



Chapter One

A sharp pebble pings off the back of my leg.

‘Got him!’ Tyler hoots. I hear him exchange a high five with his stupid friend, Ethan.

I keep my head down and ignore them. It’s not the first time they’ve followed me after school but they normally get bored before now. I think what’s done it today is they caught me writing an Ultra Boy and Wonder Dog story—based on me and my best mate Gizmo—and they think it’s stupid and that I should take up their hobby of standing outside the Londis spitting at traffic.

‘Going back to your Batcave, Batman?’ one of them yells.

I say nothing. I wish I did have a Batcave. I’d just

stay down there all the time with Gizmo, working on scientific discoveries, like Everlasting Itch Powder that only works on people called Tyler and Ethan.

WHACK!

Ow! What was that? I touch the back of my head and wince. A half-eaten apple rolls past me.

That's it. Enough is enough. I take off and run to my house at the end of the cul-de-sac. I hear them behind me, still not giving up. I get my key out of my pocket. They'll regret messing with me. No more Mr Nice Guy.

You see, I have Gizmo well trained. Wait, that's not true, he's actually massively disobedient. But anyway, I have no doubt he will recognize that I'm in danger and will spring to my rescue with his teeth bared.

I throw the front door open, still dodging Ethan and Tyler's pebbles. They'll stop soon enough. Soon there will be the hammering of feet, a growl, and a leap through the air. Then they'll never mess with me again.

'Gizmo, get 'em!' I yell. And wait. And wait. And wait. What's going on? Where is he?

Tyler and Ethan laugh at me like I'm insane.

'Where's your dog, freakshow?' Ethan shouts.

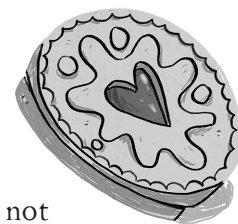
I duck into the house. He isn't in the hall. That's weird. He always waits for me when I come home from school. I slam the door behind me and leave them to lob stuff at no one. I stick my head into the lounge. He's not in there either. He loves lying on the sofa, even though Mum complains he leaves hairs all over it. I call him again. Nothing. I go through to the kitchen. Oh. There he is, just having a lie-down.

'Gizmo!' I say. 'Wake up, I'm home.'

He opens his eyes but still doesn't move. He starts panting. This isn't right.

'Gizmo?' I say, shaking him. 'What's the matter, boy?'

He looks at me and tries to get up but he can't. I crouch next to him, trying to stop the panic rising in my chest. He's fine, he's fine. He's just tired. I shake him again. He groans a little and closes his eyes again. I run and grab a Jammie Dodger out of the tin and hold it in front of his nose. Jammie Dodgers are his favourite treat. He's not allowed them too often because they're not exactly healthy for dogs, but he has one when he's a good boy. I keep waving it but he doesn't even stir. No. Oh



no. Tears prickle my eyes but I don't have time to cry. I have to get help. I call Mum but she doesn't answer. She never answers when she's at work. I stop for a moment and take a deep breath. I need to calm down for Gizmo. I'll be no help to him if I'm a wreck. I call Dad.

'Everything all right, George?' he slurs. I can tell from his voice he's only just woken up. He works nights so this is like first thing in the morning to him.

'No,' I say. 'Gizmo's not very well. He's not moving.'

He lets out one of those long Dad-breaths. 'Uuuuuuuuu. Are you sure he's not just asleep?'

'No,' I snap. 'He's not right. He's just lying there, not even responding to Jammie Dodgers. We need to get him to the vet's.'

Dad goes quiet. 'Can it not wait until your mum gets home?'

I stamp my feet like I'm four again. 'No. He's got to go now. Hurry.'

I hang up and wait. I google 'dog lying down, panting' but everything just seems to scream 'HE'S DYING'.

I sit next to Gizmo, stroking him. He can't go. Not now. He was fine this morning. How can things

change so quickly?

I drag his bowl over and put it in front of his face. 'Drink. Drink. There's a good boy.'

He breathes out slowly through his nose and his eyelids flutter. I lie down and bury my face in his fur. I don't know how I'll cope if he dies now. He's been my best friend since I was born. Mum and Dad got him when he was a puppy and he's always been there. We've had adventures together in our Ultra Boy and Wonder Dog costumes, we've been on holiday together. When Mum and Dad split up, Gizmo was the only one I could talk to about it. I'm not ready for that to end.

