

POLICE DOOG 2

HER MAJESTY'S FINEST



By wwwolf

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[Story by wwwolf](#)

[Cover art by Da Boz](#)

[Editing by Friday](#)

Chapter 2: Cobblestones and Threadbare Shirts

June 8'th 1988

02:00 Hours

The Kennel, London, England

For just an instant I hung in the air, two stories above the blacktop. Thousands of razor sharp shards of glass sparkled around me in the dying glow of the sun. My path was smooth. There was no God in the shrapnel this time, no church laid out before me. It was only I and the simple, unadorned, mundane world.

It seemed I paused there forever. Above me a full moon looked down impassively.

With a stab of pain the world lurched back into focus. My legs buckled as I hit the ground. Instinctively I pulled into a roll, bleeding off the momentum I could.

The loose asphalt ground into my fur. It was only by sheer luck I was able to keep the soft pad of my nose from being torn asunder. The rest of me was not so fortunate as I tumbled.

With a sickening crunch I slammed into a wall, a soft groan escaping my lips.

Opening my eyes, I gingerly rolled onto my chest.

A mass of bruises criss-crossed my body beneath my now ragged and worn pelt, joining those that had yet to heal from only yesterday. I could hardly move, hardly raise my head. Every breath hurt, but I was still alive.

I looked up to the ragged hole gaping in the side of the Kennel. Light spilt out, pointing accusingly towards me, shining down like a searchlight to point me out.

It seemed impossibly high, so far away.

I could hear the alarms howling, I could hear people running and shouting. They were confused, panicked, afraid. They shouldn't be, they'd all been trained to deal with this situation. All they needed do was follow that training, like a Dog would.

For just a moment I lay there, waiting for them to close around me with the cold, calculated,

iron-clad speed and efficiency the service was so well known for.

Nothing happened.

People came to stand by the window and peer down. They pointed. They shouted.

Nothing happened.

Struggling slowly to my feet, I leaned against the wall and looked back up at them.

They flinched away.

The faintest shadow of laughter tugged at the back of my throat. They didn't know what to do. Something like this had never happened. Not once.

In all the years of the Kennel, a Dog had *never* escaped. It simply never crossed our minds to even try. There were policies and procedures to deal with delinquent pups, paperwork and plans. But no Dog had ever tried to escape.

They, the humans, had been trained, drilled in exactly what was to be done in a situation like this. Yet they didn't know what to do.

One foot in front of the other, shards of broken glass grinding beneath the soft pads of my feet, I began to walk.

“Hey! Hey... halt!”

I turned to look back at the window so far away. The female officer who debriefed me stood there.

“Forty-Two! Come back! Where are you going?”

There was something in the way she addressed me. She hadn't spoken as a Handler to a Dog. She asked me as a civilized person would.

I'd done something she never could have expected. I was more than a mere Dog now.

I looked up at her.

Beneath me, I could feel blood dripping to the blacktop.

I didn't answer.

Leaning against the wall, I limped away. Cold and naked, I limped into the dark, empty, unknown London night.

The world spun about me as I walked, once familiar streets turning alien. I hardly knew where I was, and didn't know where I was going.

No more than a hundred meters from where I had fallen I was forced to pause, to slump against the age-worn brick wall. I was only steps from the street. And in the end that was what saved me.

I heard the disorganised and frantic slap of their boots on the pavement well before I could see them. That gave me more than enough time to crawl back into the deep shadows, my dirty and stained brown pelt merging into the night.

A dozen human officers raced past me. They were clad head to foot in body armour and carried high power machine guns. The last time I'd seen men who looked anything like this was at my

Goddard tests.

It was clear in their motions they were beyond nervous. They never even thought to perform a proper sweep for me. The men had been trained in what to do, but they hadn't dreamed they'd ever have to do it.

They rushed past me, clustering about where I had fallen. The broken glass crunched under their thick boots but I'd have been surprised if they even heard it.

"Where is he?" one of the men asked. His voice was high and nervous, words coming fast.

"Why the bugger do you think I know?" another replied. There was a long pause as they looked about, but none of them would take more than two steps from his fellows.

"Is this the same one that...?"

"Yeah," the first said. "It's him. The Philosopher Dog learned a new trick. Maybe he'll try to talk us to death."

There was nervous laughter.

Taking a deep breath I slipped back to my feet, fighting not to let out a gasp of pain as the dirt and filth of the street ground its way into my wounds.

The humans continued to cluster around where I had fallen. It was clear they had a procedure to follow. They should be securing the area, they should be fanning out, looking for me. They should be able to catch me easily, having all the advantages.

None of them seemed to want to leave their little patch of light thrown by the broken window.

I encountered three more teams of men over the next five minutes. They all stood on their corners or paced their side-walks, weapons at the ready in their nervous and shaking hands.

None of them prodded the shadows too deeply. None of them *wanted* to find me. They all did exactly as they were ordered, but never went above and beyond to seek me out.

It was only a handful of blocks before it seemed I was free of them. The human officers, and they were all human, feared to stray too far from the Kennel.

Only when I found my first street with citizens walking their late night errands did I realize something.

I was nude.

A human would have come to the realization far sooner, but my fur kept me warm and dry enough in the calm London night. Yet I was naked none the less – I would stand out no matter where I went.

Slipping back into yet another narrow back alley I began picking through the ubiquitous dustbins, looking for something, anything to disguise me.

The logical part of my mind told me that I would likely be out of luck. I was far too large to pass as a mere human, and the chances of finding a Police Dog's uniform in the trash was so low as to be unthinkable.

But I looked nonetheless.

The light was dim. I was forced to hunt by scent and touch alone. I was near ready to give up when my fingers brushed something soft.

Pulling it gently and quietly out into the wan light of the moon, I had a large, light blue knit shirt. It was clear why it had been thrown out, the thing was worn and threadbare. And it stank of the scent of a human who'd spent far too long wearing it. The stench was strong enough that I could almost see it in the air, like a physical thing. It was strong enough to even overwhelm the smell of the garbage it had been left in.

In short, it was perfect.

The musk of the clothing would help disguise my own scent, and it was baggy enough that I could tuck my tail within it and slouch to at least attempt to conceal my silhouette. It wouldn't disguise me from anyone who came within a few paces, but with a touch of luck I'd be able to walk the streets at night without raising eyebrows.

Slipping from the alleyway once more, I scampered down the dark, twisting, cobblestone streets of London. I'd been born in this city, and it was here I'd spent the majority of my life, yet I still felt a stranger.

My youth had been spent almost completely confined to the Kennel. I was a Londoner in name only, I'd never had the opportunity to learn how to survive in the wilds of the city.

I had no real direction in mind for my flight, no destination or goal.

It was only then I realize what a fool I was.

I'd decided to consign myself to death last night. Then I'd broken my oath to avenge the death of my friends. After that I'd found myself tied up by the SERT team, unable to slip quietly away.

And when Master Constable Proust had all but handed me a way to keep my secret safe for all of time I'd rejected it as well, in the most unspeakable of ways.

Stopping dead, my claws skittered over the concrete.

And I was now implicated in the death of a human. A police officer.

I leaned against a nearby wall, having to fight back the impulse to vomit.

I hadn't killed him... it hadn't been me.

It was Proust. This was Proust's fault...

I whispered it, but the words tasted like ashes on my lips.

My ears twitched a moment later. Someone was coming. No – an entire pack.

The thought disgusted me, but I dove for a nearby dustbin. It had been piled high with food waste from a neighbouring pub. The scent was enough to hide anything.

Holding my breath, I watched as a team of Police Dogs marched into sight, moving as perfectly as if they were on parade.

Something tickled at the back of my mind.

They would send a pack of Police Dogs to apprehend a rogue Dog?

That was against the most basic tenets of procedure regarding Dogs. *Humans* always dealt with

Dogs. We were never permitted to police ourselves. There was far too much opportunity for... It simply was not done.

They came to a stop in the middle of the intersection. These were no washouts, they were the cream of the crop, the absolute pinnacle of the Police Dog service.

They moved like robots, walked in perfect time. Not a thought or initiative between the lot of them.

The lead Dog's radio burst to life with a wash of static.

"Constable Ninety-Seven. Have you reached position?" a human asked. His voice was tiny and artificial over the speaker.

"Yes, Sir," the Dog replied. If anything the clip to his words was even more perfect than my own. "Do you have further orders for us?"

There was a long pause.

"Constable, you are on special assignment. There has been a lock-down at the Kennel." Not a single Dog so much as twitched. But I could read them, I was one of them. I could read the sudden attention those words garnered. "A canine officer has gone rogue."

With that the Dogs did react. No human would ever have been able to recognise the signs, but I could see their tails shift, I could see their ears pull back ever so slightly.

They were afraid.

"Sir?" was all the Dog said.

I could hear the Handler begin to stammer on the other end of the line. His voice sounded weak, unauthoritative, distinctly human. "This could be the most important assignment of your life, Ninety-Seven. You are hereby ordered to bring the Dog in. You are authorized to completely disable him if so required." Once again there was a long pause, only the sound of static over the line. "And you are not, under any circumstances, to inform the public of your mission. If the general population were to be aware of a rogue Dog there could be a panic."

The Dog replied instantly. His words were clear and perfect.

"Understood, Control. If the rogue enters our zone we shall apprehend him."

I closed my eyes.

The Dogs spread out, each taking their own path. It was only a matter of time before the scene was clear.

My hands shook as I peered around yet another corner. I wasn't lost. Lost would imply that I wished to be found. I was alone.

For just a moment a wave of self-pity rolled over me. I wanted home. I wanted back to West Woodburn. I wanted my warm and cosy box, my boring, regulated routine. I wanted... I didn't know.

And it was in that moment of self-absorption that I acted the fool.

Rounding another corner, I quite literally walked straight into fellow officer.

He could have just as well been my clone. Ever so slightly shorter than me, and some pounds lighter, we were otherwise seemingly identical – save he was dressed in a crisp uniform and I in an old raggedy smock.

Despite our slight differences, it was he who bounced off of me. I stood solid as a rock, fear keeping me rooted as he stumbled breathless.

“My apologies...” The words came from his lips unbidden before he even looked up. When he did he stopped short. And his eyes widened.

I had only a moment to react. Forcing my ears to stay up, I met his gaze.

“My apologies as well, Officer.” I pitched my voice lower ever so slightly, making it clear who the superior was here. “Have you found the rogue Dog?”

His jaw moved, but no words escaped him.

I had to keep a sneer of disgust from my lips. Was *this* what was now passing as the best of the best?

“Report,” I ordered, pitching my voice more aggressively. “You are one team out looking for him. I am another.” I waved a hand at my repugnant clothing. “I’m a special operations team, so he won’t be able to avoid us by detecting our scents.”

“Ah. Yes, of course.” The words spilled from him now. He acted exactly as I could only dream he would. There had never been a rogue Dog before. No Dog had ever been trained not to explicitly trust the word of every other Dog.

“He’s not been found yet, Sir,” he said with a salute. “But it is believed he is in this area. All forces are being redeployed to search for him here.”

I had to hold back a whimper.

“Very well,” I said, dismissing him with an offhanded wave. “We must continue the search.”

“But... Sir...”

I walked off before he ever got a chance to finish.

I made it another seven blocks before the sound of claws on the pavement behind me caused my ears to swivel.

There was something wrong about the footsteps that followed me. Something... *off*.

I couldn’t place a finger on it, but I could *feel* something in the sound of the other Dog’s steps. He didn’t move like a Police Dog should.

It was pointless to run. If I could hear him, then he most certainly could hear my own too long, claws.

Another twist and turn and I backed myself into an alleyway. I could only hope my disguise would hold up again.

Taking a deep breath, I prepared to make my best show of dominance. If only I had a uniform I could pass off as an everyday officer.

The Dog was upon me not moments later.

What in the name of...

My attempt at dominance fell away. I'd known something was amiss the moment I heard him. Now that I could just make out his silhouette in the night a sliver of ice touched my heart.

He was a Police Dog. He had to be. He was dressed in the uniform, he was a Dog. But beyond that he showed none of the hallmarks of the service.

He stood hunched over, a tremor to his body. His steps were not sure and precise as they should be, but scatter-shot and out of sync. I was amazed he could stand at all.

And when he looked at me... In the soft moonlight I could only just make out his face. It was criss-crossed with scars. I could hardly make out his brown fur from where the skin had healed over, pink and angry.

He watched me with unblinking, bloodshot eyes.

One of his ears twitched.

I took a step backwards.

This was not a Dog. This was a sick animal.

A feral growl escaped his lips as he advanced towards me. His entire body shook. At first it looked as though he were shivering, but the closer he came the more it appeared he was holding back a flow of energy that sang through his muscles.

He raised a hand, exposing a set of claws that belonged to no canine. Long and razor sharp, they looked more akin to what you would see on a feral street cat.

No further warning, he leapt at me. A snarl erupted from his lips that could be heard for blocks.

I couldn't help the involuntary yip that escaped my lips, but I still managed to move fast enough to duck under his claws. They sliced through the air where my throat had been not a heartbeat before.

The Dog landed behind me. It was clear in his actions that he'd fully expected me to be well in his grasp by now. Turning again to face me, its expression very nearly screamed *Why aren't you dead?*

He closed on me again, slower this time.

A single trail of drool fell from his lips.

Now a growl grew in my own chest. That alone was enough to frighten me. This... *creature*, whatever it was, was no Police Dog. He was a mockery of everything the service stood for. He was nothing more than a warped mirror of the excellence the service had fought so hard to achieve.

He cocked his head slightly when he heard my growl join his. Then he smiled, exposing his fangs. When he leapt this time, I was ready for him.

Two things became crystal clear the moment we touched.

First, he was completely unprepared for me to fight back. I couldn't say if he'd battled Police Dogs before, or how many, but he expected no resistance from me.

And two, he was *inferior*.

He was strong, he was fast. He was quite possibly more than a match for any proper Police Dog, but I was no mere Dog. He was a hodgepodge of enhancements. He had strength in one arm, claws on only three fingers. He was obviously a modification of the Police Dog design, but he was broken.

His treatments had been applied haphazardly. Some of them had taken root, some had not. I was nothing like him. He was a rough design of what could be done.

I was the perfectly polished final product.

His clawed hand swiped towards me, once again aiming for my neck.

I calmly reached out and grabbed him about the wrist. The soft press of a finger and I put pressure on the muscle that controlled the joint.

His wrist went limp.

A moment later he struck out his other hand, balled into a fist. The force behind it was monumental, far greater than any human could ever hope for. I caught it in my open palm with little more than a grunt.

Looking straight into my eyes, he roared. I swear he roared like a dragon of myth. Throwing open his jaws, he let out an inhuman scream, driving his fangs towards me.

I danced back, away from his snapping teeth, but there was only so far I could go without letting him free.

From somewhere in the back of my mind I could feel my special training push. This was no human. This was no Dog. This creature was a mangy, mutated abomination. He had no right to live.

I growled once again. The sound was deeper, more powerful than what had come before.

The Dog paused.

Raising my lips, I let him see my perfect, white, razor sharp teeth.

I'd killed a Dog before. I could do it again.

Lashing out with my foot, I swept his legs, sending him crumpling to the ground.

I never let go as I threw my weight down upon him. A human's arms would already be broken. The Dog moved fast, but not fast enough to escape from beneath my weight.

I came down atop him, the force of my impact driving the breath from his lungs.

My lips pulled up in a snarl.

Beneath me I could feel a change in the creature. When the battle had started he'd been sure, confident. He'd done this a hundred times before.

When I'd put up a fight he'd still been sure of himself.

Now that he was held beneath me he began to whimper.

The speed in which his bearing changed was so fast as to nearly give me whiplash. One moment he was fighting, putting all the spirit and energy into it that one would expect of a well trained Dog. The next moment he was whimpering, trying to pull into a ball and tuck his tail between his legs.

My vision had already become awash with red. This abomination had dared try to kill me. I

would be the victor here.

He whined again. His voice was so sad and pathetic that it stayed my jaws that hungered for him. He sounded just like a pup. It took all the self control I had to shift my weight ever so slightly, to let him breathe just that much easier.

“Who are you?” I growled.

He only continued to whimper. He refused to meet my gaze, but I could just make out that he was a blue-eyed brother.

And he looked to be my age.

“Who are you?” I repeated, fighting to force the growl from my voice as we lay there in the filth of the alley.

He whimpered again. Pulling his ears back, he raised his head and exposed his throat to me.

That alone was enough to knock me from my frenzy like the blast of my crash kit.

This Dog, this... *thing* had just exposed its throat to me. And I was the one who just moments ago had been ready to kill it.

What in the name of God was this creature?

I took a deep breath and tried to regain my composure. It did little good.

Carefully, I released my grip on the other Dog's hand and stood up. He stayed laying on the ground, only now he could fully pull into a ball. He'd still yet to say a word.

“Who are you?” I repeated one last time. “Tell me your name.”

He looked up to me, meeting my eyes for just a moment before letting his gaze fall.

His lips parted, but nothing came forth but a hoarse grunt.

He raised his hands slowly, two fingers were out on his right, four on his left.

“Twenty-Four? Your name is Twenty-Four?”

He nodded.

“What happened to you?”

It's been a long, long time since I last saw a Dog cry. It brought back memories of Forty-One.

I looked away for a moment.

“Are there more of you? Were you sent by the Kennel?”

He shook his head twice.

I grimaced. Yet another unknown.

“Fine.” I pointed to him. “Take off your clothing. I want your uniform.”

He blinked, as if unable to understand what I was saying.

“Now.” I let a growl slip back into my voice.

Twenty seconds later he was nude and I had his clothing neatly folded in my arms.

I nodded to him.

“Good. Now turn around.”

He did so without so much as a thought. And I hit him savagely over the back of the head.

He went down like a sack of barley. Out cold.

I scowled.

I only wished I had the guts to kill him. I *could*. I truly could, but I wouldn't.

Turning, I threw my tattered shirt to land over him like a shroud and walked off once again into the darkness.

It was too late that I realized what a bad trade I'd made.

The Dog's uniform had looked good at first, but it was like a child's fancy dress costume. It *looked* like a Police Dog's uniform, but was nothing more than a cheap facsimile. It fit, after a manner, but any fellow Dog would be able to tell it was fake once the daylight came.

At least it was enough to help me slip past the next two checkpoints. It was obvious the Dogs that had been sent to find me were becoming more proficient. The Dog I'd tricked must have reported back.

Another hour and I only made it deeper into London. I'd been meaning to try to slip to the countryside where I might have some chance of escaping, but it was obvious I was not operating at my peek tonight. I'd only managed to circle around downtown and nearly end up where I'd started.

At least I managed to find myself in a residential area now. The small estates were not much to speak of, but the tiny back gardens gave me at least some small scrap of space to hide away from the street.

Crouching behind a house, I could hear the sounds of a family asleep.

It was dangerous, it was foolish, but I climbed the shed and pressed my face up against the windows of the small brick estate house to peer in at them. There was a pang in my chest that hurt worse than anything else I'd felt since coming to London.

The family was not so unlike that of the Hyatts. A mother, father, and two children. They all slept soundly, blissfully unaware of the rogue Dog who watched them not feet away.

I touched a finger to the cold glass, feeling its smooth surface between us. My mind was back in West Woodburn, with the Hyatt family. I'd promised to protect Trevor. Yet another oath I seem to have broken.

My breath fogged up the glass as I crouched there, forcing me to wipe it clean again and again.

I was just turning away when the young girl who slept there stirred.

I froze, still as stone.

She couldn't have been more than six. Opening her eyes slowly, she looked up at my hand pressed against her window.

I held my breath.

She didn't scream. She simply looked at me.

She smiled and waved a tiny hand. I waved back.

Closing her eyes, she rolled on her side and fell back asleep, secure in the knowledge that a trustworthy Police Dog was looking out for her safety.

My ears pulled back.

Turning, I leapt back to the ground, my feet silent on the soft turf.

In the distance I could hear the textbook perfect click of a Dog's claws on the road out front. I didn't even bother giving it so much as a second thought. It was a proper Dog. It was a Police Dog. It wasn't an abominable creature like I had fought.

I could easily avoid any mere Police Dog.

Another hour and I was back in the commercial end of the city. I didn't want to spend time around families any longer. I... I didn't have the heart for it.

Back behind one of the countless pubs, I was sorting through a dustbin, searching for anything edible. I had to hold my nose.

A true dog may have no compunctions with eating garbage. True dogs didn't have a proper understanding of germ theory.

Cheap kabobs, broken glass from a shattered mug, wrapping from a dozen orders of chips...

I sniffed the kabob meat and held back a grimace. How do humans eat these things? Even fresh I couldn't imagine it smelling much better. The chunks of meat on a stick were tough and dry.

I thought back to the Hyatts and the single meal I'd shared with them. An involuntary chuckle escaped my lips. Back then I'd been petrified then about eating meat, and its attendant blood. This garbage? I had no such fears now. There was little of it, and what I did find was next to rancid, but I ate it anyway.

The sound of someone clearing their throat behind me made me freeze.

Dropping the stick I'd been gnawing at, it clattered to the trash, suddenly unnaturally loud as I turned.

The morning sun was just starting to kiss the horizon, but I still couldn't make out his face. His upstanding ears, however, were a tip off to his species.

He didn't say a word. He didn't so much as take a step towards me. He simply cocked his head.

Standing, I slowly moved to put the dustbin between us. There was something about this Dog... he was completely unlike the abomination I'd so recently fought, but he was also not a Police Dog as I would expect him.

The Dog simply stood there, watching me. A tiny bit more sunlight splashed across him and I could see his uniform was far better than the parody of a policeman's clothes I wore. And there was a pip on his breast that I couldn't place.

Still he didn't say a word as he took a step towards me.

I narrowed my eyes.

"Stay back." My voice had more of a growl to it than I would have expected.

He took another step.

"Forty-Two?" His voice was a touch higher than I would have expected. It had the clip of a Dog... but at the same time his words were mellowed out by an accent, as if he were trying to emulate the upper-classes, as if he were reaching for the ring of the gentry.

"No."

It took a surprising amount of willpower to lie. Such a simple word as that. It felt like it took more effort to simply lie to another Dog than it did to kill one.

It left me feeling just as dirty.

He cocked his head again. "Really? My apologies then."

Turning, he prepared to leave.

One last thing slipped his lips before he stepped back out onto the street. "Give my regards to the Hyatts."

I went stiff.

He stopped and smiled at me. "Hello, Forty-Two."

Turning, I bolted. My claws skittered on the cobblestones as I raced for the far end of the alleyway. I could hear him sprinting after me.

The half darkness of twilight hid all manner of bumps and hazards on the road – and it seemed I encountered each and every one of them in perfect succession.

Sparing a fugitive glance over my shoulder, the Dog was frighteningly closer than he should be. I was faster than any Police Dog. I was stronger. He should be far behind me...

I stumbled once again and he surged forward. The Dog moved like he knew every cobblestone, like he knew every inch of London as if these dark streets were his playground.

A whimper pulled at my lips. I was not used to being the one hunted, not for a long, long time.

Spinning, I did the only thing I could. My claws skidded, leaving lines on the stones as I came to a stop. My actions were so sudden that even the lighter Dog couldn't slow in time. He all but slammed into my chest.

I struck at him. My left hand shot forward, fist balled. Aimed straight at his chest. He only had an instant to see it coming – his own momentum throwing him towards me.

Much to my surprise he managed to dodge to the side.

The barest of smiles slipped to my lips. A spar it was. There was no mat beneath us, but the situation was far too similar.

I lashed out to sweep his legs, an action that so often had worked before. He leapt it as though he'd seen it coming.

I frowned.

Shifting my weight, I made a feint of slashing him with my right hand, but instead led with my shoulder, slamming forward. I'd used that attack many a time back at the Kennel.

As if he were reading my mind the Dog completely ignored my ploy, stepping just out of range.

Did I see a smile on his face?

I had to fight back the urge of my special training to rush forward, to take control. This was not the time. Rather I fell back to the standard Police Dog training that I had learned so long ago.

The Dog defeated each and every one of my attacks even more quickly, as if they were nothing to him.

Did I detect a smirk?

Now it was my turn to feel a sliver of fear. Who was this Dog who could fight me to a standstill? *Me?*

He took a step back and I advanced without thinking – only to trip over an uneven stone that I could tell you for a fact he'd known was there.

My lapse in attention was small, but the Dog was more than capable of taking advantage of it.

Yet he didn't.

He had a perfect opening, an ideal split-second to slip in a blow that would end the battle.

But he didn't.

All he did was cock his head again and watch me.

Something in that action. Having the advantage and not taking it... I growled.

He was *playing* with me.

Whispers of red began to mist in the edge of my vision.

It was almost imperceptible at first, but my blows began to come faster, stronger.

My fist met his forearm. He was shoved back a step.

The mask of serenity that had held fast over the other Dog's face slipped. His eyes widened when I followed it up with a blow that would have broken his neck if he'd been but an instant slower. A glimmer of panic flickered past his eyes.

I didn't give him the opportunity to realize just what trouble he'd brought down upon himself.

Once more I swept his legs. He leapt again, but he did so exactly as he had last time. I knew where he would land, and I was already there.

His toes didn't even brush the cobblestones before I slammed into his knees. The Dog's legs buckled. A heartbeat later he was laying on the ground before me.

The red fog continued to swim in my vision. The rational part of my mind was screaming for my crash kit. It was howling for me to run far, far away.

I ignored it. I was a pup no more. This was part of who I was.

I took a deep breath. I could detect the sour note of his fear in the night air.

“Who are you?” My voice came out far more clipped and perfect than I ever would have

expected.

He just looked up at me and smiled. "A friend."

Then my 'friend' threw a handful of *something*, some dust, in my face.

It felt like he'd dunked me head first into a vat of acid.

A yip escaped my lips and I pulled back.

The pain was gone in seconds. But when I could see again I was alone. Not even the sound of retreating claws suggested he'd ever been.

With the sunrise so close I couldn't afford to step out onto the street. The back of the pub was pungent enough to cover my scent, and I was already here. I suppose home is wherever you make it. I slipped into a small space behind the dustbin.

This wasn't home.