

# SNITCH

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*orca soundings*

ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

# Chapter One

It was supposed to be easy. You choose, they had told me. You can either go to a regular anger management program, which is where, basically, you sit around with a bunch of losers once a week and talk about what makes you mad and what you could have done instead of punching out a wall or maybe a person. Or you can go to this special



program where they teach you how to train dogs. Gee, let me think about it—door number one or door number two...

I went with the dogs. It had to be better than sitting around listening to a bunch of tantrum freaks gripe, right? Besides, how hard could it be?

Things went sour right from minute one.



The woman at the front desk told me to go to the room that she called the training room. I opened the door. And there was Scott. He was standing in the middle of the room with some other guys. He turned when the door opened. When he saw me he grinned, as if nothing had happened, as if we were still friends. He had a kind of lopsided smile that always made him look goofy. I didn't smile back at him. My hands curled into fists.

"Hey, Josh," said someone behind me.

I spun around, thinking it was some other guy from my past. Why not? With Scott there, things were already bad. They might as well get worse.

But it was Mr. "Call-me-Brian" Weller, who was in charge of the program. I'd met him once, just after I applied. That was part of the thing with this program. You had to go to an interview before they let you in. Mostly they asked questions about your experience with animals—whether you had ever had any pets, whether you liked animals, what you thought of people who hurt animals. I'd admitted that I had never had a pet and that I wasn't sure how much I liked animals. I figured that would be the end of it—they'd ship me off to the regular program. But they didn't.

Mr. Weller smiled at me. "Did you manage to find the place all right?" he asked.

"My brother drove me," I said. I live with my older brother Andrew, his wife Miranda, and their kid Digby



(don't get me started on what kind of dumb name that is), who is nine months old.

"It's nice to have a big brother who's so supportive," Mr. Weller said.

Mostly Andrew was glad I was in the program because it would keep me out of the apartment for a couple more hours. I had been living with him and Miranda for nearly a month now, ever since I got out of the group home. Miranda never came out and said she didn't want me there, but I could tell she wasn't thrilled. The place was so small. She and Andrew shared a bedroom with Digby and his crib. I slept on the couch in the living room/dining room. Besides those two rooms, the apartment had a kitchen and a bathroom. Andrew said I could live there as long as I didn't mess up again. He said that as soon as I finished with the program, I had to get a job—sooner if I could swing it. But that was going to be hard because I was going to school in the mornings to make up for at least a couple of the classes I had messed up last

year, and the teacher really piled on the homework. Andrew said I'd have to work all summer and keep a part-time job when school started so that I could contribute to the household. He said as soon as I got a job and proved that I could hold it, he would start looking for a bigger place.

I looked at Scott again. He seemed right at home with the other guys. Mr. Weller looked at him too.

"You and Scott know each other, don't you?" he said. He asked it like it was a question. But I knew he had read my file. So I knew he already had the answer.

"Don't worry about it, Josh," he said. "If it turns out to be a problem for you that Scott is here, we can deal with it."

Right. Like I needed someone to handle my problems for me. I took another look at Scott and said, "Why should it be a problem?"

Mr. Weller looked at me for a moment. Then he nodded and held out a hand, a signal to me that I should go right on in.