona.”

“Nice to meet you guys.” Patrick pets Dona, whose coat is silky smooth from all that brushing she gets from the boys.

“Hi Patrick, I’m Storm, I’m thirteen, and this is Rex, my friend, and companion.

“Hi, so maybe, next year we’ll go to the same school. Storm, is there a place you go to shoot hoops around here?”

“Yeah, there is. I’ll tell you later about it.”

Jim waits patiently for the kids’ introductions, and he starts reporting the progress of the day.

“Today, I received news about the other abducted dog. The lady owner received a call from a woman saying she’d found Ginger and read the flyer with the thousand dollars finders fee I had posted.”

“A thousand dollars? That’s a whole lot of money, man. I wish I’d had found her.

“Storm, if you had found her, you would have gotten the \$1000. But we know the dogs were stolen not lost. It was our idea to provide an incentive for returning the dogs and ensure the thieves don’t think of hurting them,” says Lani. If the woman found the dog indeed, she will get her finder’s fee. If it turns out she stole the dog, she wouldn’t receive any money and have to deal with the police. If we reward thieves for returning stolen goods, what would stop them from stealing all the time?

“Ah, good thinking, Miss Lani,” says Storm, all deflated.

Bella jumps in and tells everybody what they found during their morning patrol around the park.

“I saw a man come out of The Dakota and take a Cocker for a walk.”

Lani is interested in what she hears and asks,

“What did the man look like, Bella?”

“Like this. I took a photo of the man and the dog.” Bella hands her cell phone to Jim, who was next to her.

“I didn’t see you take the picture. Way to go, girl,” says Storm, who I think is sweet on Bella.

That's progress. I can't help myself, and I go over to Bella to lean against her leg. She touches my head and shakes one of my ears. She always does that, as if she's weighing the ear to compare it with Baron's.

"Great job, guys. How many of you have cell phones?" Lani asks the children.

"Max and I are the only ones without a cell phone. We're not old enough yet." That was the little big-mouth, Suzi.

"Let's do this, guys," says Lani. "These are the photos of the two stolen dogs—Missy and Ginger. Here are Jim's and my cell phone numbers." She gave all the kids the photos and a piece of paper.

Lani's cell phone rings. She steps away. We're all waiting in silence because she's talking to Officer Goodman. I like officer Goodman.

He was very nice to me after I helped him with the thief. He had some special ear-rubbing moves I enjoyed a lot. let me Also that day, he let me lick his face, and he smelled good. He'd had a ham and cheese sandwich for lunch, and I could still smell it on him.

I get close to Lani while she's talking to him. I whine a little for her to look at me. She got it immediately, and I hear her say,

"Officer Goodman, I have here a big fan of yours, who wants to say Hi. She lowers the cellphone to my face, and I do a small and happy bark for him. I can hear him say,

"Hi, Ingo boy. I'll see you soon."

Lani gets off the phone and explains.

“I’m meeting Officer Goodman tonight after his shift. I’ll give him the photos of the dogs. And Bella, please text me the picture of the man with the dog from this morning. I want to give it to Officer Goodman. I’ll let you all know tomorrow night what he says. We’ll meet again here at 7:30 pm. And guys, when you go with the dogs to the park between 7:30 and 8:00, do not enter the park. Only walk on the west and east sides of the park, from the south end at 57th Street to 72nd Street. Keep your eyes open for people going into the park with American Cocker Spaniels—”

“What do American Cockers look like?” Chatterbox Suzi asks.

“Like Ingo, but smaller, with a shorter nose. Take a look at the pictures I gave you.”

“I didn’t get a photo.”

“Here you go, Suzi, I’m sorry,” says Lani. “May I continue?”

“Sure, sorry.” Suzi looks at the pictures.

“Like Bella so brilliantly did, please take cell phone pictures of anyone walking that kind of dog. Do not approach them, do not talk to them. Then send a message to Jim with the photos.”

“I’ll be near the park, too, so if you need help at all, just call me, and I’ll be there in minutes,” added Jim.

“Tomorrow evening, Jim, Ingo, and I will go to Mrs. Allen’s house. We’re meeting the woman who supposedly found Ginger. Officer Goodman may come, too, in case we need help.”

“What about us, the smaller kids? What do we do tomorrow to help?” asks the quizzical Suzi.

DWG 7*

“You’re right, Suzi. I forgot, thank you. First, I will ring the doorbells at your apartments on my way back down and make sure your parents are Okay with your participation. You and Matt with your dogs are one team. Max and Lee, you’re the second. You go tomorrow afternoon to the same area at dog walking time. Look for the same things. Matt and Lee, you have cell phones. Fifteen minutes before walking out for the patrol, please call Jim to join you at the corner of the park so that he can keep an eye on you from a distance. You must call him at once if you see anything of interest or if you need any kind of help.”

“So, that’s it, are we done for tonight?”

“Yes, Bella, that’s it for now. See you all tomorrow night.”

Only the four of us are left on the top of the building now. I am thinking of taking a run, from roof to roof, all the way to the 9th Avenue corner and back. The little parapet walls between buildings make a perfect obstacle course for me. But I will do it first during daylight, so Lani can see that I am safe.

“It is a beautiful evening, and we can almost see the stars. There is so much light coming from the streets and buildings that you rarely see stars in the sky over Manhattan, but tonight we can see a few,” says Jim, charmed by the evening’s beauty.

“Why doesn’t your building have a water tank? Many of the buildings have one,” Patrick, who has a curious mind, asks Lani.

“Our building is only six stories high. The closest City’s water tower is big and tall enough for the water pressure necessary to serve the building’s needs. The old high-rises, taller than our building, need a roof tank to ensure gravity-fed pressure. Pressure pumps push the water up to the tanks. The new taller buildings have pumps and booster-pumps in the basement and the mechanical rooms on the roof.”

“Oh, I see, thanks.

“It’s time to go get some pizza, and then we have to head home with Ingo. It’s a school day tomorrow,” says Jim.

“Right, let’s go, Ingo.” Lani waits for everyone to leave and closes the stairwell roof door behind us.

The pizza place is close by between our house and Jim’s. It has a terrace where dogs are allowed. The pizza is good, but I don’t get any crust. Lani says it’s not good for me. I like what she gives me, though, some cheese and pepperoni. I haven’t been that hungry since they took poor Missy hostage.

We finish eating, and Lani tells us she needs to go home soon because she is waiting for Nieves with the competitors’ list and officer Goodman.

“But, Lani, I wanted to take you guys for ice cream now,” says Jim, disappointed.

“Oh, thank you, but I have to get home. You can take the boys for ice cream if you want. I also have to cook something special for

tomorrow evening. I got to go.” And with that, Lani kisses me, wishes good night to my men-companions, and goes home alone. I’m going with the men to their house.

I bet Lani misses me tonight, and I miss her too. Jim and Patrick are great guys, but I’m used to my Lani’s soft touch and kisses. No such thing here, no display of affection, no kisses, no hugs, nothing. It’s a manly and respectful camaraderie.

Boy, she spoiled me, big time.

But tonight, I get my evening loving from little Doogie. He is pleased to see me. I give him a good licking on the head, and I sleep with him in my lap. The little guy is adorable. He covers himself with one of my enormous ears.

Chapter Seven – The Less Fortunate



-Tuesday-

In the morning, Patrick gives me a good breakfast, makes himself a massive sandwich with ham and cheese, and puts it in his pocket. We go out on patrol. On our walk to Central Park, I see a man sleeping on the sidewalk, next to a building. He's poorly dressed and quite dirty, and he has a skinny dog with him. I stop and stare.

I've never seen anything like this before.

Why are they sleeping on the street? Why is the man so dirty and the dog so skinny? DWG 8

I look at Patrick, and back to them, and again at Patrick who's eating his sandwich.

Patrick is an intelligent boy. He's used to Missy's body language, so no wonder he figures me out at once.

"You want me to give them some of my food, right, Ingo?"

"Bow."

Patrick breaks his food into three equal parts, gives some to the dog, and puts some in front of the sleeping man's face. The man wakes up, takes the food, and thanks Patrick.

"It's Ingo's idea," Patrick says, pointing at me.

"Thank you, beautiful Ingo, thank you. My dog's name is Pooch."

“Hi, Pooch.” Patrick pets the poor skinny and hungry dog on the head. “I’m Patrick.”

“Nice to meet you, Patrick. My name is Kevin O’Conner,” says the homeless man. “I was an iron-worker in Ireland. I don’t have children, and my poor wife died of a serious illness a few years ago. I took to drinking for a while, and I lost my job.”

“I am so sorry to hear that. We will try to help you as much as we can.” Kevin’s story saddens Patrick.

I’m proud of Patrick, and it looks like he is proud of me. We continued our walk, but I see more people in the same situation—some with and some without dogs.

What is going on here? How is it possible in this great and free country for people to have no food and sleep on the street?

I look at Patrick with worried eyes every time I see one of these folks, and he’s getting the idea, I guess. I’m barely dragging myself thinking about these unfortunate creatures. Events like these open my eyes. I begin to realize how lucky I am to be loved, cared for, and not having to worry about my food, shelter, and survival. I want to help these dogs and humans.

We are patrolling in the area on the west side of the park, and we see the same man from Bella’s photo, with the same dog, leaving The Dakota building. Patrick takes a picture, sends it to Jim, and calls him.

“Dad, did you get the photo I sent you? I’ll wait. Really? Is it him? Wow. It looks like we’re getting warmer. And Dad, I need you to buy

me something as soon as possible for a new project. I need several yards of canvas, yeah, like for a lightweight backpack or tote bag. Please, Dad, as soon as you can. I'll tell you when I see you at home, but it's important."

We return to their house, waiting for Jim, who probably went out on Pat's urgent errand. Patrick is all packed for school, but he's preparing to make something. He gets out a measuring tape, markers, a stapler, and big sheets of wrapping paper. I have no idea what he's making.

This scene reminds me of Lani, a while ago, when she made a stuffed toy, Platfus, for my cousin DD back in Morania.

Jim arrives, and he has a big package with Patrick's canvas.

"Patrick, you have to tell me what this is all about. Maybe I can help," says Jim and sits down, waiting for a story from his son.

"Dad, you should have seen how Ingo reacted when he saw his first homeless person with a dog. He seemed to be crying. He looked at me like begging to share my ham and cheese sandwich with them. I want to make some saddlebags of canvas for the gang dogs to collect food for homeless dogs and people. I have some friends from school who have dogs, and they'll want to help, too. We can go to food stores and restaurants and collect their left-over food. What do you think, Dad?"

"As long as you're willing to put in the work, I'm fine with it. I can even print whatever you want me to write on the bags. I can put "Food for the Homeless" across the back. And I can put "for dogs" on

one pouch and “for people” on the other. We can even ask Lani to sew them for you. She has a sewing machine, and I’m sure when you tell her that it’s Ingo’s idea, she will be happy to do it.”

“Awesome, let’s make one for Ingo. Have any ideas?”

“I think we need a strap across the front of the chest.”

Patrick works fast, takes measurements on me, and draws stuff on wrapping paper, cuts with the scissors, and tries it on my body. He adjusts it and then marks it on the fabric, cuts it, and staples it together. Not bad. I think this will work. I am sure Lani will fix it big time for me when she sees it.

It’s lunchtime. Patrick eats quickly and heads off to school.

I need a little rest. I can’t get those poor people and their dogs out of my mind. Doogie doesn’t come to take a nap with me, but I bet he’ll join me later. He’s perched on Jim’s keyboard with a ‘Do Not Disturb’ look on his little face. **DWG 8***

I look forward to seeing Lani. I miss her.

Lani arrives directly from work at Jim’s on time for the appointment with the Allens. Jim shows her Patrick’s photo of the man with the dog coming out of The Dakota, and tells her he’s sure this is the man who stopped him in the park for directions. Lani shares the list received from Nieves and her discussion with Officer Goodman.

“Lani, I think we should leave Ingo here. Patrick will want him when he returns from school. I’ll tell you all about it on the cross-town trip. They have a new project together.”

“Is it the sign language thing?” asks Lani.

“No, I’ll tell you, but let’s get going. We don’t want to be late.”

“Can I get a bottle of water from you, Jim? Thanks.”

They leave, and soon Patrick returns with a friend from school and his black Labrador, Pepe.

“Hey Ingo, this is my friend Camilo and his dog, Pepe. We are trying to fit him with a saddlebag for food collection. Did Dad and Lani go to their East Side meeting?”

“Bow,” I confirm.

The boys are starting to work feverishly, and I keep Pepe company. He is a big, big boy, Pepe is. Doogie is staying away from him because of his size, but Pepe is a lovely and well-mannered dog.

Later on, when Lani and Jim return home, I overhear them telling Patrick about their adventure at Allen’s house. Here it is.

Jim and Lani arrive at Allen’s building. As Abigale Allen is expecting Jim, the doorman lets him in. He will be pretending to be Mister Allen—who is out of town—then the woman comes with the dog. Lani is outside, waiting for Officer Goodman, who will provide support and help in case need be. **DWG 9**

A few minutes after 6 p.m., a woman with a weird looking dog stops at the building and talks to the doorman. He lets her in.

The dog is supposed to be Ginger, but Lani says that they sure did a job a hair butchering job on her. All her hair on the ears, chest,

and the back of her front legs is chopped off. Later on, Lani shows me the picture of her and, my God, I can't believe what they did to her.

Now, this part, with what was happening inside, is Jim's story.

Mrs. Allen, with Jim behind her, opens the door and sees the woman with this strange-looking dog. Abigail Allen takes a step back, puts both her hand to her face, and says,

"This is not my dog." Chin down and slumped shoulders, she walks away from the door and sits on the sofa. Jim comes to the door to talk to the woman and shakes her hand. The woman drops the leash in the process, and the dog runs directly into the apartment's living room, jumps in Abigale's lap, and starts kissing her face.

"Oh, my God, what happened to you, Ginger? I'm so happy you are back, sweetie. Mommy loves you so much." Abigale hugs the little Ginger tightly.

"You have your dog back. Can I have the thousand dollars now?" asked the ransom woman.

"Come in, please." Jim invites her in.

"We need you to sign a receipt for us. I'm going to need your name, your address, your ID, and—" Jim is interrupted by the woman.

"Why do you need all that? I brought your dog back. You give me the money," she says.

"Please, have a seat. I will be right back," says Jim as he leaves the room. Abigail is so busy with her poor Ginger that she couldn't care less about the woman in the same room.

Jim sends a text message to Lani, telling her that they chopped off Ginger's hair and that Officer Goodman should follow the woman to find out where she lives.

Jim talks to Abigail's maid in the kitchen and tells her, "You walk into the living room behind me and tell Mrs. Allen to come with the dog to the kitchen to feed her. Tell them to stay there until I come back."

"Okay, no problem, Mister."

They do as planned. When Mrs. Allen is out of the room, Jim tells the woman,

"Listen, I am taking a picture of you." And he does. "I am asking you only one more time. Where did you find the dog, and what is your name? I want to see your ID."

"Give me my money, and I'll go," repeats the ransom woman.

"If you don't give me the information, I'll assume you stole the dog, and I'll call the police," replies Jim.

"I am not giving you anything, and I am leaving and will tell the police you didn't pay the reward."

"Go right ahead." Jim opens the apartment door for her to leave.

"So, that's how you, rich people do it. You have money, and you hold on to it and cheat us poor people."

"Lady, get out of here," Jim raises his voice at her.

The woman leaves, mumbling. Officer Goodman is waiting for her outside.

Jim goes to the kitchen and tells them it's all sorted out and that the bad woman has left.

“You let her leave? We will never find her again, Jim. She and her accomplice are not going to suffer any punishment for their actions.”

“No, no, Mrs. Allen, I have the police waiting outside, and they will follow her. They will investigate and let us know what's going on.” Mrs. Allen was much relieved.

“Oh, Jim, you are so smart and such a nice man. Thank you so much for your help. Look what they did to Ginger. There is no way she can compete in less than four months from now.”

“You're right, but at least you have her back. We don't know anything about my Missy yet. I'd better go now. My friend, who is helping me, is waiting for me outside.”

“Okay, thank you again, and don't be a stranger. Keep in touch and let me know when you find Missy. Good night, Jim.”

“Good night, ladies.”

Chapter Eight



Hearts of Gold

-still Tuesday-

Jim and Lani tell the end of the story to Patrick and me, and I relate it to you.

As Jim comes out of the building, Lani runs to him to find out what happened. She tells him that Officer Goodman and some patrol cars are on the ransom woman's trail. Of course, Lani has her license plate number.

They hurry back to the West Side for the gang's roof meeting. On the way, Jim calls Patrick.

"Hi, Pat, we're on the way. I will meet you and Ingo in front of Lani's building in half an hour. Yes, Ginger got home, but you should have seen what they did to her; they chopped off all her hair. Lani took a picture, and we'll show you later. In half an hour at Lani's, okay? Bye."

"Jim, what happened in there?" asks Lani.

"Did you see what they did to that poor dog? Abigail didn't even recognize her. Thank God the dog ran in the house and jumped in her lap."

"Did you give her the money?"

“Are you kidding? Of course not. I asked her name and ID, and she didn’t want to supply them, so I told her I would call the police. She left cursing and mumbling. At least that part of it is over now.”

Jim gets silent and looks worried, and Lani picks up on it.

“Jim, I hear you, and I know you’re worried, and so am I. But I imagine the police will be able to get useful information out of her. I think we’re on the right track. We will soon find Missy.”

“They probably chopped her hair off, too. I think we were right a few days ago when we figured the whole thing is about eliminating competition for the Westminster Dog Show. And you know what? I don’t care if they shaved her. All I want is to have her back,” says Jim, whipping a tear or two from his cheeks.”

“Jim, I am so sorry about the whole thing. I can’t even imagine your pain. If this had happened to Ingo, I would’ve freaked out.”

“I’ll be all right, Lani. I know we’ll find my poor Missy.”

Patrick and I are waiting outside, in front of our building.

As Lani and Jim approach, they see the canvas contraption on my back. I sit proudly and raise my right paw to my right temple, like a military salute. **DWG 10**

Lani starts laughing.

“Oh, my baby Ingo ... what did Pat teach you?”

“He’s saluting you, Lani,” says Patrick with pride.

“What’s that saddlebag on him? Oh, my, is that your new project, guys?” Lani asks, trying to keep from laughing.

“We’ll show you other stuff, too, after the meeting,” says Patrick with a wicked look on his face.

We get to the roof on time for the meeting. The kids shower us with questions about the thing on my back.

“What is that double bag on Ingo?” asks who else but Suzi.

“I want one for Maya, to carry stuff,” says Matt, speaking up in public, which is not usual for him.

“Me, too, for Rex.”

“It’s a Patrick and Ingo project. I don’t know anything about it. Ask Patrick, after the meeting,” says Lani, moving on to the subject of the stolen dogs.

She tells the children that Ginger is safely home and that the thieves had chopped off all her lovely hair so she couldn’t compete in the coming Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show.

All the dogs are staring at me to translate. I mumble to them a little, and they all look as if they understand. The dogs look at each other wide-eyed, horrified by the idea of cutting off a Cocker’s hair. It’s a bizarre spectacle for the humans, I am sure, but terrifying for the dogs.

“Do we know who these people are, Dad?” asks Patrick.

“Not yet, but Officer Goodman and some patrol cars followed her, and we also have the woman’s license plate number, so I’m sure we will find her,” Jim tells the children.

“We need to link her to the man who distracted Jim in the park when they abducted Missy,” added Lani.

“In any case, we don’t have to patrol the park’s East Side anymore. We only need to focus on Central Park West up to 72nd Street inclusive. We need to find Missy,” Jim tells them.

“Dad is almost 100% sure the guy Bella and I photographed leaving The Dakota is our man.”

Do you have his photo, Patrick? asks Bella, glad to address Patrick directly. I can tell Bella is sweet on Patrick. He may be a year younger than her, but he is a big and strong boy. He takes after Jim.

“Yep, and here’s the proof,” Patrick moves close to her and shows her his cellphone photo. Oh, Bella is delighted, and they start to chat.

“Lani and I will go to The Dakota tomorrow evening and talk to the dog owner. Lani received the list of competitors from your Mom, Bella. The list confirms that Cora, the female dog in The Dakota, is the last competitor in the area.”

“Are these our marching orders for tomorrow? asks Storm.

“Yes, good night, thank you, and we’ll see you all tomorrow evening,” says Lani, ready to go. “Oh, one more thing. The way the pigeons flew off the roof in a huff when you and your dogs arrived gave me an idea. If you, guys, could bring your dogs to the roof around lunch—before or after school—we may rid ourselves of the pigeons. Pigeons soil the building’s facade and carry many viruses. See if you guys can do that. Okay?” DWG 10*

With this, the gang left the roof with Bella and Patrick still chatting.

“Pat, wait for us downstairs. Lani, Ingo, and I will be right down.” Jim turns back to us and takes a deep breath.

“Lani, I am very sorry this horrible thing with Missy’s theft is getting in the way of us spending time together to know each other better. I can’t wait to find Missy and resume a normal life.”

With a sad smile on her face, Lani grabs Jim’s right hand with both of hers.

“I know you are upset and worried. But I want to tell you two things, which may help you feel better.”

“Great, let me hear them.” Jim likes that she is holding his hand, and he’s looking her straight in the eyes.

“As you are 100% sure that the handler is the thief, I want to tell you that a man who makes at least part of his living working with purebred dogs is not, I am sure, going to harm one.”

“All right, I can buy that, thank you. And what’s the second thing?”

“Oh, the second thing that I hope is going to make you feel better is that I like you too, and I am looking forward to knowing you better.” She reaches up and gives him a little kiss on the cheek.

“That’s nice, thank you.”

“Well, let’s go down. I’m dying to hear about Pat and Ingo’s project and the military salute.

When we get to the first floor, Patrick and Bella with Baron are in front of our door, still chatting. Bella leaves and we go into the apartment.

Patrick starts talking before we are all in.

“Lani, Ingo has a heart of gold. I’ll tell you what happened today. I don’t think he’d ever seen a homeless person with a dog before. This morning, he made me share my sandwich with him. I think he would like to organize a food collection for homeless people and dogs.”

Patrick, in one breath, tells Lani the basics of our plan.

“Bow,” I say in approval and nod my head as Patrick taught me. He says it makes for a more decisive YES.

“I can help with the bags. You did a fine job with the staples, but they might hurt their skin. I’ll sew them for you.”

“Can you improve on the design and show me how to make a pattern for each dog?” asks Patrick.

“Sure, I will show you what measurements to take, and we can make them together.”

“I told you she would help you make them,” says Jim.

Lani is making some tea for herself and asks her guest what they want to drink.

“What about that military salute and whatever else you taught him for sign language today?”

“He learned to sign Yes, No, Please, Thank you, Food, Water and HELP or SOS in Morse code. We’ll show you.”

Lani takes a covered pot out of the refrigerator and starts to warm it up on the stove. It's some superb smelling food she had cooked the night before.

"I cooked it for you guys. You've probably never had this before—Chicken Paprikash.

"I remember the name, my older sister in Morania makes it, but I'm not sure what it is," says Jim, stepping toward the stove.

"May I look?"

"Sure, it's a Hungarian meal, with chicken, sweet-smoked paprika, and I serve it with sour cream. I hope you guys like it."

"Bow," I say and nod my head up and down. I know I like it.

Lani sees me and laughs so hard she spills her cranberry juice.

"Pat, this is so good and so funny. I love it. Let's see how much you taught him. Is it hard?"

"Ingo's a one-of-a-kind dog. He seems to understand whatever I say. It takes him a few tries to get it right, but he knows what I'm asking him to do. It's incredible."

One by one, Patrick demonstrates to Lani my newly learned sign language.

For YES, I do a short bark and nod my head up and down.

For NO, I shake my head left to right a few times while sitting.

For PLEASE, I sit and put my front legs together, paw pads touching.

For THANK YOU, I put my right paw on my chest's left side where the heart is.

For FOOD, I put my right paw in my slightly open mouth.

For WATER, I place my paw in front of my mouth, then lift my head, mouth open, and front foot above it, as if pouring water down my throat.

“I’m so impressed, Pat. I know Ingo is a smart one, but you did an outstanding job teaching him and in only one day. Excellent job!”

Patrick blushes, all enchanted with his success.

Jim and Patrick love the Paprikash and ask for seconds. There go my leftovers for tomorrow, I’m thinking. Lani serves a little ice cream, and the three of us boys leave.

I kiss Lani and give her the funny salute that Patrick taught me before I left. I hear her laughing as the door closes behind us.

Chapter Nine



Work in Progress

- Wednesday -

I spent the night again at Missy's house. I can't even believe myself saying it. I've dreamed of this for a long time, and now that I'm finally here, she's missing.

Early in the morning, Patrick and I test my stapled saddleback.

DWG 11

First, we go to the corner store, close to their house, where people know him.

"Good morning. How are you?" Patrick greets the store owner.

"Good morning, Patrick. What can I do for you?"

Patrick points to my saddlebag and says,

"My friends and I are starting a food collection for the homeless and their dogs, and I wonder if you have any left-overs that you can give us."

"Oh, good for you. Sure, I have some food I can give you."

They fill my saddleback pockets with some bread slices, cheese, ham, and doughnuts. They also give me some overly-ripe bananas.

"Thanks a lot," says Patrick before leaving.

I stop at the door, turn around to face them, sit down, and put my right front paw over the left side of my chest as a thank you.

“Look at that dog,” the owner of the little store says to the other shoppers. “He’s thanking me. I’ve never seen anything like this in my life.”

We walk out loaded with food and a spring in our step. The plan is working very well. We’re not too sure what to do next.

“Let’s go find the man and the dog we fed the other day,” says Patrick, who by now has figured out that, somehow, I understand his speech.

We find them in their spot, and Patrick, unsure of what to do, starts talking to Kevin,

“Good morning, Kevin. We have food for you, your dog, and other people, but we don’t know where they are.”

“That’s so nice of you. Thank you very much. I can walk with you for a few blocks to meet some of them, but I could also give the food to other homeless people, myself. If I had a jacket with pockets for my dog, I could load him up, and he’ll give the food to other street dogs,” says the man. He gets an old plastic shopping bag out of his small pile of stuff and starts putting the food in it.

Once my saddlebag is empty, Patrick takes it off me and puts it on Pooch, who’s about my size but bonier. It fits him perfectly.

“You’re so kind, both of you. Can we keep it?”

“Yes,” says Patrick, “we’ll make another one for Ingo.” Patrick’s face lights up in a big smile.

Pooch eats a little and starts down the street loaded with food to visit his friends, the hungry street dogs. DWG #11*

“Kevin, you know what? I will take you up on the offer to walk together a few blocks and meet some of your friends. Ingo and I are on the way to the Park. Is that a good direction to meet them?”

“It sure is, if we go on back streets.” Kevin gets up, sets his blanket and things in order. He looks down the street and sees Pooch on his way back, points to the blanket and calls in a loud voice,

“Pooch, sit and wait.” Then he turns to Patrick and says,

“All right, we can go now.”

In three or four blocks, we get to meet a handful of homeless people. Kevin introduces us to all of them in the same way,

“Good morning—he knew them all by name. I want you to meet my new friends, Patrick and Ingo. The two of them and their friend are starting a food collection for us and our dogs. Some of the kids may come directly to you with the food, or they will leave it with me, and I can send it to you with my Pooch. Or you can visit me and get some that way.”

“God bless you, and thank you very much” is pretty much what we hear back from all of them.

I show my respect—to the delight of all of them—with my new military salute. It’s not lost on them. They all have a good laugh, and I hope I brighten their otherwise dark day.

We get close enough to the park to send Kevin back and do our patrol job.

“Kevin, Ingo and I have to go now. Bye. We’ll see you tomorrow, hopefully,” says Patrick, and we walk away.

Patrick, who took a photo of Pooch with my vest on earlier meeting his friends, takes a picture of Kevin

“I can’t wait to show this to Jim and Lani and the kids. They’re going to love it.” Patrick is thrilled that our plan is working.

We get home, and Patrick is right. Jim can’t believe that we included our homeless man and his dog to help distribute food.

*

At about 6 pm, we meet Lani, who comes straight from work to the Columbus Circle entry of Central Park. The plan for tonight is Jim’s talk with Mr. Callahan, and after that the gang meet.

“Good to see you, boys.” Lani, all dressed up and in high heels, walks fast toward us. She hugs Jim and bends down to scratch and kiss me. We start walking north toward the Dakota.

“You look very nice, Miss Bellamy, I am quite impressed,” says Jim, who’s looking at her head to toe. “I had no idea that intern architects dress up for work.”

Lani laughs with all her heart, throws her head slightly back, and says,

“Oh, don’t be fooled by my outfit. I had a client meeting for the hospital project I’m working on. I usually dress casually and when I have a construction site visit, I wear jeans.”

“You had a client meeting? I thought you are just an intern,” says Jim, confused.

“Well, I know I don’t look like somebody would trust me with their millions of dollars. But the Veterinarian Hospital I am building is my diploma project, and I’m the project architect.” Lani quickly changes the subject.

“I got another call from Officer Goodman early afternoon. They have the ransom woman’s identity and her address in Queens. I gave him the handler’s name from Bella’s mom’s list. He is Mortimer Knepper from Queens.”

“That’s great. We’re making progress,” says Jim, who knows Lani changed the subject, but lets her get away with it.

Jim is such a nice guy.

“So, Knepper probably comes by subway, twice a day, to walk Mr. Callahan’s dog. Wow!”

After a few blocks, we can see the big and fancy Dakota building before 72nd Street on the park’s west side. Jim tells Lani that John Lennon of the Beatles lived in this building and somebody shot him in the Dakota arcade. **DWG 11****

“Wow, I didn’t know that. When was that, Jim?”

“Back in December 1980.”

We’re in front of the Dakota building. The gate looks like iron lace. Jim appears no bigger than a toy next to the gigantic entrance. He goes to talk to the doorman while we wait outside. I see him walk with

the doorman into the building lobby, and we see him talking on the house phone and then walking to the elevator.

Lani and I are waiting outside. A few minutes later, a man walks into the building, and the doorman comes over to us.

“That man who walked in is the handler for Mr. Callahan’s dog. Do you want to talk to him?”

“Oh, no, thank you. Jim will talk to him when he meets him upstairs.”

A few minutes later, Jim comes out of the elevator, and the handler man gets in and goes up.

“Cora’s handler walked in as you were coming out. He went up,” says Lani.

“Wow, I don’t even know what to say. I’m overwhelmed. Mr. Callahan is a nice, older man, and Cora is a beautiful and well-trained dog. He showed me pictures of some of her wins. Her handler is our guy.”

“Are you saying that you are sure his handler stole Missy?” asks Lani, terrified.

“I know, it’s crazy, but I’m 100% sure. What is going on here?”

“Okay,” said Lani looking at her watch. “We barely have enough time to make the roof meet with the gang.”

We start a power walk toward our house.

I am distraught because I can see a very dark scenario in this situation. I wish I could speak, but I can’t. I must figure out how to make Lani and Jim understand what I am thinking.

Jim looks worried and confused. “What can a man like Callahan have to do with the abduction of two dogs?”

“Jim, what did you discuss with Callahan?” Lani insists on finding out more.

“I told him I live in the neighborhood, and that Sunday morning, somebody stole my dog and another female on 5th Avenue—both dogs registered in the Westminster Show. I only wanted to warn him that his Cora may be in danger of being dognapped.”

“What did he say?”

“He said he didn’t walk his dog and pointed to his cane. He said his handler is more than capable of keeping Cora safe. He also told me that the handler works with a groomer and a trainer to have Cora in top shape for the show. Mr. Callahan has promised him a \$10,000 bonus if Cora wins her category.”

“Oh, my ... the bandit handler is eliminating the competition so that he can get the \$10,000 bonus.” Lani’s face is in an expression of total disgust.

At this moment, I regret that we didn’t get closer to the handler when the doorman offered to let us talk to him. I could have smelled him and would have known more.

“You may be right, and I am sure this is the guy.”

I walked in front of Lani and sat in front of her. I stared at her, not knowing how to make her understand that I have a plan.

“Look at Ingo, look how agitated and upset he is. I wonder what he’s thinking. Let’s rush back to meet with the kids on the roof, and we can brainstorm after.

It’s a beautiful night in New York. We can see many of the little lights in the dark sky, and it is not hot, but not cold either. As we get closer to home, the buildings become smaller, and there are many food stores. We love it here. I am enjoying the walk, and I hear Jim being romantic.

“It’s a lovely night, isn’t it? Look at the stars peeking down on us from the darkness of the sky and all these terraces full of folks having dinner before going to the theater. I love the West Side, especially our area, Hell’s Kitchen.”

“I agree, Jim. Also, the rents are decent, you can walk almost anywhere, and we have all these small food stores and restaurants.”

When we get to the roof, there are no pigeons on site. **DWG 12**

Lee and Max are already there with the beautiful Dona, who’s getting a good brushing. She gets up and comes to greet me. She always smells like she just came from the groomers. What a dame!

One by one, the gang shows up for the meet. Suzi and Matt are talking about the costumes for the Halloween Party at the school.

“Suzi, I see how you want to come as a Geisha for the party, but what costume are you planning for Hiro?”

“I was thinking Samurai, but I’m not sure they even let us bring our dogs. You know, all those younger kids, some are afraid of dog—”

“I will be Friar Tuck, I think, and if they let us bring the dogs, I will put a wicked hat on Maya, a belt with the buckle on the side. Suzi, why don’t you come as Maid Marian?” Matt’s face is glowing with the excitement of his idea.

“I may take you up on that, we’ll see.”

“Hi Lani, Jim, Ingo. Are we late?” The sweet Matt and Maya come to say hello to us.

“No, don’t worry. The bigger kids are not here yet,” says Lani.

Soon, Bella and Storm arrive, still dressed in school clothes, and the two big dogs start looking all around, to see if there are any pigeons left.

I may be the gang leader, but I know enough to be quite respectful of the big boys. I greet them. They want to know what I think of the job they did chasing the dirty birds.

“Hi, everybody,” says Bella, “they kept us late. We had a school paper meeting before the holidays.

“Oh, are both of you on the staff of the school paper?” Lani seems pleasantly surprised that Storm is part of extra-curricular activity.

“Yes, I do page layout, and Bella is one of the editors.”

“Good for you, guys.”

Everybody shows up for the roof meet except for Patrick.

Bella asks, “Patrick is not coming?”

“No, Bella, he’s home keeping Doogie company,” says Jim.

The children are chatting away, and Lani walks among them and says,

Now that we are all here, let’s give you the latest information.

“We are sure that Missy’s thief is the handler of the Cora dog. Officer Goodman has the ransom woman’s name and address, and we have the handler’s name. We don’t have any proof they stole the dogs yet. Officer Goodman is involved with this case as a courtesy to Ingo, who helped him last year to catch a thief. The police can’t do and won’t do anything until they have some proof. They have much bigger cases in the City requiring their attention, so it’s up to us. We will have to find some proof,” Lani reports to the children.

“Babe, you really hit the nail on the head,” whispered Jim to her.

The dogs do it again. They stare at me, vocalizing all sorts of questions, and I identify for them the handler as the man Bella photographed.

“So, we’re focusing on the handler, right?” Storm asks before he continues. “How do we get those canvas saddlebags, Lani? We made a list of stores and little restaurants in the area to go collect food. Here’s the list,” and Storm hands the list to Lani.

“Cool, guys. Good job. Look, you all have my cell phone number. Later tonight, I’ll email Bella a sketch with the measurements you need to take of your dogs. Bella, please send them the sketch. Please, send me

the dog's measurements and mark the dog's name. I'll work with Patrick on tailoring them, and I'll sew them for you guys."

"And I can get some paint and put the text on them," says Jim.

"Jim, if you need help with that, let me know. I do lots of graffiti, you know," Storm says with pride.

Jim laughs a little and says,

"Thank you, Storm. Show me some of your work one day, but these signs need to be easily legible."

"That's it, guys. But remember, Do Not Approach or Talk to the handler man under any circumstances. I want all of you to mark the morning or evening time when he takes Cora out. If any of you happen to see him leave The Dakota after the walk, especially in the morning—so this is for you, Bella and Storm—see how he goes home. On foot or a bus, subway, whatever. Okay?"

"Goodnight," said Suzi.

"Goodnight, guys. See you all tomorrow night."

Chapter Ten



Work for a Good Cause

-Late Wednesday & Thursday

Jim, I know it's late, and you need to have dinner and prepare for tomorrow, but could you come in for a minute? I want to take some photos of Ingo and his measurements so I can sketch the pattern I have to send Bella." With that, she opens the apartment door, and in we go.

"Have a seat, please. What can I get you to drink?"

"Seltzer for me, Lani," says Jim.

I sit down on the little sofa next to Jim, and Lani looks funny at me and says, "Ingo, are you sitting there as if you're also expecting a drink."

"Bow," and I nod.

"Do you believe that? Patrick has created a monster. Now I'll have to have polite conversations with my dog, for crying out loud." Lani laughs.

I haven't seen her this amused in a long time and I like it. I need to learn more because it makes her laugh. I love it when she laughs.

She brings me a bowl of water and holds it up to me on the sofa, so I can splatter on the floor while I drink. Then Lani takes a piece of

paper, a tailor's measuring tape, a pencil and starts to make sketches, takes a few profile photos of me and measurements.

"Lani, I think you need to put a strap across the chest of the dogs to keep the saddlebags in place," says Jim. "I told Pat also, and he put one on Ingo's old saddlebag.

"You're right, but I think around the neck and at the waist is better. The neckband won't let it slide back, and the one on the waist will not allow it to move forward because the chest is much deeper."

Lani, my expert tailoress, appears to have given it already a lot of thought.

"Sounds like you know what you're doing," says Jim with admiration.

"Oh, I made my first dress in an emergency once when I was nine years old. It was for a pageant, and my mom was not home to make it for me, so I did it. It wasn't great, but it worked.

"Is that right?" Jim has a hard time hiding his amazement.

Before Jim and I leave, I snuggle next to Lani and lick her face a little.

"I know, Ingo, I miss you too, but it won't be long now. We will figure it all out. Do you want to go with Jim or stay at home with me? But remember, I have to go to work in the morning, and you'll be here alone," says Lani and waits for my answer.

I get up, and I sit next to Jim.

“Here he goes again, I swear, he understands what we are saying,” Lani says. “I better watch my mouth around him.”

“I think you’re right. Let’s see. Ingo, get your leash. We need to go,” says Jim.

Of course, I get up and get my leash. I am not a dunce, you know. DWG 12*

They look at each other and then at me.

We, boys, say our goodbyes and leave. I start having a little guilt about Lani being all alone. I am sure Lani cooks herself dinner, does the sketch for the dog’s saddlebags, and sends it to Bella to distribute to the gang.

*

In the morning, on Thursday, Lani surprises us and shows up at Jim’s house.

She had called her office and asked for a personal half-day off. She made the template for my saddlebags and obtained all the dogs’ measurements sent by the children in the morning.

“Hi guys, this is now a four-boys house—Jim, Patrick, Ingo, and Doogie. Where is the little guy?”

“Hi Lani, you sound excited. What’s happening?” Jim is surprised by my master’s level of energy after working late the night before.

“I want to get Pat started on the saddlebag templates. I understand he wants to help. I will show him how to apply each dog’s measurements to my pattern.”

“Do you think he can do that? I don’t know that I could,” says Jim.

“Oh, I’m not worried. I’ll help until he gets the hang of it. The other thing I wanted to say is that Officer Goodman called my cell phone this morning.”

“Anything important?”

“No, he wanted to let me know that he discussed it with his superiors and they are waiting to see if we can find any proof. Then they’ll be ready to proceed with arrests. I told him again that we’re looking for the proof and that as long as Missy is still in their hands, we fear harm may come to her if we proceed with any action against the ransom-woman.”

“Excellent, Lani.”

“Bow,” I bark and nod, but it becomes clear to me that our humans can’t do much about finding proof.

Patrick comes out of his room dressed and with wet hair.

““Good morning, Lani. Doogie is in Jim’s room, still sleeping,” reports Patrick, “I overheard your question. How come you are not at work, Lani?” Patrick heads to the kitchen, where his breakfast plate is waiting for him.

“I called them up that I’ll be a little late this morning. Let me know when you finish with breakfast, and we can talk about the saddlebag patterns.” Lani turns to Jim and jokingly says,

“Jim, I didn’t have my morning coffee on purpose, knowing I can get the best coffee in town at Jim’s café.”

I joined them in Jim's studio, where the two of them were chatting and enjoying their fresh hot and smelly drink.

When Patrick finish his food, he joined us.

"So, Lani, tell me about the saddlebags. What do we do? Can you teach me a little about how you want them done?"

"Patrick, I have all the information we need to make the saddlebags for the dogs," says Lani with enthusiasm.

"Thank you for sending me the sketch, Lani. I got it when I woke up. I gave it to a few more friends from my school to measure their dogs, too. Do you mind the additional work, Lani?"

"Not at all, if you help me," says Lani—

"Well, that was our agreement. I told Pat I am okay with the whole project and buying the materials if he does the work."

"Sure, where do you want to work?" Before Patrick gets to answer, Jim tell them,

"Please go to Pat's room, it's a long project, and we don't want to mess up the living room."

"Ingo, come with us," says Patrick. DWG 12**

The three of us go to Patrick's room, and we set up on the floor in the middle of the room.

They open a roll of wrapping paper roll backside up.

"Ingo, please go to the end of the paper and hold it down with your paws so that it won't roll up," Patrick tells me. I leave Lani's side and like a good boy, I hold the paper down.

"Good boy, Ingo, good boy."

Lani quickly shows Patrick how to put my measurements on paper and make them part of the template.

“For the neck, we make a 3” wide strap and 5” longer than the neck dimension, and two straps of 4” wide for the under the belly. One 5-6” long, and the other one, a couple of inches.”

My buddy, Doogie, arrives to see what we are doing and looking for company. He gets right on top of the paper and lies down to be close to me.

Patrick is amused by this and reaches out to pet Doogie.

“Are you helping, little guy? Thank you, good kitty.”

Lani finishes her tailoring lesson and gets off the floor.

“These will overlap with Velcro on the dog’s left side to hold the vest at the waist. And that’s it!”

“I can do that,” says Patrick. “I will put all the pieces for each vest in a separate bag and mark the dog’s name on it.”

“Pat, don’t forget to leave half an inch all around the perimeter of the pieces when you cut. I need that for sewing. I will sew a border of linen-colored tape all around for a finished look and for strength.” And with that, Lani is done, gets up, and moves to the other room to talk to Jim.

“Jim, I think he’s got it. Would you keep an eye on him while he does the first one, to make sure, please?”

She leaves the four-boy house and rushes to work.

Patrick goes right back to work on the templates. After two and a half hours of intense work, Pat is done with the gang's patterns, has something to eat, and runs to school.

"Boy, Lani has her work cut out for her. I will have to go and help her at least with the cutting of the patterns," says Jim.

*

Minutes after six in the afternoon, Pat is back, he leashes me up, and we go to Central Park for our detective evening shift.

Suzy and Matt were correct. At about 6:30, the handler and Cora come out of The Dakota and enter the park.

We walk at a safe distance behind them. At one point, I sit in front of Patrick, look him in the eyes, and then I put my front paws together, pads to pads—my code-sign for "please."

"Ingo, what do you want? What do you need, kid?" he asks because, at first, he doesn't understand. But then, I keep looking back at the man with the dog and back at Patrick.

"You want to go close to him, don't you?"

"Bow."

"You want to sniff him...right?"

"Bow."

"Then go, but be careful and come back, OK? Lani will kill me if I lose you."

"Bow."

"Is this Bow a yes, for you will come back, or is it a yes, for Lani will kill me?" asks Patrick, laughing at himself because he is having a

conversation with a dog. He leaves me leashed, but he drops it so I could go. **DWG 13**

I meander at first, sniffing the man's trail. When I get closer, I run past him and Cora, and on the way back, I stop, and he bends over to touch me. That is what I want. I want to get a good whiff of his scent. Then I run away.

They continue their walk, and I return to Pat, who is hiding behind a tree. We return home, but Jim is gone. We find a note from him, "I will come back with dinner for you guys and let you know what the kids think about the food collection's success. Lani will stay home and sew some more tonight."

Patrick reads the note and calls Jim immediately.

"Hi, Dad. Yeah, I even took Ingo for an afternoon patrol. Yeah, I got that, but I want to come with Ingo to the roof meeting. Is that okay? Please buzz me in when we get there. I'll do the usual two long and two short, so you know it's me.

Chapter Eleven



Work of Love

-still Thursday afternoon

When Lani returns from work late afternoon, she is amazed by Patrick's progress. Together with Jim, they pick up all the bags with cut parts and rush back to our house to start pinning and sewing them.

"Let's go fast, or we'll be late for the roof meet under the moon. It's so romantic, like in a storybook," says Jim.

"I know, I find it romantic too, but I don't have anything new for the gang. I think I should call Bella and tell her that there is no meeting tonight, that we are working on the saddlebags for the dogs, and that we will see them tomorrow night."

"Lani, I'll meet the gang, and Pat and Ingo want to come too. I'll let Pat run the meeting, and it'll be only for few minutes and then come back to help you. I want them to know that Pat is our delegate and give Pat some advice.

"Sure thing, that's a great idea, tell him to stop by and bring Bella with him. I'll be waiting to hear their reaction."

*

Patrick and I get to the house early, and Lani opens the door and asks us in. I see that Lani moved her desktop computer out of the way

and set up the sewing machine. She has a big spool of the red cotton edging band and has a blanket set up for Jim on the living room floor to do the pinning. Jim puts the black and red writing on the parts and pins pieces of fabric together. Lani sews them together and adds the edging—a mini-assembly line.

We get to the roof, the three of us boys. The gang is all present, and Jim tells everybody,

“Good evening, everybody, Lani is downstairs, working on the saddlebags, and I am helping her. The only news we have today is the successful launch of the food collection project. I will leave you with Pat to tell you and show you pictures.”

Ready to get off the roof, Jim turns to Pat.

“Please don’t forget what Lani asked you about Bella.” Jim leaves.

“Hi guys, you are going to totally love the saddlebags. They are awesome.” Patrick takes out his cell phone, and the kids gather around him.

My gang and I are all gathered around Rex, who’s having a stare-down with a humongous dog on a penthouse terrace across the street. Nobody is barking but the moment is tense. Being so many of us, we intimidate the big Dane, and he walks in.

Patrick tells the children about our visit with Kevin O’Connor.

“My homeless friend is Kevin and his dog is Pooch. Take a look at these photos. Kevin introduced us to some other homeless people in the area and they got all excited to hear we are helping them out. So,

when you have food for them, you can give it to Kevin or spread it around yourselves to the other people.”

“Max, Matt and I can’t see. We’re not tall enough,” says Suzi.

“Here, Matt, take my cell and show it to them.”

“Okay. A few friends of mine from school asked for saddlebags, too, for their dogs. After we have them all, and after we find Missy, we need to ask Storm and Bella to help us figure out a plan, so we don’t all go to the same food stores—Storm interrupts Patrick and says,

“I made a list, Lani has it, I can work with Bella to assign kids to areas of the neighborhood. The younger kids will go just around the house, and us bigger kids can go further.”

“Storm, you’ll be the boss of this.”

“Pat, why do you think Lani wants to see me?” Bella asks, slightly concerned.

“I think she wants to know if later tonight you can help her with the sewing.”

“I can do that, sure.”

“That’s it for tonight. We all meet tomorrow night,” says Patrick, and they all leave.

Pat knocks on our door, let’s Bella in, says goodbye, and we go home.

*

At about nine in the evening, Jim goes to buy more ham, cheese, and rolls for the morning from the corner store.

“Your boy and a dog, not yours, but similar to Missy, came this morning asking for food donations,” says the store owner.

“Look what they did with it.” Jim shows him the photo of Kevin and his dog, walking away with Ingo’s vest on him with food for the street dogs.

“I’ll tell you. Kids nowadays are so smart. They’re something else. You have a good boy, Sir,” says the store owner. “I’ll spread the word to my friends to donate.”

“We’re making these bags for about 8-10 dogs, so, thank you, we can use some directions from you as to where to send the kids with their dogs.”

“It’s best to come by for food in the evening, around 7.”

*

Jim brings us lasagna from the pizza place.

“Hi, guys, dinner is served. Come and get it, you too, Ingo,” Jim calls to us.

While we’re eating, Jim tells us that Bella is with Lani, helping her with the sewing work.

“Bella told Lani that she went to visit her grandmother in Guadalajara, Mexico during the summer, and she learned from her a lot about sewing. The girl is truly excited to help. She watched me for some ten to fifteen minutes, and she took over when I left. Great young lady.”

“I have to tell you, Dad, that the meeting with the kids went well. I showed them the pictures. Aside from that, Bella and Storm confirm

that the handler takes Cora out in the mornings, between 8:30 and 9 a.m. Matt and Suzi and Max and Lee say that he usually walks her around 6:30 in the evening.”

“That’s good to know,” Pat.

Patrick leans back on his chair and looks at me. I want more lasagna, but there isn’t any left. I sit in front of Patrick, and I put my right front paw in my mouth and whine a little for him to look at me.

DWG 14

“Dad, please watch Ingo. He’s showing me what I taught him, the sign for the word food. He wants more food. He’s still hungry. I’ll give him an egg.”

Atta boy. I think this sign language works well. I get my raw egg and love it. It’s just what I needed. Thank you, Patrick. I am ready for a nap now.

I go to take a nap, and Doogie comes and snuggles with me. He loves it if I spoon him while he sleeps because I keep him warm. He also likes to play, climbing my hairy ears. I look like I have a large earring. I can walk around, and he hangs on for dear life. He’s quite my favorite toy now.

*

In the morning, Patrick and I do something different. I don’t have my saddlebag anymore, so Pat gets his backpack and makes a large color print of yesterday’s photo. We go door to door in his building,

asking for food donations. We got bananas, apples, four muffins, some bread, some yogurt, and two containers of leftovers.

We take our harvest to Kevin at the corner, and he and Pooch are thrilled and thankful. The man puts apples and muffins in the dog's bag, and before the dog makes it half a block on the way to his friend, four street dogs are coming toward him. We see them carefully stick their noses into the bags and get food for themselves. It is a beautiful scene. I can't believe how well-behaved these poor dogs are.

"Ingo, I think we need to tell Lani to make an extra-strong bag for this wonderful dog. The one I made won't last long," says Patrick, taking photographs of this impressive scene.

*

"How did you guys do?" Fred, the doorman, asks when we return to the house.

"Look at this, Fred." Patrick shows him the photos he'd taken.

"Poor folks. Thank God for nice kids like you," says Fred and returns to the door for the incoming guests.

Jim loves the photos too. He asks Patrick to send them to him, then sends them to Lani and calls her.

"Good morning, Lani. How are you, tired? How late did you work last night, and how late did Bella stay to help you? Oh, you must have had only five hours of sleep. Did you get the photos I sent you? I'll wait. Yeah, all of them are incredible. I think we need to make another bag-vest for Pooch. The one Patrick made is probably going to get destroyed soon. Yeah, okay. See you later."

Jim tells us that Lani worked till 2am, and Bella helped her until midnight. Lani takes the afternoon off work to go home and finish all the dogs' saddlebags for Pooch and Pat's school friends.

At about three o'clock, Lani calls Jim and asks him to help her. She wants to finish the bags for the weekend's big food collection test.

It's late, and we're starving. It's just about eight when Jim comes home from Lani's, and we have a Chinese take-out dinner. He brings us up to date on the happenings of the day. He tells us that, in the morning, when Lani saw the photos taken by Patrick, she called Doug—Matt's father, the newspaperman—and sent him the pictures. She suggested that Doug should write a little story about the gang's food collection program in the paper. Doug asked if Matt is part of it, and he was happy to hear he was. Soon we'll know when the story comes out.

"Yay, we're going to be in the newspapers," an excited Patrick says. "Maybe people knowing about it will get more kids to do it, and it will be much easier to get food donated. We can have the kids carry a laminated copy of the article when they collect the food. That's great, Dad." Patrick is jumping out of his skin with joy.

"Now, look what Lani sent for Ingo," and Jim takes out a bag, a great-looking saddlebag with red fabric piping all around the sides and at the top edge of the big pockets.

"It's gorgeous, Dad, and your writing is beautiful too. You guys did a fantastic job. Did she get the gang's vests done, too?" asked Patrick.

I go to Patrick and push my nose in the saddleback he had in his lap. He understands that I want to try it on and sets it on me. I can feel how much better the fit is. I start doing a few slow laps in the living room, to let them admire my new ‘service vest.’

“Yes, Patrick, you should have seen the joy on the gang children and how excited the dogs were when I gave them their saddlebags. They all fit perfectly; you did a fantastic job with the patterns, son. Lani is very pleased and sends you a big thank you.”

“Why didn’t she come with you, Dad?”

“She hasn’t finished, even with Bella’s help. The two of them had a good time together. Lani told me that Bella wants to become an architect. You can imagine the chat the girls had. Well, she still has to make one, a very strong one, for Pooch and two more for your colleagues at school. She wants to make sure all are ready for the weekend.”

Happy to be able to keep his promises to his school friends, Patrick is still studying the artistry details of the saddleback work.

“She is a good girl, Dad.”

“Patrick, she is not a girl. She’s a woman, and it—”

Patrick interrupts, “Dad, first, you called her ‘a girl’ when you said about Bella and Lani, ‘the chat the girls had.’ Second, Lani told all the kids to call her Lani, not Miss Lani, because in dog years she’s only four years old,” says Patrick to his dad.

“You mean Lani is 28 years old? I thought she was even younger than that, but I guess to go for six years to university and all that I can see how she could be 28.”

“How old are you, Dad?”

“I’m 35. Your mom and I got married at 22. Way too young, we didn’t know who we were and what we wanted from life. That’s why we had trouble later—Jim’s life story is rudely interrupted by Patrick.

“Look at the Ingo parade, Dad.” Patrick turns to Jim and, with an intense and curious face, asks him,

“You don’t know her age, Dad? You didn’t ask her?”

“Patrick, only kids tell you their name and their age. It’s not polite to ask a girl or a woman how old she is. They are sensitive about it.”

Chapter Twelve—The Spontaneous Hero

- Friday morning

It's already been five days since Missy got dog-napped, and I don't know how or when we will find her. I am sure everybody shares my fears and impatience, but nobody is talking about it. In a way, this makes it less real.

This morning, Patrick and I are going out again and watch for the handler. I have no idea what we expect to find out, but these are our orders, so we go. Who knows, maybe today we can make some progress. I somehow feel that what we are doing is not going to work. There must be another way. We need a trick. We need to hit him in his soft spot, and that seems to be purebred dogs, apparently.

On the way to the park, we stop by the corner store, where we got the food donation. The owner tells us that Jim showed him the pictures Patrick took the other day, and he gave us a small bag with breakfast food.

We drop it off with Kevin, and Patrick tells him that we couldn't get them enough food for the whole group because we're on a special mission today to find Missy.

"Young man, can we help? Do you have a picture of her? My dog and I can keep an eye out for her," Kevin says.

"Thank you very much, but we think she's somewhere in Queens. We have a suspect, and we're going to follow him right now."

*

October is one of the best New York weather months. It is sunny but not too hot, and it rarely rains. We enter the park at West 65th Street to avoid accidentally meeting them face to face on the sidewalk. Patrick is making sure that we're deep enough in the park, not to be seen from Central Park West, yet close enough to see them when they come out of The Dakota. DWG 14*

Of course, the walker and Cora come out, as the smaller children said, minutes after 9 am. They cross the avenue and enter the park. We keep our distance the whole time. Nothing special or out of the ordinary happens until they finish their walk and exit the park at 72nd Street. Suddenly, the handler stops on the sidewalk on the avenue's park side. He seems to be looking around and waiting for somebody.

And who do you think shows up? The ransom-woman. They kiss, talk for a few seconds, and then the handler crosses the avenue with Cora and enters The Dakota.

We have them together for the first time. This gets my juices going. My little dog's mind is on fire.

"Ingo, do you think she's waiting for him? I'm taking photos of them together, but it's hard to tell if they are recognizable at this distance," Patrick tells me.

I hear Patrick talking to me, but my mind is working out a plan. This is the man who stole Missy. I know it. The only way I can find her

is for these evil people to take me to her. I need to do something and do it now!

I sit in front of Patrick and stare at him.

"Ingo, what's the problem, kid? What do you want?"

I look in the direction of the woman waiting on the sidewalk, then back at him, and again. Then, I put my paws together, signaling him the word "please." I can almost hear Pat's brain wheels turning. I look one more time at the woman, still with my paws in a *prayer* or a *please* position.

"Do you want me to let you go closer to her?"

A silent "bow" and the head nod confirm what I wanted from Patrick, precisely.

"Ingo, don't you do anything stupid, please. Promise?" To be funny, Patrick put his "paws" together also.

"Bow."

Patrick is getting ready to let go of my leash, but I touch my pendant with my paw, pushing it away from my chest, and he understands that I want it removed. I don't want to lose it in case the thieves take my collar off. It's a talisman from Lani's mom.

Against his better judgment, Patrick removes my medallion from my collar, lets go of my leash, and I go undercover.

With my leash trailing behind, I run to her. I start acting all friendly with her. She finally picks up my leash, turns around a little to see if anybody is looking for me, and then starts walking with me back and forth, still waiting for Morty, the handler.

Several minutes later, he comes out of the building and is surprised to see her with a dog. He meets her, and they start walking toward Columbus Circle, arm in arm.

"What's with the dog? Where did he come from?" Morty asks.

"I think he's lost and asking for help. He looks like he hasn't been lost for long," says the ransom woman.

"We'll take him home and decide what to do about him later."

Patrick is watching in disbelief how I am walking away with the dog thieves. He can't believe he allowed it to happen. But I like when I hear them say they are 'taking me home,' his home. That's all I want.

Patrick is watching in disbelief how I am walking away with the dog thieves. He can't believe he allowed it to happen.

*

I know Patrick well by now, and I have a good idea of what he is doing. But what I am telling you word by word his version of events, as he discussed it much later with Lani.

Half-panicked, he calls his father to come immediately with his car to help.

"Dad, don't be mad. I have pictures of Morty and the ransom-woman. Now we have the proof they know each other. But Ingo lost his patience and begged me to let him go to them—"

Jim interrupts, "What? You lost Ingo? Lani will never speak to us again, ever." Jim sounds very upset.

"Dad, I'll give you details when you get here, but the short of it is that Ingo is with them on purpose, and they are walking down Central

Park West. I think they have a car parked around here. Please bring your car as soon as possible."

He keeps his dad on the phone, telling him everything that's happening.

"They turned right on 65th Street. Let's meet on 65th between Columbus and Central Park West. Please, look for me, so that you won't miss me. I'm inside the park, not the sidewalk, walking from 72nd to 65th. Come fast, please, they have Ingo. I don't want them to get away."

*

So here I am, in the company of the two dog-thieves, listening to their conversation.

"We need to drop off the dog first, and then I have to make a few phone calls. After that, we can go out for lunch," says Morty.

"Isn't he a beautiful one?" asks the ransom-woman.

"He sure is Westminster caliber." Morty is looking at me with the critical eye of a specialist. "I think this is the same dog that came to us yesterday, in the park."

I'm thinking to myself, he's a bad man, but stupid, he's not.

"After I dropped you off, I parked in the next block," says the ransom-woman.

After we turned to the right and walk one block, we cross a big road. I think it's an Avenue. I see Jim's red station wagon, and he turns right toward the park on the street we just walked. He saw me, and I saw him. I'm sure Patrick called him, and they're going to follow us. Pat and Jim are bright, and I know I can count on them to help. They know

I am doing this to get to Missy. My impulsive little plan seems to be working.

We get to this shiny silver-colored car. They put me on the back seat and start the vehicle. We are driving back toward Central Park, and then probably they are going to where they live. It can't be very far since Morty comes twice a day to walk Cora.

We cross the Avenue and I see Jim's red Subaru pull over to the side. Patrick is getting in. All I have to do is get my face in the back window to make sure they see me.

I am sure Jim recognizes the woman—he had met her before, in person—and they have to see me now in the rear window.

DWG -15

Patrick sees me and now he and Jim follow us to the house where they keep Missy.

I look back from time to time and see Patrick talking on the phone. Bet you he's calling Lani and telling her what's happening. Poor Lani must be anxious and crying. But she knows me, trusts me, and after a good cry, she'll be fine. I'm a big boy.

It is a long trip, longer and slower than I thought. In the other direction, the cars are bumper to bumper. I can walk faster than those cars move in this traffic.

A joke, more precisely a straight liner, crosses my mind. I know this is no joking time, but I can't help it. Let's see how it sounds to you.

“I finally have a tail.”

What do you think? Not that funny? It sure sounds better and funnier in my head.

*

I wish I'd known it at the time, but, later I found out what my guys and Lani were doing. Lani called Officer Goodman. Soon, he and Detective Jacob Spade were on their way to Queens to help out with the case. Lani kept them informed by phone about our location. She asked Patrick to keep her informed every few minutes.

*

The woman and Morty are not talking much, but I hear them say, "Too bad he's not an American Cocker. We could have paired them and make a lot of money on puppies," says Morty.

"Or we could wait to see if anybody offers a reward for him. Maybe we can make some money that way."

"Yeah, like the way you handled the other dog reward ..." says Morty sarcastically.

I'm looking back, and I can see Jim and Patrick two cars behind. I'm not scared of what could happen to me, but I am nervous about seeing Missy. I know it in my heart. We're going to where she is.

*

"Dad, it's getting late," says Patrick.

"They're on side streets now and should be stopping soon. When we get closer, please note their license number and take a photo of them when they get out of the car. We'll park nearby, give Lani the address for the police, and see how soon the police arrive.

*

The car stops. The street is full of row-houses set about five yards back from the sidewalk, with little gardens and gated small iron fences in the front.

I look back quickly, see Jim's car slow down, pass us by, and turn onto the next street.

I hope they saw us. Maybe they're looking for parking. The two crooks get out of the car, and the woman opens the car's back door and grabs my leash. I'm going to see Missy any minute now. I don't care if they lock me up with her. At least I found her. It's all I can think about.

I get out of the car and stroll across the street with the woman. We are going to a small entry gate. I start piddling on the sidewalk to leave a trace, and when we get to the small entry gate, I lift my hind leg and make a whiz as long as I can. There are a few reasons for that.

DWG 16

One – I'm stalling. I want my guys to see me and know which house it is.

Two -- If not, they'll see the pee marking at the gate.

Three -- I was in the car for a long time, and I don't know when and where I'll have my next chance.

I look down the street, and my guys are still nowhere to be seen.

We go through the gate, then several steps up and enter the house. So, this is Morty's house. Well, now we know where he lives.

I'm inside, but I don't smell any dog here.

What if this idea of mine is wrong? What if Missy is not here, after all? At least Jim and Patrick are around to save my sorry tush.

"Take him downstairs. I have to make a few phone calls," says Morty.

"Shall I open the back door to the yard?"

"No, they have the dog door. They'll be fine till we return."

"OK, come on, doggie, let's go." The ransom-woman takes me downstairs to a half-basement.

It's dark and cold. She yanks on a pull chain, a dim ceiling light turns on, giving the room a faint orange color. Missy is not here. The woman removes my leash, hangs it on a hook on the wall, gives me a bowl of water, and climbs back up the stairs. She closes the door, and I hear her lock it with a key.

Okay, now what? I am starting to think I made a mistake. It was a long shot, but I had to try it. It's not like anybody had a better plan.

I look around and see that there's another water bowl on the other side of the basement. I also see a small rectangular thin line of light in the door to the outside, and I go to inspect.

When I sniff it, I'm stunned. I got a smell—Missy's smell. I am sure she was here, but where is she now?

I sniff again, and, in my excitement, I push too hard, and the thing moves. I pass through the thin rectangle of light. When I'm part-way through, I turn back to look at it.

It's a tiny door within a door. Wow, I've never seen one of these, but we don't live in a house with a yard.

I'm still looking at this magic opening to the outdoors when I hear a soft whine behind me.

Chapter Thirteen—Hotter, Hotter, Hot

-Friday

Am I hallucinating from stress? Am I dreaming?

I turn around, and Missy is sitting in the yard not far from me. I freeze. I don't know what to do. The longest few seconds ever. I thought about Missy every day and daydreamed about her, but I'd never figured out what to do when I see her.

She doesn't even know how important she is to me and that I love her. DWG 17

Her eyes look sad, and her body scrunched with fear tell me how scared she is. I want to comfort her, so I get close to her and sniff her face. She gets up, and I can see her little knob tail starting to move. I think she's happy to see me. Her tail wags faster and faster. This is her doggish way of telling me,

“You found me. I'm so glad. I'm so scared, Ingo.”

“My dear Missy, I missed you so,” I whisper to her. “Jim and Patrick know where we are, don't worry, they're going to free us soon.”

“Oh, you came with my masters. Thank you, Ingo. You're so smart and brave. Let's go in the sun, over there. I'm a little cold,” and Missy walks toward a sunny spot in the yard with nice thick grass.

I follow her and we're in bright sunlight now. Yes, it's better here. We have so much to tell each other. Where to start?

Missy starts to whine again. “I’m so scared and lonely. I’ve been here six days. I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. I am so glad you are here. There was another girl dog here for two days in the beginning, but they cut a lot of her hair off. Look in the grass, over there, and you can still see some of her hair.” Missy is crying as she tells me this, and she hides her face with her golden paws.

“Missy, we saved that dog. Her name is Ginger—”

Missy interrupted, “Yeah, Ginger, is she all right?”

“Sure, she’s with her master now,” I tell her, and that gives Missy a lot of comfort and hope.

“Ingo, how did you get to New York? You lived very far away, a long time ago, when we visited Jim’s sister in that country. I don’t remember the name of it—”

“Morania, the place was called Morania, Missy.”

“Yes, it was Morania. How did you get here?”

“Oh, it’s a long story. My master Lani got a job here, and we moved more than a year ago.”

“I remember her. She was a skinny girl, and I liked her. I thought of you many, many times,” says Missy as she curls up in the thick grass warmed by the sun.

I spoon her, and I’m in Heaven. If the world ends today, I don’t even care. I found my Missy.

With the sun on our faces and joy in our little dogs’ souls, we fall asleep.

*

You might think that the following part of the story is a dream because we just fell asleep. No, it is not a dream.

Listening to the humans talk about the events taking place while I was not around proved very interesting. Every one of them had a slightly different version of the events. I guess human eyes are not as precise as dogs' noses. We process scent information more accurately. However, our sense of time is not the same as humans'. That's not to say all humans have the same ability to estimate time. What feels to Jim like five minutes, Patrick thinks it took more like fifteen minutes. Anyway, this part of the story I gathered later, listening to our humans reminiscing about the police events and the rescue.

*

So, Mortimer makes his phone calls—as he said he would—and then he and the ransom-woman leave the house.

Jim and Patrick have a little trouble finding parking, and they must do the New York special— “go around the block and try again.” By the time they arrive on foot, the villains' car is gone.

“Dad, they're gone. Do you know which house it is?” Patrick asks his father.

“This is the spot where they parked. It could be any of these houses around here,” says Jim looking around.

“Look, a fresh whiz line here and a puddle at the gate.”

“Yeah, you're right. I can't believe how smart that Ingo is. He marked the house for us. Incredible.” Jim calls out loudly,

“Ingo, Ingo!”

Patrick calls out, too,
“Ingo!”

*

I hear them, like in a dream, and I think it is a dream until I hear Patrick’s voice calling my name. I don’t want to startle Missy, so I whisper close to her face that I’ll have to bark loudly.

“It’s Okay, Ingo. I love the sound of your voice. Was that Patrick?” Missy tilts her head a little for more room under her ear so that she can hear better.

I get up, walk to the back of the yard facing the street and do what Patrick taught me:

"Bow, bow, bow, Boow, Boow, Boow, bow, bow, bow..." I wait for a few seconds, and then I do the SOS in Morse code again.

It’s the human equivalent for Tit, Tit, Tit, Tat, Tat, Tat, Tit, Tit, Tit—the Morse code for a distress signal.

As I find out later from chats, this is what goes on with the humans, out, on the street, and Missy says to me,

“Yeah, that is Patrick.”

*

“Dad, did you hear that? That’s Ingo. He barked SOS in Morse code.”

“Patrick, how would he know how to do that?”

“I taught him that, Dad. I am sure it’s him.”

“Ingo, it’s okay, we’re coming,” I hear Patrick yelling at the top of his lungs.

"Dad, it’s almost 11:30. I need to get to school soon," says Patrick.

Officer Goodman and Detective Inspector Spade pull up in their official white and blue Chevy Impala patrol car. They’d seen Jim and Patrick on the street and stop the vehicle, leaving their police lights on.

“So, where are the suspects and the dog?” Goodman asks jovially.

“Gentlemen, I am so glad you are here,” says Jim as he shakes their hands.

“They’d left by the time we found a parking place. But Patrick found this new dog whiz line, and we are sure this is the house. Ingo sent us an SOS in Morse code...”

“You’re joking, right?” says Inspector Spade, who doesn’t know Ingo.

“You don’t believe us?” asks Patrick with a wicked look on his face.

“Of course not. How would a dog know SOS in Morse code?” the inspector says, amused, and looks at Goodman for feedback. Skillfully, Goodman avoids eye contact with him. He knows better.

“I can prove it,” says Patrick.

“Okay, show me.”

Officer Goodman is staying out of it. He has enough experience with Ingo to bet against his abilities.

“I’ll call his name and after I call it twice, you, please give the police siren one short burst,” says Patrick, setting up Ingo for sending the SOS barked message again.

“Ingo, Ingo!”

Waaaaaahhhhh, the police siren pierces the late morning silence of the neighborhood.

"bow, bow, bow, Boow, Boow, Boow, bow, bow, bow..." I bark right back my SOS.

“Incredible. Nobody will believe me. People will think I’ve lost my mind if I tell them about this,” Inspector-detective Spade confesses, his eyes wide open in amazement.

“We can’t do anything if they’re not home, but at least we know his name and where he lives,” Officer Goodman says. We’ll be back early tomorrow morning.

“Here. Let me show you the photo. I took this several minutes ago when they got out of the car. It’s not that good, but it’s proof that they know each other,” says Patrick.

“This is good. Now we can confront her with the evidence that she not only knows him but that they work together. We’re on the right track,” the detective says, snapping out of his amazement.

“We need to go back to the City now. My son has school this afternoon. But we can tell you that the man is the handler of a show dog, and he goes to Manhattan twice a day to walk her. At about 9 am and 6 pm, he starts the walk. We got to go. Goodbye!”

They walk away, and Jim tells Patrick,

“I’ll buy you some lunch on the way to school.”

Jim and Patrick walk to the car and start back to the City.

“Watch for a nice deli store. I’ll get you a tuna sandwich—”

Patrick interrupts, “with onions and celery, Dad, please.”

“Patrick, this is New York. All tuna salad has onion and celery, or nobody in NY would ever buy it.”

“On rye and with pickles on the side,” adds Patrick.

“Cream soda?” asks the loving father.

“Yeah, sure.”

They hit the boulevard and stop at the first deli store. Jim buys lunch for Patrick, and they continue the trip.

Jim sets his hands-free cell phone and earbuds and calls Lani.

“Hi doll, we got it,” he says when Lani picked up.

“You got Ingo?” Lani asked.

“No, but we know where he is, and we think Missy is probably there, too. Goodman and a detective came, so they know.”

At that moment, the New York finest police car with the two officers pass Jim’s car and give them a short siren burst salute.

“Lani, I see their police car passing us on the way back to Manhattan. I think they’re inviting us to follow them in a high-speed escort to Patrick’s school. They know he’s running late. I have to get off now to catch up with them. I’ll call you when I get home. Bye, Lani.”

Patrick's phone rings and he tells officer Goodman what school he is going to. DWG 18

They arrive at the school only a few minutes after classes started. Officer Goodman walks in with Patrick, and he knocks on the classroom door. The teacher sees the police officer through the glass window in the door and signals him to come in.

When officer Goodman enters the classroom with Patrick, all the children gape in amazement.

"Officer, what's going on?" asks the teacher.

"I apologize, Ma'am, but Patrick is working with us on an investigation, and we detained him too long in the field. Sorry, we brought him back late for class."

"Oh, that's all right. Thank you for coming in with him, Officer. Otherwise, we would have never believed his story."

"Good day, Ma'am," and he puts his police hat back on his head and leaves.

Patrick has no books, no notebooks, and isn't dressed for school, either, but all the kids and the teachers help him throughout the day. He is their "hero," according to the story he relates later to Ingo.

Chapter Fourteen

Almost There

-Friday afternoon

Well, I'm still in Queens with Missy, so all that follows is my recollection of what I heard my humans saying. It is "hearsay" or "ghostwriting" for my ghostwriter, Lani.

Jim arrives home safely and calls Lani at work.

"Hi Lani, I'm home. Officer Goodman walked into Patrick's classroom and excused his belated arrival at school. He's a good guy. I can only picture how pumped Patrick is right now."

"Hi Jim, give me some details. But before you start. Do you have any pictures of the adventure? Send me what you have, and I will send them to Doug. This morning, he called me that his boss wants him to have an article ready for the Sunday Times. I told him about what is happening today, and he wants some pictures."

"Sure, I'll send you what I have. Let me download the photos to my photo program on my computer and adjust for quality, and I will send them right over."

"I have to say this to you. Ingo is a magic dog. There is no other way to put it."

"Tell me what he did."

"He not only planned the whole thing himself, but he also whizzed at the gate to mark the house for us. When Pat called him, Ingo

barked back the SOS Morse code that Patrick taught him,” he says with pride as if Ingo was his dog or his child.

“You don’t say...that Ingo. I’m going to buy him liverwurst tonight,” said Lani.

“Well, he won’t be home tonight...” says Jim timidly, not knowing what reaction to expect from Lani.

“What’s happening? Where is he?” Jim hears the angst in Lani’s voice.

“We’d parked the car, the police came, but the villains and their car were already gone. The police will have to find them at home. They can’t just break-in.” Jim is hoping that Lani is not going to cry or something. But then, he remembers that even though he thought she was barely 22 years old or so, just a kid, she’s 28, a young lady.

“Is Missy with him?”

“We think so.” Says Jim.

“Okay. Please send me the photos as soon as you can. Could you meet me tonight at about five at my house? I’ll leave a little early today. I have the saddlebags ready for the homeless dog and Patrick’s two colleagues.”

“Sure, Lani, and don’t worry, it will be all right. Bye!”

Jim cleans up the photos and a small video taken during the SOS dare Patrick and the detective had. He also has the recording of Ingo’s SOS Morse code reply. It will be a surprise for Lani, Patrick, and the police, who know nothing of it.

Jim is emotionally exhausted and too tired to work. He eats a little something, sends the adjusted photos and the video to Lani, and takes a nap.

They meet at Lani's a little after five o'clock and walk over to Patrick's school. At a quarter to six, when classes end, all the kids came out. Patrick gets the saddlebags for his friends and calls them,

"Jose, Alex, look what I have for your dogs." Patrick hands them the beautiful saddlebacks and the boys in awe.

The entire school knows already they have a hero kid working with the police on an investigation. Some are thinking it a drug case, and others even think it's a murder case. But it doesn't matter what, one of theirs is a Hero.

On the way back to Jim's house, the three of them stop by Kevin and Pooch. "Wow, this is beautiful. Thank you very much," says Kevin.

"I love what you wrote on it, Lani," says Patrick.

They tell Kevin they might not have time to get them food for the next 24 hours because of the police's events in the morning and hopefully a happy reunion.

"You can go, now and then, to the corner store, and he pointed out the direction. The owner there knows the story and will recognize the saddlebag and will give you some food. I will mention it to him on the way home," Jim tells Kevin.

“Thank you to all of you, and good luck catching the dog thieves. Your son told me the whole story.”

*

At Jim’s apartment, the three humans drop onto the lovely sofa and club chairs Jim has in the Living room, and they breathe a sigh of exhaustion and relief.

Jim brought a beer for himself, a cup of hot mint tea for Lani, and a tall glass of iced Coke for Patrick.

“TGIF,” said Jim, raising his bottle of beer.

“What does TGIF mean, Jim?” Asks Lani, a little embarrassed because she doesn’t know that.

“Thank God It’s Friday,” says Jim, “we don’t have to work tomorrow.”

“Oh, I see. Thank you. I may sound stupid or childish to you that I don’t know simple things, like this, but it’s quite a challenge to learn a new language and how everything works in a new country.” Lani is slightly embarrassed about her English language limitations.”

“I am sure I couldn’t do it. I am so impressed with how well and fast you learned English and adapted to the New York life—”

“I’ll tell you,” Lani interrupts, “there are some stressful things, but some fun too. One day, early on, I went to a Pizza place and asked for three Pizza slices. The guy asks me, ‘to go?’ I froze. I had no idea what he was asking me. Don’t laugh, I answered, ‘go where?’

“Wow, astonishing,” says Jim, and his big rounded eyes and dropped jaw showed his amazement.

Patrick, adds after thinking a bit,

“Lani, that may be funny, but I’ll tell you, it is scary stuff. You guys came here without knowing anybody, without money, and just ‘took on’ the WORLD.”

“There are so many things you guys don’t know about me. Maybe, one day, we’ll get to know each other better.” Lani hopes that with that remark, she can change the subject. But no such luck. Jim jumps in and says,

“I am sure we will, but name some of them, please.”

Lani smiles and says, like in passing,

“All right. Magic Fairies saved my life from freezing under the ice when I was almost three years old. My strict and structured education was accompanied by physical punishment—wildly practiced at the time in that part of the world. I was fluent in four languages by the age of twelve. I have a sister named Oana. When I was 17 I took a glider flight on a dare, despite motion sickness and all. I came to America with fifty dollars in my pocket, and I didn’t know anybody. My new boss—Bruno Místico—sent a flight ticket for me and my son, Ingo—”

“Oh, Lani. You could write a book. They’d make a movie of it. I can’t wait to hear the whole story.

“Lani, my heart cries for you. Leaving your family behind, being all alone, and facing the toughest city in the world, all of this would break anybody’s spirit.” Patrick hugs her, deeply touch and with tears in his eyes.

“I came to another world. People don’t understand my determination and drive, the need to validate myself. What every American takes for granted, I had to pay with tears, blood, and sweat.” Before anybody gets to say anything, Lani changes the subject.

“I can’t wait for the roof meeting to find out how the kids did with the new saddlebags and food collection. Are you guys coming to the meeting to report to the kids?” Lani asks.

“Yes, we will. But let’s eat first. I am famished,” says Patrick.

Doogie comes and snuggles in Lani’s lap.

“What a sweet little cat,” said Lani, caressing Doogie.

“I think he misses Ingo, and he hasn’t seen him since this morning. I think the cat imprinted on Ingo, and he thinks Ingo is his mother,” says Patrick. “I will tell you during dinner what I read about tiny animal babies, who can imprint on anything, even a cardboard box,” he continues.

“Finished with your drinks? Let’s go then,” says Jim.

We went to the little restaurant around the corner. During dinner, Lani calls officer Goodman to find out the latest. She tells us that their shift ended in the mid-afternoon, and they will return to the house in Queens early in the morning. They want to catch the guy before he leaves for Manhattan to walk the Callahan dog. DWG 19

“That is great news. Do you guys want to go too, Lani, Patrick?” asks Jim and offered to drive us there.

“Sure thing, we’ll all go. Missy and Ingo will love seeing us when they are released.” Said Patrick, with the enthusiasm that only a thrilled twelve years boy can experience.

The boys ate their hamburgers, and Lani had her Caesar salad with chicken, and all three of them went to the roof meet.

The younger children arrive a little late, but the meeting didn’t start without them.

Max, Lee, Matt, and Suzi arrive, all out of breath from running up the steps but with radiating smiles on their faces.

“Lani, we got food, and we just took it to the corner homeless guy, Kevin. His dog had a saddlebag like our dogs. Did you make it for him too?” Says Suzi in one breath.

“Yes, Suzi, I did, because the man puts some food in the dog’s saddleback’s pockets and Pooch—that is his name—takes it to street dogs, friends of his,” says Lani, while all the kids were settling down.

Maya is whining again because Ingo is not there.

“Maya, I know, Ingo is not here, but he’s fine,” and Lani pets her big head.

“Guys, we found, actually Ingo found the thieves who stole Missy, he let them take him, too, and now he’s in the thieves house in Queens with Missy.”

“Oh my God, now Ingo is missing, too?” asks Lee.

“No, Lee, he is not missing; he’s in a rescue operation he volunteered for,” says Matt. “I know all about it from my dad. Dad said that he is waiting for the outcome tomorrow morning, more photos, the

police officers' names, and the Inspector detective's. He will have an article in the Sunday's New York Times about the whole thing." Shy Matt manages to speak in front of everybody, which is a big thing for a shy kid.

"Dad came with us when we collected the donations and delivered the food to Kevin," continues Matt. "He took pictures, so I'm sure the four of us will also have a photo in the Sunday Times." Matt sounds proud and happy about this.

"That's fantastic, Matt. You need to thank Doug, your dad, very much from us," says Lani, enchanted by what she heard.

"So, guys, that's about it. We'll confirm by cell phone tomorrow morning, but let's count on a roof party tomorrow night for all of us and any of your parents who want to join. We'll have a big celebration for the successful detective adventure. We hope to have Ingo and Missy with us," Jim concludes, and the meeting was over.

"Dad, Lani, I want to get back home. I kind of neglected Doogie today, and he is blue anyway, not being able to snuggle with Ingo. May I go?" Patrick asks, like a good boy, permission from his dad.

"Sure, I won't be long. We need to get up early tomorrow and be at the villains' house by or before 8 o'clock."

Patrick left. Lani and Jim are alone on the roof in the dusk of early evening, with a moon barely visible behind the skyscrapers.

"Lani, I know we live close to each other, but I wish we lived even closer," says Jim.

“To tell you the truth, I wish we lived in the same building with the dogs loving each other and Doogie being so close to Ingo—”

“Why don’t we move in together?” Jim interrupts.

Lani stares at him, and you can see the surprise on her face.

“We’ve only known each other a week, not even a week ... I have to think about it, Jim.”

“I know, and you’re right, but something important has come up.”

“What is it, Jim?”

“I’m from Washington DC, and I’m in New York on a consulting contract. I received a message from my agent that I need to think about returning to DC. They have a big job there, waiting for me.”

“Wow, so you may be leaving NY soon?”

“By the end of the year,” Jim responds.

Lani is quiet for a while, thinking about it.

“Jim, I’m here on a five-year contract. I got my work visa from the American Consulate in Morania based on this contract.

I need to speak to Bruno Místico, my boss, to see what he can do to help.

“But what if we were to resolve your immigration papers and get you another job? Would you entertain the idea of moving together?” asks Jim, fearful of what the response would be.

“Let me sleep on it, but I like you, and I think you are a good man with a heart of gold. The fact that you’re handsome doesn’t hurt either, so I think so, but give me some time, please.”

And with that, they hugged and had their first kiss.

If I'd been there on the roof with them, I would've said that "*the twinkling stars and crescent moon have done their job, creating a lovely and romantic moment they will never forget.*" But I wasn't there, so I say it now.

Chapter Fifteen

“Plant Kindness and Gather Love” _Saturday

It’s the big day. Early in the morning, on Saturday, Lani meets with Jim and Patrick at their house, and they drive to Queens to save Missy and me.

Lani brings a bag full of goodies with her. In a tote bag, she has some tiny Moranian meatballs, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, sodas, and seltzer water, as well as two small plates and two small bowls.

“Patrick, may I please sit in the front? I get terrible car sickness. I’ll never make it if I sit in the back.”

“Of course, Lani. You look ready for a picnic,” says Patrick when he sees the bag he was holding for her in the back.

“Yeah, I have food for us—we don’t know how long we will have to wait—and, of course, I selected food that is perfect for the dogs, too. Who knows how hungry they are?”

The Saturday traffic is light, so they get there a few minutes before 8 a.m. The police are already parked a little further back from Morty’s house. Officer Goodman and the detective are having coffee and doughnuts—as any red-blooded policemen would. Jim parked his car behind them. Nobody got out of their vehicles.

Within minutes, the door of the villain’s house opens, and Morty comes out.

Officer Goodman gets out of the police car and greets him, with the detective following.

"Good morning, Mr. Knepper, Mortimer Knepper?" says Goodman.

"Yes, what can I do for you, Officer?" asks Morty.

"We need a moment of your time. Can we come in?"

"I'm sorry, I'm in a rush. I have a job to show up for in 45 minutes in Manhattan," says Morty, getting ready to leave.

"Oh, don't worry about that. We have informed Mr. Callahan that you may be late this morning."

"What is this all about?" Morty starts being irritated.

"Let's go inside. You don't want all your neighbors to see and hear us.

"All right." The three of them walk in but leave the little fence gate cracked open.

"What do we do now?" asks Patrick.

"We wait and see," Jim says. Patrick gets out of the car and walks around, pacing back and forth. His patience is exhausted. He can't wait to see the two dogs set free.

*

While this is happening outside, in Marty's house Officer Goodman talks to the suspect.

I went up the basement steps and eavesdropped at the door. My hearing is sharp, and I can hear their conversation.

“What do you do for a living?”

“I have my own small accounting company, and I am also a pure breed dog handler. But what—”

“Do you have dogs, Mr. Knepper?” Inspector Spade interrupts.

After a short hesitation, Morty says, “I do. Two dogs.”

“Where are they? What are their names, Mr. Knepper?” This time it was Officer Goodman asking.

“They’re downstairs, in the half-basement, and they have access to the back yard. Do you want to see them?”

“You didn’t tell me their names ...” insisted Officer Goodman.

“Oh, the female is Mi ... Mina and the male is ... Ralph.”

“Are they microchipped, Mr. Knepper?” asked the detective.

“No, there is no need for that. My dogs are safe here, but why are you asking all these questions? What’s going on?”

“We’ll tell you in a minute. Let’s go see the dogs.”

I know they are coming, so I run down the steps and out through the little door into the back yard.

The three of them go to the basement door, Knepper turns on the dim orange light, and they descend to the basement. They see two water bowls.

The Inspector detective wastes no time and goes to the door leading to outside, with Officer Goodman right behind him.

*

Now, that I'm back. I can tell you first paw, I mean, firsthand what is going on.

When I see Officer Goodman, I run to him and jump for joy.

"Ingo, good to see you, boy," says Goodman, rubbing my enormous ears.

He turns to Knepper and says to him.

"Where did you get this dog? It's not your dog. This dog is Ingo, and you stole him."

"Well, Mela was getting lonely, and somebody lost this dog, and—"

"Who is Mela?" the detective interrupts.

"The female," says Knepper, pointing at Missy.

"A minute ago, you said her name is Mina, not Mela." And with that, the inspector detective takes the handheld dog microchip scanner out of his pocket and scans Missy's chip.

"This dog is Missy, and you stole her, too. You're coming with us to the station." And the officer reads his rights.

After which, officer Goodman says to him, "Put your hands behind your back, Sir," as he cuffs him.

I go to the pile of poor Ginger's cut-off hair and bark to draw Goodman's attention.

"What are you showing me, Ingo?" asks Goodman.

I put my nose on the hair and then looked at him.

"Wow, look here, Detective, I think we have the proof that they had Mrs. Allen's dog here, too."

The inspector pulls an evidence bag and a glove out of his pocket. He gathers some of the hair from the grass and places it in the bag. He caresses my head, “Good boy, Ingo, good boy!”

The two policemen, Morty in handcuffs, and Missy and I walk through the basement. I try to grab my leash hanging from the wall hook, but I can’t, so I bark. Goodman comes over and gives me my leash.

When the front door opens, Detective Inspector Spade pushes out the handcuffed villain and locks the door. Missy and I run out right past them.

I hear Lani’s scream.

“Ingo, my baby!” She jumps out of the car, I push the gate open with my nose, and we meet in the middle of the street. She’s crying with happiness. The nightmare is over. I feel safe in Lani’s arms.

Jim and Patrick are hugging and caressing Missy. She is also crying and telling them how scared she was and how much she missed them. I could understand her, but nobody else could. It’s one of those extraordinary, emotional moments like you see in the movies.

Officer Goodman speaks to Lani, “We’ll talk in the early afternoon to see what charges to press.” He also says goodbye to me, puts his police hat back on, and salutes me with his hand to the brim.

I respond in kind. I sit down and first put my right paw over the left side of my chest for thank you. Next, I put it to the base of my

humongous right ear. Click, click—the detective and Jim take photos of us saluting each other. **DWG 20**

The policemen put Knepper in the car, thank us for our help, and leave.

The first thing Lani does is to give us each a little bowl of water and some hard-boiled eggs. The two of us sit in the back with Patrick. Missy curls up next to me, puts her snout in Pat’s lap, and falls asleep.

*

Jim drives us to his place, and we all go upstairs.

Missy walks in and starts sniffing around. She finds an odd smell in the house that she doesn’t recognize. I know what she’s smelling. I go to the other room and return with a soft, hairy bundle in my mouth. I put it down in front of Missy.

“Missy, this is Doogie, the little cat I found in the park the day they abducted you a week ago.”

Missy sniffs Doogie, licks him on top of his head, picks him up gently in her mouth, as she saw me do, and carries him to her fancy bed where they curl up together.

“Welcome to my home,” is Missy’s message to Doogie.

We all relax and enjoy the afternoon. I get all the sides of the story, listening to Jim, Lani, and Patrick chat about the adventure. My

little dog heart is full of love and gratitude for these compassionate humans who spared no effort to help me find my Missy.

In the afternoon, Jim walks Lani and me home. When we pass the Korean green-grocer, I stop by the sidewalk display. Lani stops, too, and waits to see why I did. I remember that when I met Missy in Morania, she was smelling a red rose bush in their front yard. I grab one of the red roses in my mouth and look up at Lani. She pays for the rose and gives it back to me. At home, we put the rose in water.

A little later, Lani and Jim buy food and stuff for the evening roof celebration before Jim returns home to grab Missy and Patrick.

At 7 p.m. when Jim, Patrick, and Missy arrive at our apartment, I take the rose out of the little vase and offer it to Missy.

DWG #20*

She sniffs the rose, and before accepting it, she licks my face a little. She takes the rose and puts it back in the water before going up to the roof to set up for the party.

The kids arrive with their dogs, and some parents are with them. Patrick comes with Missy, and Jim brought the music. For ambiance, colored paper lanterns light up the roof.

We have nuts, pizza, small hamburgers, hot dogs, cheese, crackers, a big green salad, croissants, vegetable sticks and dip, lots of juices and beer for the adults. The children enjoy cookies and chocolate candy bars for dessert, while the dogs get liverwurst.

The party is great. The kids and other dogs meet the beautiful Missy. I am continuously chatting, answering millions of questions about the adventure. They all show Missy love and listen to her emotional story.

The party is in full swing when Doug, Matt's father, comes up the steps. He calls us down to watch the "Good News" segment they had announced at the beginning of the evening news. We all go one floor down to his apartment and crowd the TV room to see the program. First, they show our gang of kids and dogs in the food collection photos. Next, we see Pooch distributing food to his street dog friends—the picture Patrick took. They mention Patrick being the initiator of this project and show some photos of the homeless folks he'd met.

Now, the whole city knows about the thoughtful children who help the less fortunate. The kids in the room are beaming with pride. The anchorwoman starts talking about a dog's heroic gesture, who put his own life in danger to save another dog's life. They show the picture taken by Patrick of me, Ingo, joining dognappers voluntarily. As the reporter puts it, "Ingo is risking his freedom and wellbeing to find the stolen Missy." There's the video that Jim took on Friday of the "SOS dare" between Inspector Detective and Patrick. In the video clip, you can hear me barking the SOS Morse code. Everybody in the room applauds. Lani and Patrick cannot believe it. They were there but didn't know Jim had recorded it, like the professional he is. The announcer tells this morning's outcome of the story and how with Ingo's help, the police caught the thieves. They show the photo Jim took at the end, of

Goodman and Ingo saluting each other. They present Officer Goodman's interview. He mentions that he had met Ingo several months before when Ingo helped him catch a purse snatcher. He says that the New York City Police Department will issue Ingo an honorary New York's Finest K-9 Detective badge. The little presentation ends with Ingo's photo, and the photoshopped badge hanging from his dog collar and his right paw in a military salute. The inspector detective had taken that detailed photo of Ingo saluting and added the badge electronically.

The crowd of parents and children in that little room goes wild. I am the hero of the day, which is pretty much every dog's dream.

*

The party is over at this point. Everybody goes home, but we return to the roof and the humans, with big black trash bags, clean up all the party garbage.

"Dad, may I walk Missy and Ingo on leash on some of these roofs?" Patrick asks Jim.

"All right, but only for a few minutes and not too far. I want to be able to always see you guys.

"I promise," and off they go, slowly.

Lani and Jim are alone on the roof, and Lani says, after a moment of silence,

"Jim, I thought about Washington. I am sad that you are leaving in a few months. I like you, and it would be nice if we could develop a relationship. We still have a few months to spend together. Let's see

where things go by early spring, and if we still want a relationship, we will decide then.”

“You’re right, Lani. It is way too early, but I wanted you to know that I think the world of you, and I don’t want our connection to die simply because I am moving 250 miles away.”

“I will find out more on Monday, but my company may have an office in Washington also. I know they have one in Los Angeles. Bruno Místico likes me, and he may help me with a transfer. What do you think?”

“What do I think? I think it’s great. I am so happy, and we have a few months to get to know each other better. If the trick with the job doesn’t work, I can ask you to marry me. That will take care of your immigration_problem. That’s what I think,” says Jim, on cloud nine.

We return from the exciting roof walk in the sky. The top of our building is lovely and clean again, no sign we had a party. Jim, Patrick, and Missy soon go home. Lani gives me a quick bath and dries me. Then we snuggle, watch a little TV, and she lets me sleep in bed with her. My dream of finding Missy has come true, my mission is accomplished, and I sleep like a baby dog.

In the morning on Freeday, we resume our routine. This time, I am not going to look for Missy. I’m going to meet her, and we’ll play together in the park.

I do this every single Freeday. I lightly put my front left paw on Lani's shoulder.

“Okay, Ingo, I'm getting up. I know, it's the Central Park walk day. Be with you in a moment.”

When we open the apartment door, we find the Sunday New York Times on the floor. I bet Doug put it there for us to see his article.

Lani picks it up, steps back in, sits down, gets her coffee, and starts looking through the paper. She finds the article about our adventure, sees my picture with the badge in the newspaper, kisses me on the head, and says to me,

“We will need another copy of this so we can frame it for you, my hero.” **DWG 21**

Before putting the paper aside to go to the park, Lani sees a big headline next to my article:

“Thousands of volunteers needed to guard the running route of the New York Marathon.”

She looks at me with love and says,

“Ingo, it looks like your gang and the street dogs have a big job to do in a few weeks ... let's go now. We only have till 9 a.m. to run free without a leash in Central Park. *The End.*”