



CHAPTER 5

By the time Sam caught up with them, the Sniffers had turned the corner of the building towards the basketball court. Amira shook her head at Wilfred, and Wilfred hung his like he had been scolded.

'But I did see it,' Sam heard Wilfred say. 'Just because you can't, doesn't mean it's not there.'

Amira growled. Deep in her throat. Sam smiled. He recognised the sound now.

'You saw the light too, Amira,' Hazel added. 'And if an angel's with him, then surely ... he can't be a monster.'

Sam raced towards them. 'Hey!' he yelled.

The trio swivelled to face him.

'What do you want?' Amira snarled.

Wilfred wiggled his bottom again and grinned at Sam.

Sam took a dangerous step forward. 'You know, you've made coming to school almost as hard as being in the

monster world.' Sam took another pace closer. 'And you're right, I'm not human, not totally, but I don't think you are either,' he said. 'You said I didn't smell human, but ...' He counted one finger. 'Your ability to smell is better than human.' Second finger and third fingers. 'You can sense angels, and you, Wilfred, wiggle your bottom when you see them.' He inhaled their musky aroma. 'At first I thought you smelt like Hoy Poy because you had pets, but it's not that at all, is it? It's cos you're like Hoy Poy.'

'Who's Hoy Poy?' Hazel asked.

'That's my neighbour's dog.'

Amira rammed him, making him stagger. She grabbed his collar and pushed him to the wall, hissing low, so no one else could see or hear them. 'It's our job to protect humans, so you shut your mouth, you monster.' She looked around to see how close the other kids were. She was angry all right, but from under the anger came the strong, dank whiff of fear.

Wilfred grabbed her wrist. 'No, Amira, he must be good. He talks to angels.'

Hazel's dark-golden eyes glowed. 'Yeah, I'm pretty sure too. That light felt nice. No, not nice. Good. It makes sense he's good too.' Beige-blond hair bounced around her shoulders, catching the sunshine, and she smiled warmly at Sam.

Sam stared straight at Amira. 'You smell like dogs, because somehow you're like me. You're a mix of something. Like you are dogs.' Even as Sam said it, it sounded ridiculous. They were obviously human.

Amira pushed him again.

'Amira!' Hazel yelled.

Sam fell to the asphalt with a heavy *oof*. If he'd been a normal boy, it would have hurt.

'I didn't mean to; I didn't mean to.' Amira's heart-shaped face paled. Fear and anger. Sam saw them again, both flaring in her dark eyes. The irises grew, covering the whites in a shiny black. Human eyes didn't do that.

Sam kept talking. 'Dogs don't like me at first. Hoy Poy didn't, because I smelt wrong to him.'

Amira burst into tears.

'He won't hurt anyone.' Wilfred pulled at Amira's blazer. 'He's a mixture of something odd, but he won't hurt anyone.'

Sam sat on the ground, waiting for Amira to thump him. Her dog smell got stronger. 'You smell funny too. All musty. I thought you'd been rolling around with dogs, but it's more than that.'

Amira whimpered. 'He's a monster. We're supposed to protect humans from monsters.'

'I'm not going to hurt you,' Sam said. 'Or anyone else.'

'I believe him,' Hazel said.

A teacher bellowed across the yard. 'Amira Saluki, I cannot believe I just saw you push someone? Lunchtime detention.'

Wilfred helped Sam up and dusted him off. Wilfred's bottom still wiggled.

The bell rang for the end of break. Amira gave a low, throaty growl at Sam.