

The Proginers



By wwwolf

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Chapter 10: Washed Up on Shore

English's home was set well back from the road, with several strands of trees between it and anyone who might try to pierce the veil of privacy.

The house at the centre of the near grossly oversized lot wasn't all that big, but it was familiar. A pure white two story Victorian, it looked like it had just been transported here from across the Atlantic.

"Come on," English pulled us forward with an arm over our shoulders, "Let's get you and the terrors settled in."

Stepping up the unblemished whitewashed steps, we hardly even slowed as he unlocked the front door.

"Take 'em upstairs, Mate. I've got just the place," he said.

For just a moment I looked at the stairs in horror as if climbing them was the equivalent of Mt. Logan. We'd come all the way out here with me carrying the kids, Rebecca their supplies, and English *our* supplies.

My arms felt like they were about to fall off.

Gritting my teeth, I was about to glare at the lion, but turned only just in time to see his poof tail disappearing around a door frame.

Rebecca was no help. She'd dropped all her bags the moment we'd stepped through the door and had spread herself out across the nearest sofa.

"Have fun, Wolfy," she said, a chuckle to her voice.

The stairs were just as bad as I'd feared they'd be, but I made it none the less. And managed not to drop either of the kids who curled asleep in my arms.

Coming to the top, I felt almost as worn out as the first time I'd stood here. And back then I'd had to scramble my way in through an upstairs window.

Pausing for just a moment, I turned right, into the spare bedroom. I had a feeling English wouldn't much care for the idea of me settling the kids out over his massive king sized bed. Like most things in this house his bed was pure white. It wouldn't stay that way long with the kids on it.

Then again, to think of it, not much in this place would be white for long with the kids here.

I was just starting to chuckle when I stepped into the spare bedroom. The sound stopped dead on my lips. It's hard to laugh when your jaw is sitting on the floor.

Had I just stepped into a parallel universe?

I'd been in this room before. It had been, like the rest of the house, white walled, only this once had held a spare white linen bed and a couple of stained wooden night stands. I'd never been sure why English had it as I'd been fairly certain Rebecca and I had been the only ones ever to use it. And sparingly at that.

That room was, to be quite blunt, gone.

In its place was quite possibly the most jarring, most over thought, most... *extravagant* kid's room I'd ever seen.

The walls on one half of the room had been repainted a sky blue, the other half a unicorn pink. There were two cribs, one on either side, and a toy box in the middle that was positively overflowing with every imaginable children's toy.

"English!"

I could hear laughter from behind me.

"Like it, Mate?"

"Well, what else was I going to put all my money into? With the upswing in business I had to invest it in *something*," the lion said, sitting back on a chair in the kitchen, sipping a cup of steaming lemon tea. Rebecca and I were seated across from him.

I shook my head and Rebecca just laughed.

"But a room for *our* kids?" She asked.

English shrugged. "It's not like I'm ever going to have any. And anyway, what better? They'll enjoy it while they're young, coming out to their ol' uncle's house. Then when they grow old enough to not care for it anymore I can just put it back again, eh? You're only young once." For just a moment his voice went soft.

We didn't get much else done that day, seeing how the walk out had taken *forever*, but we made up for it come the next morning.

Rebecca had been right, I don't think we'd ever taken the kids out of the city before. My dad would have cuffed me soundly about the ears for that if he'd still been alive.

Watching the two of them crawl about on the lawn and through the garden at the back of the house was an amazing experience. You'd never think it would be such a big deal, but the wonder in their eyes said far more than any words possibly could.

Ging was, unsurprisingly, the more active one. They were only about eight months old and wolves develop faster at this age. He was already ambling about on all fours, chasing butterflies and trying to chew on *everything*.

That wasn't to say the Beth was far behind. She was smaller and her crawling was far slower than Ging's unsteady loup, but she trailed determinedly behind her brother and always kept him in sight. More than once she managed to catch up with him by finding a shorter path to whatever it was that had caught their attention.

"What have you there, little-one's?" I asked, scooting through the dirt towards them as they clustered around one of the garden rows.

A moment later Beth's hand came up, followed by Ging's sniffing nose. She was clutching a bluebell.

I laughed. At this rate the two of them were going to uproot every one of English's expensive

imported plants.

“Feel like a run, Mate?”

It was nine in the morning and English and I were the only ones awake. Rebecca was still sprawled out on the couch and the kids were sound asleep upstairs.

That was a nasty side effect of making over the spare room. Rebecca and I had been demoted to sleeping down here.

English had offered us his room, but it just didn't feel right to sleep in another man's bed.

I stretched, yawned and cracked my spine. “Sure, why not. It's been a long time since I've had to sleep on someone's sofa, and longer since I've had to share one with someone else.”

He chuckled, leading me out the back door and across the wooden patio.

For just a moment I felt a twinge of guilt at leaving the kids, but then I saw the flash of a blue uniform out of the corner of my eye. There were cops on the path between us and the road. We were as safe here as back in the apartment, if not safer.

Breaking into a run, we were weaving around the trees in little more than seconds. There were no cops out here, they hardly ever braved the forest.

English, when I'd first met him, had been as home the the woods as a deep sea angler fish would be in the company of hawks. His motions out here were still a touch stilted, a hair to stiff and hesitating to be completely natural, but he no longer seemed to try and tip over every dead branch between here and Manitoba.

The dark green foliage of the trees closed in around us like a mist, obscuring our vision but bringing such a plethora of scents to our noses that it more than made up for it. The city smelt of concrete and asphalt and far too many people pressed into far too tight a space. The road smelled of travel and dust. Even English's home was unnatural, selling far too strongly of lion and whitewash.

Only the forest smelled as it should, clear, rain swept and *right*.

We didn't have any real destination in mind as we set out. Sometimes I led, sometimes English did. Every so often we would stumble upon the trail of prey, a deer or a rabbit. We followed their trails now and then but never gave them any serious attention.

I didn't need to hunt. I needed to *run*, to be free. Spilling blood and bringing back a fresh carcase wasn't high on my priorities when I knew there was a well stocked larder in the kitchen.

Somehow without even trying to we slowly climbed up the foothills of the Rockies. It wasn't long before we rose above the crowns of the trees below, opening up a vista to the west. The city and the sea spread out before us, glimmering like jewels just waiting to be plucked.

“Wait for a breather, Mate,” English called from behind me, his voice rough.

I found a soft rock to park myself down on and gazed out over the view.

It wasn't until I sat down that I realized just how winded I was.

“Oi, Mate,” English puffed, collapsing down next to me, “You haven't made me run like that in years.” He shot me a grin. “I'm an old man, eh? You do that to me too many times and my heart will give out.”

I smiled and punched him in the shoulder. His muscles were rock hard.

“Wow, Mate,” he said, looking out over the ocean. “I haven't seen a view like this in a very long time.” Pointing a finger, he singled out the ships that anchored out in the harbour. They were plain to see even at this distance. “Gods, I remember coming in on a ship like that, only smaller.”

“It was a different lion that stepped off that boat, Mate. Michele James may have boarded the

boat from Japan, but he was at the bottom of the sea with the jetsam.”

“I walked down the gangplank from the boat with nothing, literally nothing, save what was on my back. Everything I'd had, money, status, I'd packed with me from Japan was the gods knew where. All I had was a single backpack I'd salvaged from the explosion, and it had precious little in it.”

“I'd set off east, to the new world, and by the gods I'd made it. Now I hadn't the slightest where I was going next. It may sound like a bit of a cop out, Mate, considering I'd walked all the way from the golden plains of Africa, but I took one look at the soaring Rockys in the such close distance and quickly decided that I had no intimidate desire to cross them.”

“Then again,” he said, smiling, “That may be in no small part due to the fact I arrived in the middle of winter. As you may have noticed, winter just isn't my season. I'd never been someplace where there was snow before. Even when I'd been crossing through China I'd always stayed to the lowlands. I took one look at the snow that had crept down from peaks and decided it just wasn't for me.”

“I'm not going to say I'm proud of what I did next, Mate, but I did what I had to do in order to survive. I stole.” The lion tried to flash a smile but failed. “Keep in mind, Mate, I could speak a good half dozen languages by this point, but 'english' wasn't among the ones I'd used in a long time.”

He shook his head. “You wonder why I was never much of one to respect the cops in this town – our good friend expected – I started out on the other side from them.”

“I spent a month here, Mate, never venturing far from the docks, burgling whatever establishments I could find as the weather just got colder and colder. One night I'd raid a pastry shop, the next a wine store. I took what I needed to survive, and perhaps just a little bit more. I had a few run in with the dogs back then but they never caught me, never even caught sight of me.”

“It was the coldest day of the year, sometime in January. Gods, I thought my whiskers were about to snap off I was so cold. I'd been sleeping on the streets and in disused attics.” He laughed. “You'd have hardly thought that mere months ago I'd had a posh little house in Japan. I looked little better than a street urchin and I *was* little better than a cut-purse.”

“Anyway, it was sometime around two in the morning when I decided to venture a little further afield than I'd normally been doing. My escapades had been on the shorefront and that had attracted the attention of the dogs. Enough so that I'd decided I wanted to move elsewhere. And where better than up? High street wasn't all that far away.”

“I wasn't able to case my target as well as I would have liked. I looked – and smelled – like a tramp. Walking up and down the street to get a good idea of who and what was there would have attracted far more attention than I would have liked.”

“The shop I picked was based purely on need. There were jewelry stores and watch shops on either side, but I picked a tailor to rob.”

“I was cold and I wanted something warm to wear. And more than that, I wanted something I could look good in. This was supposed to be my first step up in society. I'd been on top once, more than once, and I wanted to get back up there again.”

The lion closed his eyes for a moment. “And I picked the wrong store to burgle.” He chuckled slightly. “Or perhaps I picked the perfect one.”

“The moon was in hiding when I stalked up the back alley. I thought myself in luck when I found the back door unlocked.” He chuckled. “I didn't even pause to think what it might mean.”

“Prowling into the back room, I made a racket that could have raised the gods. Honestly, I wasn't even *trying* to be all that quiet. I was sure everyone had gone home for the night. I thought I was alone and could do anything I pleased.”

“I got about ten steps before a door opened at the top of the nearby stairs. A golden light flowed

out. It almost blinded me.”

“You remember how I told you I couldn't speak the language? Well, by this time I'd managed to remember a few dozen words. What I heard from up the stairs didn't sound like anything I'd heard in the town previous.”

“For just a moment I was paralysed with fear. It may sound silly, but despite my weeks of burgling I still didn't really think of myself as a thief. The idea of being caught, of being *tried* was terrifying to me.”

“Only just in time did I gather the presence of mind to hide. I thought myself cunning, ducking behind a sack load of bolts. It wasn't until much later I learned he knew every square inch of that blasted store.”

“Flipping on lights as he walked, the man at the top of the stairs came towards me, straight as an arrow. I was still dazzled from the light and couldn't make out the form.”

“It wasn't until he was nearly atop me that I could finally see him clearly. A red fox, already well on his way to going grey. He hardly even reached up to my chest. And he was looking straight at me.”

“He said something, but for the life of me I couldn't make it out. Then he said something more. Still couldn't understand a word of it but his voice made it more than obvious he didn't care for me hiding behind his cloth as I was.”

English let out a long sigh.

“I, if you'll pardon the pun, bolted for it. Tossing the cloth aside, and in the general direction of his head, I ran. I could have stood and fought, but like I said I didn't really see myself as a law breaker.”

“That got me all of about three steps.”

English paused for a long moment, a smile and scowl fighting for his lips in equal measure.

“The blighter hit me in the back of the head with one of his bolts. A heavy one. Velvet, I think. I was out like a light before I even got to the door.”

“I don't think I was out long. I was still on the ground when I came to. I would have tried again for the door right then and there but he'd bound my hands and feet.”

I couldn't help but snort. English gave me a hard glare before his face softened.

“You've got it, Mate. I was soundly beaten by *Smith*. It was his store I'd had the misfortune to enter.”

“I've never been able to figure out why he didn't just all the cops right then and there, but I think I can speak for us both by saying I'm glad he didn't. Instead he dragged me across that polished floor of his and deposited me in front of a little wooden chair. He made me get the rest of the way from there.”

“I'm many things, but I know when I've been beat. I didn't bother trying to fight. When Smith started talking I listened. Not that I understood much, but I listened.”

“I only knew a dozen or so words, so it took me a good hour, but at long last I was able to get across that I was a wayfarer. A man in need of a home and a good meal. I'm not sure why, but it was when I told him how cold I was that he softened to me.”

“Not that he trusted me much. It was another eight hours, and I'd learned another couple dozen words, before he cut me loose.”

“That, Mate, as they say, was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Not that it looked that way at the time. I made a run for it before the ropes had even touched the floor, never looking back.”

“Not that I got far. The weather kept getting colder and I couldn't seem to get any richer. The first rule of being a criminal is never to return to the scene of the crime. Well, I'm a piss poor thief. It

was two days later I went back to Smith's shop, in the daylight this time, and through the front door.”

“The blighter honestly didn't even seem surprised to see me. He simply helped up his customers while I waited and then turned his attention to me when the store was empty.”

“I can't say that 'sorry' was one of the words I'd learned yet, nor was it likely to be something from my – now somewhat more humble – lips.”

“It took a little while, but I was at least able to get across that this time I was looking for work rather than his cash box. I'm not sure what it was he saw in me, but I'm sure anyone else would have thrown me out on my ear.”

“Smith? He invited me for a sit down and a cup of tea.”

“You might remember that I'd packed my mother's tea set with me when I left home so many years ago. It was a testament to it's design, not to mention its carrying case, that it was still unbroken. I hadn't used it in years, but it felt right to offer it now, perhaps in repayment for my attempt to rob him.”

“At first Smith wouldn't touch it, he thought it stolen. It took me a long time to get it through his thick skull that it was *mine*.”

“In any event, we have a long, leisurely tea and I picked up a dozen or so more words. By this time I'd managed to work up a pidgen english. Most things still went over my head, but I could get myself understood if I had enough time.”

“By the end of the day I had a job as Smith's helper. Not an assistant, I didn't know the first thing about tailoring, but I could carry bolts of cloth and make pickups as well as the next man. And I could sleep in the store rent free and guard it from any other would be thieves.”

“It took me a month or so living with Smith before I was confident enough to walk the streets again. I could speak the language now, thanks to Smith's help. And it was that old fox who gave me my new name, English. Until then I'd still been Michael Jones. I didn't mind the change, it helped me feel more at home here, like a new man. Like I'd never been my father's son, like I was related to Smith.”

“Anyway, the wage old Smith was paying was, to put it bluntly, rubbish. The man fed me and let me sleep rent free, but I had hardly enough pocket money to buy myself a snack likely start thinking about becoming self sufficient.”

“Well, Mate, you know about my history in India and China. I went back to the one thing I knew I could do well. Bounty hunting. I don't think I can ever thank Jasmine's parents enough for that gift.”

“Things were different back then, Mate. The cops had a different top dog and they tended to prefer to do all the work themselves. Contracts were still common, but only for the criminals the cops either couldn't find, or *didn't want to* find. It was hard cases all around.”

“I think it's safe to say I made a bit of a splash.”

“With Smith's blessing I took a day of work and picked up a contract. It was for a murderer who'd killed at least half a dozen people. No one knew where he was, all I had was a rough sketch of his face.”

“To make a long story short, I found the man, knocked his block off, and dragged him to the nearest police station with a copy of his warrant before the day was out. The cops had been looking for him for over a year. At first they didn't even believe me this was the man they'd been searching for.”

“Next week I convinced Smith to give me another day off. I went out, got another contract, and brought another man in. In two days I'd made more pocket money than I'd made working for Smith for two months.”

“The third week I did the same over again. I was starting to get a bit of a reputation.”

"Things were a bit different back then, you understand. Bounty hunting wasn't big business. There were no companies, and only a few dozen contracts up at any given time. Bounty hunting was more of a pastime for most people, a side business."

"Anyway, it was during the fifth week, and my fifth contract, that something changed. The dogs at my local police station had been competent and capable enough, but now when I walked in there was a new one. He handled my contracts personally."

"He was a Great Dane. I remember him well. His coat was pure white, contrasting with the brown and black of the shepherds, and he was as thin as a ghost."

"His name was," English coughed, "Sayer."

"I won't say he quite took me under his wing, but the old dog – he was even old in those days – did come to work closely with me. He was at the station every time I came in with a new catch, and always handled my paperwork. And he was good at it too. I hardly needed to do anything but give an account of my hunt that he'd write down."

"That was about the time I began switching gears. It may not seem like much, but I began hunting twice a week. Now instead of Smith paying me to work I payed the fox to sleep in the shop."

"And that's how it went from there. I did more and more hunting, and made not a bad little bit of scratch. I still remember the day I moved out of Smith's shop, I'd only been living there for six months. But..." he went silent for a moment, a hand reached up to brush his eyes. "It felt, Mate, like I was leaving home. I remember that day better than the day I buried my mother." With an obvious effort he pushed the thought away.

"Anyway, by that time I was hunting seven days a week. And, oddly, Sayer was at the station *each and every day*. Every time I came in I tarried a little longer, talked to him a little more. He... wasn't a normal dog. I'm not sure how, but I knew it the first time I saw him. He was more."

"I didn't realize just how much more until one Friday night. We were just finishing up the last of a paperwork on my latest catch when he turned to me and asked if I'd like to join him for a drink at the bar."

"I knew the cops, but not as well as I do now. I was taken aback that a officer would ask such a thing, but I wasn't as surprised as I should have been. I shrugged and agreed."

"Sayer was different in those days, looser. I met him at the neighborhood bar an hour later. He was out of uniform. Now I had a second friend in the city."

"It was a couple of weeks later, after we'd gotten to know each other, that Sayer came to me with a proposition. He wanted to start a company. A bounty hunting firm."

"I'll be honest, I just about laughed him out of the bar. *Me?* How could he ever think *I'd* want to form a company?"

"I suppose I should have seen the signs right then and there, but I was too young and stupid. Sayer wasn't the only cop taking a leave of absence from the force. There were four others right at the same time, likely even the same day. They all found other prominent hunters in the city and went off to form their own companies. Sayer was the only one who'd been rejected."

"After that point, Mate, pickings got a lot slimmer. I was a good hunter, the best in the city by a wide margin, but it's hard to compete with you're up against whole groups of people. A month later I walked back into the station on a rainy and blustery Saturday night, empty handed when my mark had been snatched out from under my nose by a team, and asked Sayer if he was still interested."

"It was the next day, with the rain still pouring down from the heavens, that we formed Storm Front, just the two of us."

"I remember *that* day, Mate. A tree out in the park across the street got hit by a bolt of lightning."

"As you can guess, forming a company on paper is one thing. Making it work is a whole 'nother problem. But even right off the bat we had an edge. I was the best bounty hunter in the city and Sayer was no slouch himself. Our profits tripped overnight once we started working together."

"But that wasn't enough. We improved, but so did all the other companies. We needed more hunters. And we were at a disadvantage. All the other groups had a head start on us. They'd all been formed a month ago and snapped up all the best and most willing talent. That left SF with the dregs, those who were either too incompetent to be hired or too proud to work for anyone but themselves."

English smiled. "We didn't want the former, so that left us with the daunting task of getting ahold of that latter. The most prominent bounty hunter who'd yet to join a company was a bear. Brown."

"I won't go too much into detail on just what I had to offer the bugger to get him to sign up, but suffice it to say that in the early years he was taking a bigger share than either Sayer or I."

"You don't know Brown well, Mate. He's a good man. A really good man. There are few people in this city I'd trust my life to, and he's one of them. I never had an older brother, but he'd be the closest I've ever had to one."

"But three hunters does not a full sized company make. With all the other obvious candidates gone now I had to spread out to... less obvious possibilities."

"You have no idea how long it took me to get a meeting with the next guy, Mate. I'm talking *months* here. He was just about impossible to get a hold of. And for good reason too. The man was in the process of starting up his own group."

"I think you might know him," English flashed me a smile, "His name was Griss."

"At long last I managed to get a sit down with him in a coffee shop on the edge of town. He kept me waiting a good forty-five minutes. I was just about ready to throw my plate across the room and storm out of there when the scent of blood hit my nose like a sledgehammer."

"He never seemed to *enter* the room, and I'd been watching for him. It was just a matter of I blinked and he was sitting across the table from me, his entire chest soaked in gore."

"Griss Taggart was not a well known name in the city back in those days. He was on the top of his game as a hunter, but there was yet any real group known as the *hunters*. He was still in the process of forming them."

"We sat down over a pleasant enough meal. I'll admit though that I was a little off put by the blood that matted his fur. He hardly even seemed to notice."

"We started with smalltalk, crime in the city, the price of food, things like that. Then there was a pause. I decided it was now or never."

"I asked him point blank what it was going to take for get him to join Storm Front."

"You may not see it, Mate, but there were some ways that you and your father were so alike. The way your eyes widen when you've been surprised, how you looked like you're about to fall off the back of the chair."

"And the way you laugh."

"And by the gods that man could laugh. I almost never heard it, but he could laugh if you gave him reason to."

"I was starting to go red before he could get himself back under control. He'd thought I'd come here *looking* for a job, not *offering* one. Griss was hiring people for the hunters in exactly the same way I was recruiting for Storm Front."

"Well, I shouldn't say *exactly* the same way. He'd be a perfect bounty hunter for SF, but I would have made a piss poor member in his ranks."

"Anyway," English let out a long breath, "Once he got over the humour of the situation he told

me, in a voice calm and commanding, that he was sorry, but he have to decline. The hunters were his life, and he wasn't about to throw his lot in with anyone or anything else. And, he added, he had a child on the way."

English grinned at me.

"Well, that was it. We did manage to get one good thing out of it though. I learned right then and there *not to mess with the hunters*. He never said it in so many words, but he make it understood that it would not be in my best interests to try and poach men from the hunter's ranks. One, I wouldn't get any. And two, I wouldn't like the consequences. Almost as an after thought he added that he wouldn't try to hire away any of my employees either."

"Things were a bit rough for the next year or so, but we survived. That was when I realized what SF really was. The best. We didn't have many hunters, only a dozen or so by that point, but they were the best money could buy. I gave people deals that they just couldn't find anywhere else. And Sayer still handled our paperwork. He did less hunting every month, but it was more than made up for by him handling just about everything else."

"You've seen Sayer as a Commissioner, he was uncanny. Now imagine that skill and force of will backing Storm Front. Even with a small force we were unparalleled."

"And that's the way we carried on. Once we got through the first year things began to settle down. The next four were the best we ever had. I knew something was wrong towards the end of the fifth year. Up until then Sayer had handled just about everything on the back end himself. But all of a sudden he started hiring office staff. One day I walked in and he had an assistant. The next week he had another. By the end of the month he had half a dozen people working with him to keep the papers straight."

"I didn't think much of it. We were a growing company and I just figured he needed help. I hardly took notice of any of the office drones."

"And that, Mate, was my biggest mistake. And I'm old enough now to admit it."

"One of the men hired, I'm not sure if it was by Sayer or one of his subordinates, was a reptile named VanderHoom."

"I hardly even noticed him. He was little more than a clerk."

"But it was only a couple of months after that things changed. Sayer quit."

"Up and quit. Just came to me one day in my office and told me he was done. There was no anger in his voice, no annoyance. It was like he'd just woken up one day and decided that the last five years work was finished."

"I think I did a good job of keeping my face in place, but it felt like he'd stabbed me through the heart with a blade of ice."

"I didn't realize it until much later, but the day he quit was *exactly* five years after he'd left the force. I did find out, however, that he quit SF on a Tuesday, and was back and working with the cops on the following Wednesday."

"You might be able to make a good guess how things went from there. The man who replaced Sayer was a ape, named Hlost I think. He was a good man. Too bad. It made his death four months later all the more painful. The cops wrote it up as an accident, and I had no reason to think different."

"Not until the next man we promoted to the head of the office died. And the one after him. It wasn't until I promoted VanderHoom to the position that the problem went away. I'll tell you that back then I didn't think twice, I was just glad to have a office manager who could stay breathing."

"You know, Mate, that I don't tend to worry myself too much about the back end of things at SF. Sayer had done an amazing job and outright spoiled me. His replacements had been pretty good too. I gave VanderHoom the same long leash."

“I didn't even poke my nose in when he started changing our hiring policy. SF had always been a small firm, but with VanderHoom at its head we began to hire lots of inexperienced hunters to compliment the old fellas like Brown and I. The fact that so many of them died off on their first few hunts didn't even make it through my thick skull. I didn't see that, I just saw how much money they were adding to my pocket.”

“I was the last to notice anything suspicious with people dieing. I'd gone through more partners then I could count. Brown was still alive because *nothing* can kill him, and Sayer was alive because he'd quit. Everyone else it seemed was long dead, replaced by new, fresh young face after new fresh young face.”

“Then one day I way hunting down a mark alone. He slipped into an alleyway and threatened to escape. That's when a waif of a kid stepped right out in front of the monster and tripped him up. That little waif was a tiger named Huston. I think, Mate you know the rest from there.”