



Chapter One

I Think There's Something Wrong

Jasmine groaned as her mum turned off the motorway into a service station. It was early evening on the first Saturday of the October half term, and they were returning from visiting Jasmine's sister, Ella, at university.

"Do we have to stop?" Jasmine said. "Can't we just go home?"

"I need to buy a few things for the morning," said Nadia.

"But the animals will be hungry. And they'll be missing me."

Nadia smiled at her as she stopped the car. “Don’t worry, they’ll be fine. Dad promised to feed them.”

Jasmine had a sheepdog, a donkey, a pig, a deer, a sheep and a duck of her own, as well as her two cats. She planned to run a rescue centre when she grew up, and she had already rescued many animals. Luckily, her dad was a farmer and her mum was a vet, and there was plenty of room at Oak Tree Farm.

To Jasmine’s relief, it didn’t take long to do the shopping. When they got back to the car, she stood leaning against the passenger door while her mum rearranged the boot to make room for the grocery bags. Nadia was a farm vet, so the boot was always full of medicines and equipment.

A few metres away, a woman got out of her car. She was speaking on her phone while scanning the car park as though searching for somebody. She waved at a man a few cars

down and he smiled and walked towards her.

“You must be Diana,” he said.

“That’s right,” said the woman, shaking his hand.

“I’m Chris. Pleased to meet you.”

Diana opened the boot of her car and Jasmine glimpsed a dog crate.

“Here she is.” She opened the crate and, to Jasmine’s delight, took out a tiny, honey-coloured golden retriever puppy.

“Oh!” breathed Jasmine, her face breaking into a smile.

The puppy was gorgeous. She had the sweetest, gentlest face, with dark eyes, floppy ears and big fluffy paws. Jasmine wished she could hold her. She sneaked up closer to get a better look.

Diana handed the puppy to the man. He walked to the front of the car so that he was standing under a lamppost, and looked at the puppy’s face. Jasmine frowned. The puppy didn’t

look quite well. Her head was tilted to one side at an odd angle and there were strings of white and grey discharge on the surface of her eyes. As Jasmine watched, the puppy shook her head uncomfortably, as though trying to dislodge something.



“What’s this gunk in her eyes?” asked Chris. “It doesn’t look good.”

“Oh, that’s nothing to worry about,” said the woman. “A lot of puppies have it. She’ll grow out of it in a week or two.”

The puppy shook her head again. *Something’s not right*, thought Jasmine. Mum always said discharge from a puppy’s eyes was a serious condition that needed prompt treatment. It wasn’t something they would grow out of.

“So I just need the payment and she’s yours,” said Diana.

The puppy shook her head again. Jasmine wondered if she had an ear infection. She hoped the man would ask about it, but instead he reached into his coat pocket and started to pull out a thick wad of notes. Jasmine stared at the money, amazed. She hadn’t realised puppies were so expensive.

He paused with the money halfway out of his pocket.

“You said she’s fully vaccinated. You’ve brought the vaccination certificate?”

“Of course,” said Diana.

She took a piece of paper from a folder in the boot and handed it to Chris.

“Jasmine!” called Nadia.

Jasmine walked over to her mum. “Can you come and look at that puppy?” she whispered. “I think there’s something wrong, but the lady who’s selling her says she’s fine.”

Nadia glanced at the scene under the lamppost. “She’s selling the puppy? Here?”

Jasmine explained what she’d seen and heard. Nadia’s face tightened. She strode across to Diana’s car. Jasmine followed her.

“Excuse me,” Nadia said, smiling at Chris and Diana. “Sorry to interrupt you, but I’m a vet, and I happened to notice that your puppy doesn’t look well. I’m sure she’s being treated for her eye and ear infections, but I wondered if I could be of any help.”

The man looked at her in bewilderment. A flash of fear passed across the woman’s face. She put on a smile that was obviously fake.

“I don’t think this puppy is any of your business, is it?” she said.

“Is she your puppy?” asked Nadia.

“I’m buying her,” said Chris.

“I see,” said Nadia. “I assume the mother is here too?”

Chris looked in confusion at Diana.

“The mother is at home with her other puppies,” said Diana. “Obviously I couldn’t take her away from the rest of the litter.”

Nadia turned to Chris. “You know it’s illegal to buy a puppy if it’s not with its mother?”

He looked startled. “Er...”

“Have you seen this puppy with its mother?”

“Er ... Well ... no.”

“Had you seen the puppy at all before today?”

“Er, no, but—”

“This is ridiculous,” said the woman. “You can’t just walk up to people in a car park and start interfering in their business. You’re clearly mad.”

Jasmine had a sudden thought. She crept to the front of the car and stared at the registration number.

Nadia looked at the piece of paper in the man’s hand. “That vaccination certificate doesn’t look genuine to me,” she said. “I think you’ve been duped into buying a puppy from an illegal puppy farm. This puppy isn’t well and I very much doubt whether she’s been vaccinated.”

“How dare you!” snapped the woman. “You should be locked up, barging in and accusing me like this.” She turned and glared at Jasmine. “What are you doing?”

“Nothing,” said Jasmine, gazing at Diana with her most innocent expression. She repeated the registration number silently in her head.



“I would strongly advise you,” Nadia said to Chris, “not to take the puppy tonight, and at the very least to phone the vet’s number on this certificate and check whether it’s genuine.”

“Will you go away and stop interfering!” spat Diana. “You should be ashamed of yourself, making accusations and causing trouble in a public place.”

Nadia didn’t move. Jasmine held her breath, her heart beating fast, as the two women stared at each other. The man stood holding the puppy, looking very uncomfortable.

Out of the corner of her eye, Jasmine noticed two police officers, a man and a woman, walking out of the service station. She waved her arms above her head and called, “Excuse me! Hello!”

The police officers looked across. Diana turned and saw them. She froze for a second, and then made a grab for the puppy. The man tightened his hold on her. Nadia stepped between them.

“Come quickly!” Jasmine called to the police. They broke into a run. Diana glanced at them and jumped into her car. She slammed the door,

revved the engine, and with a screech of tyres reversed out of her parking space and drove away.

“OY59 7PN,” Jasmine said to the policewoman as she approached. “That’s her registration number.”