

A Detective and Her K9

The Forever Team



911

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Chapter One

Detectives work best in teams. It's that whole right brain, left brain scenario. In a good, well-established team what one person misses the other zeros in on. That's what I lost when my partner Tony died of cancer. It's been two years and I still can't find that someone who complements me, pushes me to be a better detective, and puts up with my moods. Not to mention my outside-the-box speculations of possible events in a crime. Tony was always first to congratulate me when I was dead-on, even after making fun of my leap from evidence to outrageous. He also pointed out when I was wrong and made sure I remembered several times over.

My department has five detectives and I'm odd man out, or in my case, woman out. Of thirty-two certified officers, I'm one of three females, and the only female detective. I work in a man's world. That's another reason Tony and I meshed. He didn't care that I was a woman. He wanted to solve cases, and the two of us were darned good at it.

Together.

For the past two years, I coasted along barely making the motions. I continued solving cases, but not at the same rate as Tony and I had managed to do. I also tried working with different detectives looking for that spark I had with Tony. Don't get me wrong, my relationship with Tony was in no way boyfriend/girlfriend. He was happily married to Beth, and Beth and I were close. We stayed in touch for a while after Tony died; a drink now and then with happy and sad memories of the man we both loved. Now, after two years, she was getting married again this fall. I knew because I had received a "save the date" card. Of all the stupid things to come up with in an already ridiculous event called weddings, they added save the date. A fork lodged in my throat was more appealing. And to make it worse, once Beth hit the dating market again, our friendship had dwindled. Her life without Tony moved on.

Mine was ending here today at a dog kennel.

Yes, an overdramatic statement, but in my opinion accurate. After years of grievances made against me by fellow officers and detectives, my sergeant, Lou Spence, stopped listening to my excuses. He was partnering me with a dog. A trained K9—the miracle partner. One who never filed complaints.

Our first conversation on the subject was brief.

“How do you feel about dogs, Detective Jolett?” he asked as he leafed through a stack of papers.

“I’ve dated a few.” I paused a moment thinking he’d look up, but he didn’t, so I continued. “They smell and need a tight choke collar with a few kibbles thrown their way every now and then. It doesn’t help much, though, and they generally remain an all-around nuisance.” I was trying to push the sergeant’s buttons, but it didn’t seem to work. He didn’t acknowledge my condescending reply in the slightest.

“Here, take this.” He handed me a small packet. “Your training begins Monday at 0800. You’ll be gone for eight weeks. Don’t worry about your cases; they’re being reassigned. Make arrangements with your current mongrel so he knows you’ll be out of town.” He looked directly into my eyes and the corners of his mouth tipped up slightly. For a second I thought he’d smile. “Don’t call me, Laci, I’ll call you.” By using my first name he was telling me I was completely out of luck.

Six weeks of dual-purpose canine training later, with two more to go, I was receiving my official K9.

Jack Mallory, the head of the Arizona Police K9 Reserve Program, was walking me through the kennels so I could check out a few prospects. Jack was around my age and too nice-looking for his own good. It made the process of finding a dog much harder. During our six weeks of training, Jack’s grumpy; I-prefer-dogs attitude grew on me. This is what loneliness did to a woman, and I had to mentally shake myself so I could focus on the reason I was here. I pulled my eyes away from Jack and looked at the cages.

Shepherds, Belgian Malinois, and even one Staffordshire terrier stared back at me with perceived contempt. I'd trained with all three breeds these past weeks and couldn't care less what the dogs thought of me.

One of the Shepherds tried to take off my hand when I laid it flat to the bars of the cage. I didn't jerk my hand back and managed an evil glare that didn't intimidate the dog at all.

Speaking over the Shepherd's barks and growls, Jack surprisingly tried to reassure me, "Cocamo's a good dog, but will take some adjustment time."

Not the dog for me. I wanted as little work as possible. One of the Malinois caught my eye, so Jack brought him out of the cage.

"Sterling has a good disposition and he's not too high strung. He may not act it now, but he's fierce when necessary and likes to play during his down time. He's young and needs lots of attention. You'd make him a good partner."

I didn't want a partner. I was here to get my sergeant off my back. Lots of attention was another problem. I barely paid attention to my own appearance. Each workday, I applied lotion to my face and threw my dirty blonde hair into a ponytail. I exercised regularly, which for my job was necessary. My high cheekbones and small chin had most people thinking I was much younger. I had good genes to thank for that. Like I said, though, I really couldn't care less what anyone thought of me. And a needy dog was more than I was capable of. I actually pitied the mutt who got stuck with me.

I turned slightly and caught sight of a black lump curled up in the corner of a cage toward the back of the room. He or she refused to give me or Jack the time of day.

"Who's that?" I pointed at the reticent dog.

Jack looked between me and the Rottweiler a few times before answering. "That's Suii. He's lazy and getting up there in age. He has maybe two years left before he's retired."

I had eight, but we were sorta equal if you stretched it by comparing

human years to dog years. “Bring him out.” That was another thing about Jack; my short, clipped phrases apparently didn’t irritate him. He opened the cage.

Suii lifted his head seemingly uncaring. Jack snapped his fingers. The dog slowly uncurled his massive body while gaining his feet. Big. Darn big. I’d judge Suii pushed one-fifty. The dog walked out of the cage and sat beside Jack’s legs. It was a slouching sit. Lazy. The perfect dog for me.

Jack attached a leash and handed me the end. Suii didn’t budge. Jack just looked at me, waiting to see what I’d do. I gave a firm tug and snapped my fingers. Just as slowly as Suii came out of his cage, he walked the three feet separating us and sat-slouched again. His huge head tipped sideways and back as his big chocolate eyes stared into mine.

I didn’t take it as dominance. The dog appraised me like I appraised him. “I have a large couch, a television, and a small back patio. If you can handle that, I’ll take you,” I said in a no-nonsense tone.

His head cocked a little more and his floppy ears lifted just a bit. I took that as an affirmative and looked at Jack. “When do we go home?”

“We can start the next phase of training right now. Suii’s trained in German. You’ll have two additional weeks to become acquainted and learn his language before you can leave. Do you have questions about him, like why he’s here?”

I really didn’t care, but nodded anyway. Jack obviously had something to say.

He looked down at the dog and his lips compressed. “His handler left him in the car. The call went bad, and Officer Bradley was shot and killed. Suii hasn’t bonded with anyone since, so don’t get your hopes up. He’s unenthusiastic and can be difficult.”

Jack just described me and I was relieved—bonding was something I didn’t need. Suii and I would get along just fine.