

# Prologue

**S**ALLY SIMPLESMITH WAS DETERMINED not to vomit. Though she had never been a fan of recess, looking at the schoolyard as it was now—turned into a makeshift courtroom for the trial of her best friend—she longed for the days of being picked last in kickball. Standing beside the milk-crate witness box, she scanned the scene before her. Officer Stu banged his gavel repeatedly as he shouted, in vain, for order. The evil Dog Catcher turned red and screamed for an immediate judgment. Her father, unable to look her in the eye after his shocking betrayal, nervously pinched his thumbs. The audience of bloodthirsty neighbors and maniac mutts howled cruelties at her and the accused from behind the jungle gym gallery. Sally wanted to be surprised by how quickly their adoration had turned to anger, but she wasn't. Part of her had expected this all along.

She looked, then, at her best friend, Bones, so small and helpless, boxed in by half a dozen milk crates. He tilted his head and gazed up at her with empty black eyes.

She reached out her hand to him. He leaned in and gave it a single lick.

The wind wailed in the trees, nearly matching the cries of the angry mob in pitch and volume. The sound reminded Sally of that night in the graveyard when she'd first found Bones. She recalled her fear, her desperation, and finally her joy at the miraculous gift that the spirit of her mother had given her—a new best friend who would change her life forever.

Out of the corner of her eye, Sally saw the first enraged civilian break the chalk-drawn line that separated the spectators from those involved in the court's proceedings. It wouldn't be long before others followed, and she knew exactly for whom they would come.

Inhaling deeply, Sally filled her lungs with resolve. Though she would never exactly remember her next few steps, more than one witness could have sworn they heard the petite raven-haired girl whisper to the trees: "Give. Me. Death."