

The
DOG
who saved the
WORLD



Chapter One

It's six o'clock on a warm summer's evening and Ramzy Rahman and I are staring at the back entrance of the Spanish City entertainment centre, not daring to knock. Mr Mash has just scoffed a Magnum that someone dropped on the pavement and is licking his chops, ready for another. He even ate the wooden stick.

There's a massive double-height steel door in the white wall – one of those doors that's so big that there's a normal-sized door cut into it. In the middle of the normal door – looking totally out of place – is a knocker like you'd see on the door of a haunted mansion. The metal is green, and in the shape of a snarling wolf's head.

Mr Mash looks up at the wolf's head and curls his lip, though he doesn't actually growl.

Around the corner, on the seafront, men in shorts push babies in buggies; cars with dark windows hum along the coast road; and people pedal FreeBikes in the cycle lane. Ramzy nudges me to point out Saskia Hennessey's older sister, in just a bikini, flip-flops and goosebumps, shimmying towards the beach with some

friends. I keep my head down: I don't want to be recognised.

Above us, the sky is the intense blue of late afternoon and it's so hot that even the seagulls have retreated to the shade. Ramzy is doing his familiar shuffle-dance of excitement, and I feel I should calm him down.

'Ramzy,' I say, patiently. 'We're just visiting an old lady. She's probably lonely and wants to give us tea and scones, or something. Scroll through photos of her grandchildren. And we'll be polite and then we'll be off the hook. That's *not* an adventure, unless you're very odd.'

Ramzy gives me a look that says, *But I am very odd!*

Eventually, I lift up the wolf's head, which hinges at the jaws, and bring it down with a single sharp rap that echoes much louder than I expected, making Ramzy jump.

His eyes are shining with excitement and he whispers to me, 'Tea, scones, wolves and *adventure!*'

Dr Pretorius must have been waiting because no sooner have I knocked than we hear several bolts sliding back on the other side of the door, and it opens with a very satisfying creak. (I see Ramzy grin: he would have been disappointed if the door had *not* creaked.)

Now, to complete his delight, there *should* have been a clap of thunder, and a flash of lightning revealing Dr Pretorius in a long black cape, saying, 'Greetings, mortals,' or something.

Instead, it's still bright and sunny, not even slightly stormy, and Dr Pretorius – as long and as thin as a cat's tail – is wearing the same woollen beach robe as when we met her this morning.

She just says, 'Hi,' in her throaty American accent. Just that: 'Hi.'

Then she turns and walks back into what looks like a large dark storage area. With her bushy white hair on top of her thin dark body, she reminds me of a magic wand.

She has gone several steps before she stops and turns to Ramzy and me.

'Well? Whatcha waitin' for? The last train to Clarksville? Come on in. Bring the mutt if you have to.'

On the other side of the cluttered storage area is a narrow flight of metal stairs leading up to a platform with a handrail. She doesn't wait to see if we are following and so I peer round the high, dusty space. It's piled with boxes, bricks, bags of cement, ladders, planks, a small cement mixer, a leather sofa propped up on its end and a builder's skip filled with rubble. There's other stuff too: a horse's saddle, a car seat, bar stools, an exercise bike, a huge machine for making espresso, and something the size of an old-fashioned cartwheel on its side, half covered by a dusty blue tarpaulin.

Ramzy pokes me in the back and points to it. '*Psst*. Check out the copter-drone!'

I have heard of copter-drones, obviously, and I've seen

people demonstrating them on YouTube and stuff, but I've never seen one for real. I'm thinking that Clem would be dead jealous that I've seen one before he has. Then I remember that I'm not supposed to tell anyone that I'm here.

Dr Pretorius is saying: '... my green wolf knocker – d'you like it? It's called verdigris. From the old French, green of Greece. It's copper carbonate caused by the brass tarnishing in the salty air. Same as the Statue of Liberty. But you knew that, didn't you?'

We say nothing, following her up the stairs, both of us casting curious glances back at the storage area and what might – or more probably might not – have been a copter-drone.

She stops at the top and turns. '*Didn't you?*'

'Ohaye. Definitely,' says Ramzy, nodding enthusiastically.

'Liar!' she snarls and points her long brown chin at him. I notice that her white halo of Afro hair quivers when she talks, then goes still when she stops. 'What's the chemical formula for copper carbonate?'

Ramzy's poor face! His mouth droops. Ramzy is clever but not *that* clever. 'Erm . . . erm . . .'

Dr Pretorius turns again and marches along the metal landing, her beach robe billowing behind her. 'It's CuCO_3 ,' she calls over her shoulder. 'What do they teach you at that school of yours, huh? Is it still self-esteem and climate change? Ha! Come on, keep up!'

We trot after her, Mr Mash's claws click-clacking on the metal walkway.

She halts by a pair of double doors in the centre of a long, curved wall and faces us. She takes a deep breath and then starts a coughing fit that goes on for ages. At one point, she is almost bent double as she hacks and coughs. It kind of spoils the dramatic moment, but then, as suddenly as she started, she stops and straightens up. Her face softens a little. 'Ah! Don't look so scared, fella. I'm just gettin' old is all. What's your name?'

'R-Ramzy. Ramzy Rahman. Ma'am.'

The side of her mouth goes up and she chuckles. '*Ma'am*? Ha! Well, you got better manners than I have, buddy. Invitin' you into my place without even a proper introduction. So we've got Ramzy Rahman and . . .?'

'Georgina Santos. Georgie for short.' I don't do the *ma'am* bit. I can't carry it off like Ramzy.

'OK, Georgie-for-short and Ramzy-ma'am. That was my little test, see? But from now on no more lies, huh? From here on in, I'm trusting you. Did you tell anyone you were here?'

Ramzy and I shake our heads, and both say, 'No.'

'*Noooo*,' she drawls and takes off her thick glasses, bending down to peer at us with her strange pale eyes. 'So is it a deal?'

We both nod, although I'm not at all sure what the deal is exactly.

‘Deal,’ we say together.

Seemingly satisfied, she turns round and flings open both doors, growling, ‘Well, ain’t that dandy? We’ve got ourselves a deal! Welcome, my little chickadees, to the future! Ha ha ha *haaa!*’ Her laugh is like an arpeggio, each bark higher than the one before, ending on a loud screech.

Ramzy catches my eye and smirks. If Dr Pretorius is pretending to be a crazy person then she’s overdoing it. Only . . . I think it’s real.

Mr Mash gives a little whine. He doesn’t want to go through the doors, and I know exactly how he feels.