

## Chapter One

### Rocks for Breakfast

The man sat in the center of a quiet road at the edge of town. There were no cars backed up to watch the commotion, no pedestrians loitering to see the spectacle. This was Small Town, Arizona, where a traffic jam consisted of two cars backed up at a stop sign.

This morning, my first day on the job as a police officer, had Sergeant Spears and me—the new rookie, standing over a Mr. Dwaine Piskett, age ninety-two. Mr. Piskett sat squarely in the middle of the paved roadway with a huge rock in his lap. The rock might have been the most unusual part of this call, but looking at the size of the rock, and the size of Mr. Piskett, who could be blown over by a slight puff of air, I looked around for a second culprit.

“I don’t want to speak to you,” Mr. Piskett said to Sergeant Spears. “You is a ugly man an’ God done handed out the looks the day you was digging through the garbage.”

I stayed in the background at a ready position—hand on my gun, prepared for anything. During our short drive to the scene, Sergeant Spears explained my role as newly sworn in Officer Suzie Ivy. “This first week you are to stand back, observe, and let me do the talking. Above everything, don’t get yourself killed or, God forbid, get me killed. Keep your eyes and ears open and think officer safety. Got that?”

Sergeant Spears was a pristine example of military bearing with perfectly creased pants and a snug-fitting uniform shirt that covered his vest. His buzz-cut hair accented a narrow face and a surprisingly strong jaw. His physical bearing added to his whole law enforcement vibe, and I was hoping it would rub off on me quickly.

Now, with the morning temperature hovering around twenty-five degrees and the bright winter sun shining, I was trying to appear professional. Inside, I was wondering what led me to believe I could do this job.

I’d had this thought repeatedly since early morning when I’d uniformed-up to start my new career. While I dressed in matching black sports bra and panties, a black long-sleeved undershirt, dark-blue freshly ironed uniform pants, uniform shirt, and my black basket-weave duty belt, I thought it. While I checked for the nth time that my duty belt was fully equipped with baton, a set of silver handcuffs, pepper spray, flashlight, gun, and two extra magazines of ammunition, I

thought it. While I put on my outer bulletproof vest with a bright shiny new badge displaying my police officer status to the world, I thought it.

I was out of my mind!

And while the police academy made me feel I was equipped for anything, I was definitely not ready for this old man and his rock.

As ordered, I let Sergeant Spears do the talking.

“Mr. Piskett, you need to get up and move out of the road.”

His head lifted, his scrawny neck quivering. “This is my road,” said Mr. Piskett. “It’s been my road for a hundred years and I can sit in it if I want to.” His head bounced as he spoke, and a small patch of maybe five white inch-long hairs swayed back and forth. I kept one eye on the suspect while glancing nervously up and down the road to assure myself no cars were approaching.

Sergeant Spears kept his cool. “We’ve been through this before, Mr. Piskett. You can’t sit in the middle of the road. Put aside the rock and let’s get you moved.”

“This here rock is a gift from God. It’s my rock and you can’t have it.” He doubled down on his hold of the rock.

Between checking the roadway and breathing, I was examining Mr. Piskett from head to toe for possible weapons, not forgetting the threat the rock itself posed. Mr. Piskett’s sturdy leather work boots were well used and scruffy. They also matched the condition of his clothing which hung on him and could easily hide a weapon.

“Okay, Mr. Piskett,” said Sergeant Spears, playing along, I think. “I need to move you out of the road. You can carry the rock if you want.”

“Are you blind?” the angry rock-carrying old man demanded. “You’re nothing but a stupid ugly piece of kennel poop. I can’t lift this rock.”

Sergeant Spears’ voice tightened slightly. “Then how did you get it over here?”

Mr. Piskett shook his head slightly. “I rolled the thing, but as soon as I got it here, God told me I couldn’t roll it no more.”

Sergeant Spears looked at me with a slight question in his gaze and then turned back to the man cradling the rock.

“Well, Mr. Piskett, this pretty lady here was sent by God to move your rock. I’ve been sent by the Small Town Police Department to move you.”

Mr. Piskett looked at me and asked me if I was sent by God. I tried to look godly, but who was I kidding?

“God wants me to help you with the rock,” I told Mr. Piskett, completely winging it, “and get you out of the road.”

He got up, allowing the rock to roll from his lap, and said, “I’ll help you lift it. God said not to roll it, so it needs to be carried, and since God wanted it moved, it shouldn’t weigh too much.”

I stood shoulder to shoulder with the musty smelling Mr. Piskett. He attempted to help me lift the roughened stone, but the majority of the weight landed in my arms. I pulled the stone to my body and rested it against my previously pristine uniform and duty belt. Mr. Piskett was wrong about God lightening the load, and I was thankful for every push-up I did at the academy. I carried that stupid rock over to the side of the road and dropped it. When it came to a standstill, I slapped my hands together to dislodge the rock dust and larger bits that had bitten into the skin of my palms. I tried to use my somewhat clean hands to dust off the front of my uniform and belt to remove the rock particles caught in the crevices of my gear. I don’t think it worked.

Sergeant Spears’ voice snapped me out of my grooming. “Angel Ivy, I need you to get a citation out of the car.” It was said with humor although he maintained a straight face.

I followed instructions and thankfully, Sergeant Spears helped me fill in the appropriate information. I then walked over to Mr. Piskett. He was now sitting on the side of the road, out of traffic, though no one had driven past since we arrived. His plaid jacket and blue jeans were covered in the same dust I’d divested myself of.

My voice cracked slightly as I gave the required drivel I’d learned at the academy. “Mr. Piskett, without admitting guilt, I need you to sign this citation and agree to appear in court on the date I’ve written here.” I pointed to the date and the line for him to sign.

He scrawled his name and then looked up. I could see two missing holes where his bottom teeth should be. He offered a smile of assurance. “God bless you, Angel Ivy.”

He glanced back down at the court date then tipped his head my way. His wrinkled chin moved as he spoke. “I’ll see you in January if God is willing.”

If I hadn’t been paying close attention, I would have missed the lowering of his left eyelid. The old coot actually winked at me. His hazel eyes then looked away as I walked off with Sergeant Spears.

When I returned to my seat in the patrol car, I was quiet, trying to understand exactly what had just happened.

Sergeant Spears laughed. “You did a great job. There’s no explanation for Mr. Piskett. He’ll stay out of our hair until after the court date. He’s friends with the judge, and Judge Forsyth will not forgive two citations so close together. We’ll get a small break from him, and then God will give him a new task and I’ll let my new angel sweet-talk him into another citation.”

The tension in my shoulders eased and I smiled. I’d survived my first official call of duty, and my first case was successfully in the bag.