

TERRIER

Tamora Pierce



TORTALL BOOKS BY TAMORA PIERCE

BEKA COOPER

Terrier

Trickster's Choice

Trickster's Queen

PROTECTOR OF THE SMALL QUARTET

First Test

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Squire

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THE IMMORTALS QUARTET

Wild Magic

Wolf-Speaker

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THE SONG OF THE LIONESSE QUARTET

Alanna: The First Adventure

In the Hand of the Goddess

The Woman Who Rides Like a Man

Lioness Rampant



BEKA COOPER

BOOK ONE

TERRIER

TAMORA PIERCE

RANDOM HOUSE  NEW YORK

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SUMMARY: When sixteen-year-old Beka becomes "Puppy" to a pair of "Dogs," as the Provost's Guards are called, she uses her police training, natural abilities, and a touch of magic to help them solve the case of a murdered baby in Tortall's Lower City.

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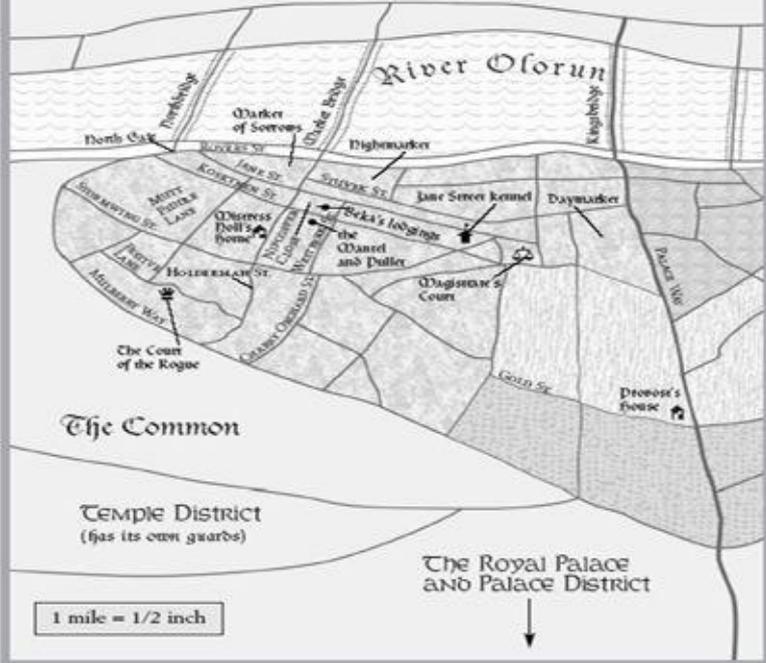
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To Tim

*This one's all yours.
It's time.
And you deserve this and more,
for putting all that effort into us.*

Corus, 246 H.E. The Lower City

THE CESSPOOL RUNS SOUTH OF KOSKYMEN STREET AND WEST OF WESTBERK AND CHERRY ORCHARD



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PROLOGUE

FROM THE JOURNAL OF ELENI COOPER, RESIDENT, WITH HER SIX-YEAR-OLD SON, GEORGE COOPER, OF SPINDLE LANE, THE LOWER CITY, CORUS, THE REALM OF TORTALL

March 18, 406 [H.E.: the Human Era]

In all those lessons for which I was made to memorize chants and prayers I never used, couldn't our temple priestesses have taught one—just one!—lesson on what to do with a boy who is too smart for his own good?

I am at my wit's end! My George was taken up for stealing and I had to go to the Jane Street Guard station.

I thought I might die of the shame. I know it is this place and the friends he makes here. Even the families who do not teach their children the secrets of theft look the other way because it puts food on the table. And I am too newly come. I cannot tell them, "Keep your children away from my son. Do not let them teach him to steal."

I want him to rise in the world. We are poor now, but I pray we will not always be so. And I cannot afford a better place to live. My family will not have me back, not after our last meeting. So I am left here, trying to raise a lad who sees and hears and thinks too much, in the city's worst slum.

At the station there my scapegrace was, seated on a bench with the Guard who'd caught him. "There was but a handful of coins left on a counter, Mistress Cooper," the Guard said. "And I recovered them all. It's his first time, and I owe you for makin' my wife's labor so easy." He looked at George. "Next time it's the cages for you, and maybe a work farm," he warned. "Don't go makin' your good mother weep."

I grabbed George's arm and towed him out of there. We'd no sooner passed through the gate into the street when he tells me, "Up till a hundred year ago they was called Dogs, Ma." He was talking broad Lower City slang, knowing it made me furious. "Ye know why they changed it? They thought folk mightn't respect 'em if they went about callin' them after curs like they done for three hundred—"

I boxed his ear. "I'll have no history lessons from you, Master Scamp!" I cried, tried beyond my sense of dignity. "You'll keep your tongue between your teeth!" Everyone we passed was smirking at us. They knew our tale, knew I'd been dismissed from the temple. They believed I thought myself better than they were, because I kept my home and my child as clean as may be and taught him his letters. Let them think it. We will not always live in the Cesspool. My George is meant for better things.

Thieving is not among them, I swear it.

When I got him to our rooms, I let him go. He stared at me with his hazel eyes, so like mine. The beaky nose and square chin were his father's, a temple worshiper I saw but for one night. George would be the kind of man women would think was so homely he was handsome, if he lived. I had to make certain he would live.

"The shame of it!" I told him. "George Cooper, how am I to face folk? Stealing! My son stealing!"

He looked me boldly in the face. "We're gettin' no richer from your healin' and magickin', Ma. I hate bein' hungry all the time."

That cut me. I knew he was hungry. Did I not divide my share so he had more, and it still wasn't enough? So he would not see me in tears, and because he needed it, I sat on our chair and turned my rascal over my knee. I gave him the spanking of his young life.

I stood him on his feet again. His chin trembled, but he refused to cry. The problem is, my lad and I are too much alike.

"There's more important things than wealth," I said, trying to make him listen. "There's our family name. Us above all, George, we don't take to thieving." I had thought to wait until he was old enough to understand to tell him about Rebakah Cooper, but I believe the Goddess's voice in me was saying it was time. He needed to hear this. I took down the shrine from the wardrobe top, where I kept it safe from small boys. I opened the front to show him the tiny figures of the ancestors.

"See how many of your great-grandfathers wore the uniform of the Provost's Guard? What would our famous ancestress say if she knew one of her descendants was a common thief?"

"We've got a famous ancestress?" George asked, rubbing his behind.

I picked up Rebakah's small, worn statue. I took it out often when I was a girl, because she was a woman, of all the ancestors who wore the black tunic and breeches of the Guard. There was the cat on her feet, the purple dots of paint that were its eyes worn away just as the pale blue paint for her eyes was worn away. The shrine was old, given to me by my great-aunt when I was dedicated to Temple Service.

I showed him the figure. "Rebakah Cooper," I said. "Your six-times-great-grandmother. Famous in her day for her service as a Provost's Guard. She was fierce and law-abiding and loyal, my son. And that I want for you. And she was doom on lawbreakers, particularly thieves. Steal, and you shall shame her."

"Yes, Ma," George said quietly.

"Remember her," I told him, giving his shoulder a little shake. "Respect her. Respect me."

He put his arms around my waist. "I love you, Mother," he said. Now he talked perfectly, as he'd been taught. He helped me to clean up from the medicine making and to make supper.

It is only in writing about this day that I realize he never said anything about thieving.

No, he will obey me. He is a good boy. And I will make an offering to my Goddess to guide him on Rebakah Cooper's path.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF MISTRESS ILONY COOPER, MOTHER OF REBAKAH COOPER, RESIDENT OF PROVOST'S
HOUSE, PALACE WAY AND GOLDEN WAY, CORUS, THE REALM OF TORTALL

Novembur 13, 240

My hart is the betur for this day. When my Beka told me the pijins talked to her I feerd she was mad. I feerd my lady wood lok her up as my lady dos not lyk Beka. Beka mayks my lord lyk being komun Dog to much.

I thot to take Beka to my husbands mother. Granny Fern wood no if ther was madnes in his blud. So I tuk Beka ther today and left the littel ones with Mya.

Beka had bred in her pokets and fed pijins all the way to Klover Lane. She says the birds say wher they was killd. I feerd somwon ov Provosts Hows wood see the bred and say she stole it.

Wen I told Granny Fern why we come Granny laffd.

She is no mor mad than me, she says. Beka has the magikal Gift. Tho som say its not the Gift exakly. Its not biddebel. You hav it or you dont. Bekas fater had it and his sister and unkl befor him.

I sayd a prayr to the Godess. My girl is not mad. Gifted is not good but its beter than mad.

Granny Fern mayd Beka churn her buttr. Beka thumpd the churn so hard! Granny Fern told her. You can tickl the magik a bit. You need to, girl. Elswys the ghosts that ryd the birds will dryv you mad with tawk you onli heer part way. Pijins cary the dead. Them as died suden, them as had biznis to do.

Them as got merderd, Beka says.

Pijins ar the Blak Gods mesingers, Granny says. They gathr souls to tayk to the Peesful Relm but som wont go. They hold to the bird until they see whats becom ov them. And they talk. Som ov wher they say is useful, Beka. Thats why you must lern how to heer theyr voyses. Hav you herd othr voyses Beka? On street corners mayhap?

I dont no, says Beka.

Lets go see, says Granny.

We finishd the buttr ferst bekaus it dont wait. Then Granny took us to a street corner but to blok frum her house. A dust spyner was ther, spyning leevs and dirt arond and abowt lyk a smal wirlwind.

Yore fater namd it Hasfush, Granny says. Or told us his name is Hasfush. Hes one ov the dust spyners that nevr goes away. Step in and lissen, Beka.

Beka nevr argus with Granny Fern. Onli with me. Into the spyner she wakd.

What if she choaks? I askd.

She wont, says Granny. She haz the Ayr Gift.

The dust spyner got smal. Beka cam owt a mess.

I hav to wash her, I says. My ladee will hav a fit.

Beka lookd at Granny. Hasfush is alive. He told me evrything he hurd. Then he got happi.

Next tyme bring him dirt frum othr parts ov the citee, Granny says. Yer fater sayd he lyked tha

Ilony, send her to me in the afternoon. I wil teech Beka how to heer the ghoasts and the dust spynrs. I writ down in a book ov the famlee.

She can taym it. The listning. She isnt mad.

I was so afeerd for my Beka. I no I wil dy frum this rot in my chest. My childrun must mayk they own way then. Beka wil hav the hardist tyme. She was in the Lowur Cytee for to long. Magik wil hel. Evun frends that ar birds and street wind and durt wil help.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF MATTHIAS TUNSTALL, PROVOST'S GUARDSMAN, RESIDENT OF ROWAN'S LODGINGS
BOTT STREET, PATTEN DISTRICT, CORUS, THE REALM OF TORTALL

November 13, 244

Tonight my lord Gershom took Clary and me to supper at Naxen's Fancy. It was his way of thanking us for bringing down Bloody Jock. (I would have done more than hobble him and bring him for a court to sentence. The scummer would rob a couple, killing the man and kissing the woman while her man was lying there.)

It was our third supper at Naxen's Fancy. Me and Clary could never afford the place on our own but when we wind up big cases, we get a fine dinner there with my lord. So the wine was flowing well and there was brandy after supper. We were all feeling good, and Clary asks the thing we both always wanted to know: how did my lord manage to hobble the Bold Brass gang six years back? Seemed for a year they roamed Prettybone, Highfields, and Unicorn Districts, helping themselves to the treasures of the folk who pay the Rogue not to be burgled. There was even talk that His Majesty was looking for a new Lord Provost. Then suddenly there was the whole gang in chains, my lord with new estates awarded by the King, and the Vice Provost transferred to a command on the Scanran border.

"What stories did you hear?" my lord asks with that little smile, like he knows a very good joke.

We tell the ones we heard most. One of Bold Brass's women caught her man with someone else. A palace mage lowered himself to Dog work to get revenge on the gang for robbing him. The gang had killed a horse some duke loved and he paid for the mages himself.

My lord starts a-laughing. "None of those are right," he says. "It was a little girl, only eight years old."

I look at my glass of brandy. "This stuff is better than the swill I'm used to," I say. "I could've sworn you said the Bold Brass gang got took down by an eight-year-old."

My lord nodded and says, "She took against one of them. He was living with her mama. When he found out her mama had lung rot, he beat her up and took all she had of value. The girl Dogged him. Dogged him like you two would do it, kept out of his sight. If she lost him, she just found him later at his favorite places."

"How'd she know he'd be worth all that work?" Clary wants to know. "Why not just stick a knife in him?"

My lord says, "The piece of pig turd gave her mama jewelry he couldn't have come by honestly, then took it back when he left."

"Yeah," Clary says, "she's got to be from the Cesspool. Those Cesspool little ones know what kind of baubles belong down there and what don't."

My lord goes on. "So Beka—that's her name, Rebakah Cooper—finally Dogs him all the way back to where he met up with his mates. She spies on them and knows she has the den of the Bold Brass."

gang. Then she goes to her nearest Dog, only this Dog don't believe her."

~~Clary mutters, "Probably Day Watch." My partner thinks the only Dogs worth bothering will work the Evening Watch like us.~~

My lord says, "So Beka goes to her kennel, but they laugh at her. She even tries to tell my Vice Provost. He has her tossed in the street. He thought she was trying to witch him. Beka's no mage, but she has these light blue-gray eyes. When she's angry, it's like looking into a well of ice. She was angry by then. It's unnerving in a little girl, but she can't help her eyes. So one day I'm riding through the Daymarket and this mite of a child grabs my Oso by the bridle. You know Oso—he doesn't like surprises. I almost drew steel on her before I saw she was a child and how Oso calmed down when she talked to him. She was telling me if I wanted the Bold Brass gang, I'd best listen to her. My Vice Provost's ready to take a whip to the girl. Meantime, I feel like I'm looking into the eyes of a thousand-year-old ghost. Unlike my Vice Provost, I'm not spooked. I listen to her. And she does it. She gives me the Bold Brass gang. Then she thinks she can disappear, but I know a trick or two of my own. I find her home and her family. The Coopers are living in my household now."

"Meaning no disrespect, my lord, but why?" I ask. "A handful of gold shows you're grateful."

He shakes his head. "A mother with lung rot, and my healers say she can't be helped. It's too far along. Five bright, promising little ones—Beka is the oldest. All in some Mutt Piddle Lane middle. The mother's an herbalist on her good days, but those are going to run out. I'd an idea Beka was already learning to steal. His Majesty was about to find a new Provost. I owed that ice-eyed mite Beka Cooper saved me from disgrace. I think she'll make a good Dog when she's old enough. Her brothers and sisters will do well in the world, given a chance. And her mother will die in comfort. I believe in thanking the gods for saving my position." My lord raises his glass. "I love being Lord Provost."

We raise ours. "We're glad to have you," Clary says. "Who else takes notice of the Dogs who do the work?"

Now I can't get that story out of my head. Dogging a cove like that when she was only eight. I hope if she does go for the Provost's Guard that she doesn't think she knows all there is to what we do. She'll quit soon enough if she does. I hope my lord doesn't build her up that way. She'll die of boredom and wash out before she's been in the work for a month. Or she'll think because she did it once, and did it young, that she knows it all. Then she'll just get herself killed, and maybe any other Dogs who are with her, too.



THE **J**OURNAL OF **R**EBAKAH **C**OOPER



Wednesday, April 1, 246

Written on the morning of my first day of duty.

I have this journal that I mean to use as a record of my days in the Provost's Guard. Should I survive my first year as a Puppy, it will give me good practice for writing reports when I am a proper Dog. By setting down as much as I can remember word by word, especially in talk with folk about the city, it will keep my memory exercises sharp. Our trainers told us we must always try to memorize as much as we can exactly as we can. *Your memory is your record when your hands are too busy.* That is one of our training sayings.

For my own details, to make a proper start, I own to five feet and eight inches in height. I have good shoulders, though I am a bit on the slender side. My build is muscled for a mot. I have worked hard to make it so, in the training yard and on my own. My peaches are well enough. Doubtless they would be larger if I put on more pounds, but as I have no sweetheart and am not wishful of one for now, my peaches are fine as they are.

I am told I am pretty in my face, though my sister Diona says when my fine nose and cheekbones have been broken flat several times that will no longer be so. (My sisters do not want me to be a Dog.) My eyes are light blue-gray in color. Some like them. Others hold them to be unsettling. I like them because they work for me. My teeth are good. My hair is a dark blond. Folk can see my brows and lashes without my troubling to darken them, not that I would. I wear my hair long as my one vanity. I know it offers an opponent a grip, but I have learned to tight-braid it from the crown of my head. I also have a spiked strap to braid into it, so that any who seize my braid will regret it.

I am so eager for five o'clock and my first watch to begin that my writing on this page is shaky and not neat as I have been taught. It is hard to think quietly. I must be sure to write every bit of this first week of my first year above all. For eight long years I have waited for this time to come. Now it has come. I want a record of my first seeking, my training Dogs, my every bit of work. I will be made a Dog sooner than any Puppy has ever been. I will prove I know more than any Puppy my very first week.

It is not vanity. I lived in the Cesspool for eight years. I stole. I studied with the Lord Provost for eight more years. Three years of that eight I ran messages for the Provost's Dogs, before I went into training. I know the Lower City better than I know the faces of my sisters and brothers, better than I knew my mother's face. I will learn the rest quicker than any other Puppy. I even *live* in the Lower City again, on Nipcopper Close. None of the others assigned to the Jane Street kennel do. (They will regret it when they must walk all the way home at the end of their watch!)

Pounce says I count my fish before they're hooked. I tell Pounce that if I must be saddled with a purple-eyed talking cat, why must it be a sour one? He is to *stay home* this week. I will not be distracted by this strange creature who has been my friend these last four years. And I will not have my Dogs distracted by him. They will ask all manner of questions about him, for one—questions I cannot answer and he will not.

My greatest fear is my shyness. It has grown so much worse since I began to put up my hair and let down my skirts. I was the best of all our training class in combat, yet earned a weekly switching because I could not declaim in rhetoric. Somehow I must find the courage to tell a stranger he is under arrest for crimes against the King's peace, and detail those crimes. Or I must get a partner who likes to talk.

I am assigned to the Jane Street kennel. The Watch Commander in this year of 246 is Acton o

Fenrigh. I doubt I will ever have anything to do with him. Most Dogs don't. Our Watch Sergeant ~~Kebibi Ahuda, my training master in combat and the fiercest mot I have ever met.~~ We have six Corporals on our watch and twenty-five Senior Guards. That's not counting the cage Dogs and the Dogs who handle the scent hounds. We also have a mage on duty, Fulk. Fulk the Nosepicker, we mostly call him. I plan to have nothing to do with him, either. The next time he puts a hand on me I will break it, mage or not.

There is the sum of it. All that remains is my training Dogs. I will write of them, and describe them properly, when I know who they are.



Written at day's end.

As the sun touched the rim of the city wall, I walked into the Jane Street kennel. For our first day, we had no training before duty. I could enter in a fresh, clean uniform. I had gotten mine from the old clothes room at my Lord Provost's house. I wore the summer black tunic with short sleeves, black breeches, and black boots. I had a leather belt with purse, whistle, paired daggers, a proper baton, a water flask, and rawhide cords for prisoner taking. I was kitted up like a proper Dog and ready to beat me some Rats.

Some of the other Lower City trainees were already there. Like me, they wore a Puppy's white trim at the hems of sleeves and tunic. None of us know if the white is to mark us out so Rats will spare us or so they will kill us first. None of our teachers will say, either.

I sat with the other Puppies. They greeted me with gloom. None of them wanted to be here, but each district gets its allotment of the year's trainees. My companions felt they drew the short straw. There is curst little glory here. Unless you are a veteran Dog or a friend of the Rogue, the pickings are coppers at best. And the Lower City is rough. Everyone knows that of the Puppies who start the training year in the Lower City, half give up or are killed in the first four months.

I tried to look as glum as the others to keep them company. They are cross that I wanted to come to Jane Street.

Ahuda took her place at the tall Sergeants' desk. We all sat up. We'd feared her in training. She is a stocky black woman with some freckles and hair she has straightened and cut just below her ears. Her family is from Carthak, far in the south. They say she treats trainees the way she does because of vengeance for how the Carthakis treated her family as slaves. All I know is that she made fast fighters out of us.

She nodded to the Evening Watch Dogs as they came on duty, already in pairs or meeting up in the waiting room. Some looked at our bench and grinned. Some nudged each other and laughed. Most of our classmates hunkered down and looked miserable.

"They'll eat us alive," my friend Ersken whispered in my ear. He was the kindest of us, not the best trait for a Dog-to-be. "I think they sharpen their teeth."

"Going to sea wouldn'ta been so bad." Verene had come in after me and sat on my other side. "Go on, Beka—give 'em one of them ice-eye glares of yours."

I looked down. Though I am comfortable with my fellow Puppies, I wasn't easy with the Dogs and the folk who came in with business in the kennel. "You get seasick," I told Verene. "That's why you went for a Dog. And leave my glares out of it."

Since Ahuda was at her desk, the Watch Commander was already in his office. He'd be going over the assignments, choosing the Dog partners who would get a Puppy or just agreeing to Ahuda's choices. I asked the Goddess to give Ersken someone who'd understand his kindness never meant he was weak. Verene needed Dogs that would talk to her straight. And me?

Goddess, Mithros, let them be good at their work, I begged.

~~Who would I get? I know who I wanted. There were three sets of partners who were famous for their work. I kissed the half moon at the base of my thumbnail for luck.~~

Outside, the market bells chimed the fifth hour of the afternoon—the end of the Day Watch and the beginning of the Evening Watch. Dogs going off duty lined up before Ahuda's desk, their Puppies at their backs, to muster out. When Ahuda dismissed them, they were done for the day. Their Puppies, six of our classmates, sighed with relief and headed out the door. Before they left, they told us what we were in for, each in their own fashion. Some gave us a thumbs-up. A couple mimed a hanging with a weary grin. I just looked away. What was so hard for them? They'd had Day Watch. Everyone knew that Evening Watch got the worst of it in the Lower City.

With the Day Watch gone, Ahuda called out the names of a pair of Dogs. They'd been lounging on one of the benches. When they looked at her, she jerked her thumb at the Commander's door. They settled their shoulders, checked each other's uniforms, then went inside. I knew them. My lover, Gershom had commended them twice.

Once the door closed behind them, Ahuda looked at us. "Puppy Ersken Westover. You're assigned to those two Dogs for training. Step up here."

Ersken gulped, then stood to whistles and applause from the veteran Dogs. I straightened his clothes. Verene kissed him, and our fellow trainees clapped him on the back or shook his hand. The Dogs, Ersken tried to walk across that room like he was confident he could do the job, in front of about twenty ordinary folk and the Dogs of the Evening Watch.

Hilyard elbowed me. "You coulda given him a kiss, Beka, to brighten his last hours."

I elbowed him some harder. Hilyard was always trying to cook up mischief.

"My kisses ain't good enough?" Verene demanded of him. She punched his shoulder. "See what a sweetenin' you get when they call *you*."

Ersken came to attention before Ahuda's desk. She looked down her short nose at him. "Stop that. Relax. The Commander's giving them the speech, about how they're not to break you or dent you or toss you down the sewer without getting permission from me first."

The Dogs laughed. One of them called, "Don't sweat it, lad. We're all just workin' Dogs down here."

"They keep the honor and glory and pretty girls for Unicorn District." That Dog was a woman whose face was marked crossways by a scar.

One of them said, "Up there, the fountains run rose water. Here they run—"

"—piss!" cried the Dogs. It was an old joke in the Lower City.

The Commander's door opened. Out came the two Dogs. They looked resigned. The heavysets beckoned to Ersken. "Heel, Puppy. Let's get our glorious partnership rolling. You don't say nothing you see? We talk, you listen." He clamped a thick hand on Ersken's shoulder and steered him to the door.

Ahuda called, "Remember, tomorrow you Puppies report an hour early for combat training before your watch. No more easy starts like today!" Ersken's Dogs let the door close. Ahuda then called for a new Dog pair to see the Commander and for the next of us to wait for his training Dogs. It was Hilyard's turn. Just as she'd threatened, Verene gave him no kiss.

While we waited for the Dogs to collect Hilyard, a citywoman called, "Sarge? Be there word who left old Crookshank's great-grandbaby dead in the gutter?" We looked at her. She was here to visit a man in the Rat cages out back, mayhap. She had five little ones with her. She must have feared there was some killer out there and refused to leave them at home.

Ahuda shook her head. "There is no news, mistress. If you're scared for your own, I'd counsel you to let go your fear. Crookshank is the vilest pinchpenny scale and landlord in the Lower City. He buys for coppers what's valued in gold. If one of his firetraps burns with a mother in it, he sells the

orphans for slaves. He's got more'n enough enemies. Any of them could have strangled that poor little one."

"Aye, but no one kills women and children," muttered a Dog. "They're no part of business."

Ahuda glared at him. "We'll catch the Rat and flay him living, but I'll bet anyone here Crookshank drove some poor looby to Cracknob Row. Your little ones are safe, mistress."

It's true, Crookshank is the most hated man in Corus. It's true also that family is off-limits if they aren't in your enemy's line of work. To kill a rival's child kin is to become outlaw.

"I'll wager the ol' scale got the best to seek the lad's killer," a cove said. "Come on, Sergeant. Who'd Crookshank buy special t' get put on the murder? I heard he got teams on each watch on seeking."

"He did, not that it's your business," Ahuda said, not looking up from her writing.

"Who's it on *this* watch?" someone else called.

Ahuda looked up with a scowl, ready to tell these folk to hold their tongues. It was old Nyl Jewel who said, "Why, me and Yoav, good cityfolk."

They all stared. Doubtless they knew that Yoav's sister hung herself but three months back. Her husband had sold her to pay a debt to Crookshank, then she had killed herself in the slave pens. Jewel and Yoav would never sweat to seek Rolond Lofts's killer, no matter how much his great-grandda paid in bribes. The Dogs picked from the Night and Day Watches were also Dogs with a grudge. Crookshank had so many enemies he didn't even know them all.

While Ahuda read out the names of the fourth pair to see the Commander, Matthias Tunstall and Clara Goodwin came in. I put my head down so my bangs hid my eyes and watched as they found themselves a patch of wall to lean on. Of the three good pairs here on Jane Street, they were the best. Goodwin a Corporal, Tunstall a Senior Dog. They could have had any posting in Corus, but they kept to the Lower City.

One night, my lord had invited them to supper for a task they'd done very well. I hid in the drapery of the little supper room at Provost's House to hear the legends talk. Lord Gershom offered them a place in Highfields, but they'd refused. Tunstall said, "Clary and me, we know the Lower City. The worst ones know our little ways. The people of the Court of the Rogue have memorized our bootprints. Bless their silly cracked heads. It suits us, don't it, Clary?"

And Goodwin, she'd chuckled.

"The pickin's are richer elsewhere." My lord Gershom was amused, I could hear it. "The Happy Bags of bribes for the kennels are fatter in other districts."

"We're humble folk," Goodwin said. She had a voice like dark honey. "We like humble picking. And the bones that come from the Rogue's Happy Bags are rich enough."

I'd never be assigned to them, I knew. They didn't get Puppies.

Goodwin and Tunstall gossiped with their friends among the Dogs as other pairs came out with their Puppy. The Lower City veterans are a hard crew, wearing metal throat protectors and metal-ribbed arm guards as well as the regular uniform. Even other Dogs are wary of these folk, respectful of their ability to stay alive.

I *would* be the last one called. I looked around as my last yearmate left with his Dogs. I wiped my sweating hands on my breeches. Then I nearly swallowed my own tongue, because Ahuda called "Tunstall and Goodwin."

"No!" Goodwin looked at me, her brown eyes sharp. "No. No. We don't get Puppies. We don't *like* Puppies. No offense, whoever you are. We have *never* had a Puppy."

"You're past due, then." Ahuda had no sympathy in her eyes. "Your luck just ran out."

Goodwin headed into the Commander's office like a hawk that had sighted prey. Tunstall ambled after.

They are a mismatched pair. Corporal Goodwin is two inches shorter than me. She is built strong and wears her dark brown hair cut short. She has a small beak of a nose, full lips. They said she'd put down a Scanran berserker when he'd killed three men in a fight, her alone with her baton. She is fast and all muscle. She's been a Dog seventeen years.

Senior Dog Tunstall has partnered with her for thirteen. He's been a Dog for twenty in all. He is about six foot three, long-armed, long-legged, with deep-set brown eyes and a long, curved nose. I think he looks like an owl, though he's popular enough with mots. He wears his hair cropped short and over his head. There is gray in it and in his short beard and mustache. He is funny and easygoing. He could be a Watch Commander, even a Captain. So could she. Neither of them want it. Kennel rumors say he is some kind of hillman, mayhap even a renegade from one of the eastern tribes. Whatever he'd been before coming to the Provost's Guard, he is one of us now.

"Rebakah Cooper."

From the laughter in the room, it wasn't the first time Ahuda had called my name. I went to stand before the desk. She looked down at me. "Don't let them rattle you," she advised. "You've got the best. That's the *only* extra chance I wangled for you. And if you're smart, you won't depend on your *other* connections high up to grease your way."

I looked down. As if I'd ask for help from my lord!

"Better not be cooing *our* tales in his ear, neither." I didn't know the voice and I didn't turn to look.

"She never did when she was a runner. I knowed she saw plenty. She had three *years'* worth of chances." *That* was a voice I knew, Nyler Jewel's. "Never you worry about lil' Beka."

I just watched the floor. I hate being talked about. All the same, turning to talk back like Hilyar or Verene would do made my tripes wring out. Besides, I could hear shouting behind the Commander's closed door. Since the Commander is a man, I knew it was Goodwin who wasn't happy.

She walked out of the Commander's office, slamming the door. I added another prayer to my string of them. I wanted to survive my Dog partners. She came up to me and looked me over. "I have two rules for you, Puppy."

I looked down. I always do, I can't help it. Meeting people is the hardest for me. It never gets any easier. She grabbed my chin with her hand and forced me to meet her eyes. "Look me in the face when I'm talking to you, Puppy Cooper. Two rules. Speak when you're spoken to. And keep out of my way." She let go of my chin and glared up at Tunstall, who had joined us. "All right? Time to start the babysitting detail."

He smiled, looking even more like a tall, gangly owl. "Come on, Puppy Cooper." His voice was deep, with a little bit of accent.

I followed them outside. I wasn't going to tell Goodwin that I well knew the rules to follow with our training Dogs: *Speak when you're spoken to. Keep out of the way. Obey all orders. Get killed on your own time.*

"Practice tomorrow at four!" Ahuda called after me. "Every day you have street duty, Cooper!"

Between the kennel door and the Jane Street gate is the courtyard where message runners and people with kennel business wait. The crowd was bigger than usual. They knew Puppies were being assigned and wanted to see who got what. The noise they made when they saw Tunstall and Goodwin with a trainee was deafening: whistles, laughter, plenty of comments about what Tunstall might do with me.

I tried not to listen. I didn't *think* the body could bend in those directions. Not that I'd know. Most of the other girl Puppies had been with a lad or two—and some mots, like my old friend Tansy, are already married by sixteen. I tried it once. It seemed well enough, but my mama's life was reasonable enough not to let myself get hobbled by a lad. And there was my dream. Since Lord Gershom brought

my family into his house, I have only wanted to be a Dog. Falling in love would just ruin things.

~~Passing through the gate, I saw movement in the shadows. One cat-shaped shadow came over walk with me.~~

“Pounce,” I muttered, “scat! Go away!” Pox and murrain, he never listened! I told him I didn’t want him about this week! The curst animal *always* finds me. I’d locked him in, folly though it was had shuttered the windows, and barred them, and locked my door. I had made sure he was inside—I heard his yowling as I ran down the stairs. Eventually he always gets out, but I’d hoped he’d take the hint and leave me be! “I’m on duty!”

“I’d best not be hearing noise from you, Puppy,” Goodwin called over her shoulder.

I shut up and flapped my hands at Pounce. He ignored me, dratted creature that he is. Stupid cat stay home when they’re locked in. I wouldn’t have this problem if he were normal.

“Tunstall, why is there a cat following us?” Goodwin asked. “I don’t want to be falling over some stray black cat.”

“It’s not a stray, Goodwin. He wears a collar.” Tunstall bent down and scooped up Pounce. I glared at my cat, silently daring him to scratch or bite. Instead my contrary animal turned his whiskers forward in a cat’s smile, and let Tunstall scratch him under his chin. Pounce didn’t even struggle when Tunstall halted in a patch of fading sunlight to inspect him.

Then he saw Pounce’s eyes. “Mithros. Goodwin, look.”

Goodwin looked. She swore. It’s about half and half, who swears and who talks religion, when they see Pounce’s face. I can’t blame them. I nearly fell out of the stable loft when I found a kitten with purple eyes.

“Are you a god?” Tunstall asked Pounce.

“Manh!” my idiot cat said. He added a few sounds like *mrt*, as if to prove his catness. For once they even sounded like cat to me. So many of his cat noises seem like speech.

“If he is a god, he chooses not to say,” Goodwin said.

“He wears Cooper’s collar.” Tunstall looked at me. “Do you have a magical kitty cat, Puppy Cooper?” he asked me, raising an eyebrow. “You may answer.”

The words stuck in my throat. I shook my head, wishing I could fall through the slops and garbage of Jane Street. He’s just Pounce, I wanted to say. He’s odd, but you get used to his ways. But of course I couldn’t say a word.

“Her cat?” Goodwin looked at Pounce’s collar. “And with those eyes, he’s not magic?” My social to be sold for dumpling-meat cat reached out and patted Goodwin’s nose. “Stop that, you.” But she smiled when she said it, and she scratched him behind the ears. Pounce rubbed his head against her hand like *she* was the one who spent precious coppers on meat that she chopped for him herself. “You brought your *cat*? Speak up, trainee.”

I tried. I did. And I remembered her warning to look her in the eye. So I managed that, but the speech just wouldn’t come out of my throat.

Goodwin lifted Pounce from Tunstall’s hold. “Did you bring him to the kennel?”

That was easy. I shook my head and got out, “N-no, Guardswoman.” I didn’t think I could call her “Dog” without permission, or even “Goodwin.”

“He followed you here.” Goodwin’s fingers were brisk but affectionate behind Pounce’s ears. The little traitor wrapped his forelegs around her neck.

“Yes, Guardswoman.” I would have given anything not to have to meet her clear brown eyes.

“Clever cat,” said Tunstall.

Goodwin put him down. “You, scat. She has work to do. Hard work, staying out of my hair.”

I glared at Pounce—*Wait till I get you home, you ungrateful furball!*—and pointed in the direction of our lodgings. He trotted across the street. I couldn’t watch him further, because Tunstall

and Goodwin were on their way.

~~People greeted them from doorways and stalls, wanting to know who the Puppy was. I hung my head as they laughed and shouted their offers to buy me or play with me. And for the hundredth time I cursed my shyness that made it so hard to talk to my Dog partners, even when I was bidden to, or to answer the street folk back, the way Tunstall did. “But she’s *our* Puppy, Inknose. If we let her fetch you, she’d just hurt you.” “Leave the lass alone, Wildberry, you saucy wench. She’ll never be as beautiful as you and your sisters.” “Shut up, Paistoi. You ain’t paid the Dogs for the last batch of Puppies you sold in Siraj.”~~

In between his remarks to them, Tunstall explained things to me. “Since we’re a senior pair, Cooper, we have no fixed route. Three nights a week, starting tonight, we roam the Nightmarket and the Lower City between Rovers Street and Koskynen, Northgate and Stormwing. That’s Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday. We go where there’s likely to be trouble. Thursday and Saturday we’re in the Cesspool, Stormwing Street to Mulberry and Charry Orchard. We do our own seekings unless assigned one by Ahuda, we get papers when we need help on a seeking, and we have our flocks of Birdies who give us what we need in order to seek. And if we have aught that’s good, we wander off on wanderings. Clary? Aught to add?”

She looked at him. “I’m bored.”

Tunstall scratched the back of her head. “And you say *I’m* a barbarian. At least I know how to train a new warrior. Halt right there, Cooper. Look about you. What do you see?”

It was too easy. Not ten feet away, a pickpocket moved in on a pickle woman. I put my hand on my baton, but Tunstall slid over like ink in water. He laid his baton gentle-like on the boy’s hand just as the lad touched the mot’s purse. Tunstall shook his head. The pickle woman started to shriek at the thief. Tunstall gave her a smile and a copper. “How about one of your pickles, sweetheart?” Like anyone in the Lower City, she got distracted by business. When she started to fish for a pickle in the barrel, Tunstall raised his baton from the lad’s hand. The pickpocket ran.

Tunstall traded copper for pickle with a bow and took a big bite of his snack.

“Oh, get on. No wonder they call you lads Dogs, thinkin’ you can charm an old hag like me with a wag of your tail!” The pickle seller bridled and blushed, then tucked her coin away and headed off down the street. There was a twitch to her hips. I’d wager she’d give her husband an extra-warm night thinking of the tall Dog who had flirted with her.

“If her husband comes looking for you, *I* won’t be your second, not after the last time.” Goodwin nudged him with her elbow. “I stood there like an idiot while you made the cove laugh so hard at your jokes he ended up buying all of us breakfast. Some duel *that* was.”

“Well, I didn’t kill him, and he didn’t want to kill me. Everyone was satisfied, except maybe for the seconds.” Tunstall looked at me and beckoned for me to come up level with him. “Now, Puppy, you saw him. That’s good. You’d’ve made a fuss—maybe not so good. What grade pickpocket was he?”

Great Mithros, a training question. My brain scrambled. Then I remembered and met Tunstall’s eyes. “He’d no knife, so he was a true pickpocket. Slow as he is, he prob’ly won’t live to be a master pickpocket.”

Tunstall prodded me. “And what’s the street word for ‘master pickpocket’?”

“‘Foist,’ sir,” I replied.

“So she knows the words,” Goodwin muttered. “So what?”

Tunstall patted her shoulder, then turned to me. “Well, we don’t go around raising a fuss for minnows, Puppy. I don’t like standing before the Magistrate any more than I must. It’s less time spent out here looking for truly dangerous folk.”

That made sense. I nodded and saw that Pounce had returned to sit at my feet. I tried to nudge

him away with my boot.

“Come on,” said Goodwin. “The evening’s young, and I was thinking we might pay Crookshank a visit. I’d like a word with him about that load of pink pearls that went missing off of Gemstone Mew. If he’s half as cracked by grief as they say, mayhap he’ll get careless in his talk.”

I *did* look up then. She was grinning, with all her teeth on show. They were strong and white, like the wolves’ in the royal menagerie.

“Now, Clary, that’s not nice,” Tunstall told her. “He’s in deep mourning for little Rolond.” Quick as a snake, he looked back at me. “Puppy, who’s Crookshank?”

He startled me, so that I answered without thinking. “Biggest of the Nightmarket scales. Owns a piece of most of what’s lifted, half of the luxury goods, minimum. A quarter of the loaner trade. He’s got about twenty buildings in the Cesspool. Twenty more in the greater Lower City.” I swallowed and remembered where I was and who I spoke to. “Sir.”

“What do you expect, Mattes?” demanded Goodwin. “She’s lived in my lord Gershom’s pocket for eight years. She had to pick up *something* if she wasn’t completely stupid. Knowing isn’t the same as doing.” She walked out into the crossing of Gibbet Corner and Feasting Street, where stalls filled the huge square before us. We had come to the Nightmarket.

I nearly fell over my like-new boots with surprise. She knew who I was! I was fair certain I wasn’t covered in what the Commander said when I was assigned to them. She’d known of me before.

Does she know I’m friends with Crookshank’s granddaughter-in-law Tansy, and my mama with his daughter-in-law Annis? I wondered sudden-like. How? No one from their old Cesspool district was ever allowed at the house. So I should tell the Dogs....

Trotting to catch up with them, I changed my mind. It wasn’t needful. Tansy wouldn’t come out to say hello to visitors, if Dogs could rightly be called visitors. She hadn’t left the house since Rolond was found dead. If Annis came to see us, she’d never give me away. She was a hard one, as fit a woman who made herself her father-in-law’s right hand. I could tell Goodwin and Tunstall I had friends in the household later, when we were off the street.

The Nightmarket was stirring up for business. The torches were just lit, the sun being behind the wall in the Lower City. Plenty of folk were still at their daily work. This was quiet time. Buyers and sellers were talking among the stalls, collecting gossip, beginning to cook, adjusting weapons. It’s my favorite time in the Nightmarket.

We walked along. Stall vendors and market regulars called greetings to Goodwin and Tunstall. Two other pairs of Dogs worked the Nightmarket, but we didn’t see them.

I was trying to wave Pounce off again when Tunstall halted. I could see that big beak of his twitching. “I smell apple-raisin patties,” he announced.

Goodwin turned to him and rolled her eyes. “Glutton,” she said, her smile a mocking hook at the corner.

Tunstall led us down the bakers’ and spicers’ row of the market until he stopped at the stall that spread those good smells. I don’t know anyone who won’t swear before all the gods that Mistress Deirdry Noll is the best baker in all Corus. And Tunstall’s luck was in, because Mistress Noll herself was minding the trays of baked goods. “Mattes, I should have known that you would sniff out my patties!” she said with a laugh. She even reached up and tweaked his nose. “Give me your handkerchief, you great lummo. Mistress Clary, how do you fare this good evening?”

“As ever, Mistress Deirdry,” Goodwin said. “None of your daughters could take the stall tonight?”

“Not tonight.” Mistress Noll placed six fat patties, heavy with cinnamon, on Tunstall’s handkerchief. She looked as she always had to me: plump, her gray hair braided, pinned, and coiled the back of her head, brown eyes, a small nose and straight mouth. She wore a brown cloth gown under

her white cook's apron. Seeing her like a Dog must, I guessed her age to be about fifty now.

~~She tied Tunstall's handkerchief to make a bundle of patties and handed them over. He reached for his purse. She put fists on hips and drew herself up as tall as she could go, which was no more than my shoulder.~~

"As if any Dog in the Lower City paid me for something to get him through to his supper!" she said, all huffy. "I'd smack your face if I could, Mattes Tunstall!" She looked at Goodwin. "Men! No notion of what's a gift!" She flicked out a slip of cloth that had been washed so often it was almost sheer and settled three patties on it. "That's for you, Clary, since I know you're nicer about your handkerchief than he is, the big barbarian."

Tunstall mumbled something through hot filling and crumbs.

Goodwin leaned in and kissed Mistress Noll's cheek. "Thank you," Goodwin said, her deep voice amused. "Don't mind him. He wasn't housebroke when I bought him."

Mistress Noll looked down. "Pounce, you little beggar, what are you doing here? Don't tell me you've run away from Beka. The two of you are melted together."

My friend cried, *Look in front of you!* in cat talk. It amazes me that he can decide who will understand him and who will not. He's done so since he bade me to find him four years ago, when he was a noisy kitten.

This time I was the only one who understood. Mistress Noll only chuckled and offered him some fish paste she'd been using for dumplings she fried at the brazier in the stall. When she straightened she saw me. "Goddess bless me, it *is* Beka! All grown up and—partnered with you two?" She looked at Goodwin and Tunstall.

"She's a trainee, not a partner." Goodwin smiled, barely. "How'd *you* get to know her, Mistress Deirdry?"

Out came another worn bit of clean cloth. Mistress Noll popped three apple fritters onto it—she knew well they were my favorites.

"Hey," said Tunstall, "hers are bigger."

I grinned at him. Then I ducked my head.

"Well, you'd best take care of her. I've known her all my life, and you couldn't ask for a better hearted gixie," said Mistress Noll. "I told her she ought to have let me make dumplings of *you* years ago," she told Pounce, scratching his ears.

Pounce mewed sad enough to pull her heartstrings. He might have been thanking her for the scratch with his last, starving breath. I glared at him, telling him with my eyes, *You're disgusting. Tell me you didn't have a beef supper before I left.* He licked his chops as Mistress Noll gave him an even bigger ball of fish paste.

Goodwin asked, "Mistress Deirdry, did you hear about old Crookshank's great-grandson?"

Mistress Noll looked at Goodwin sidelong. She knew she was being played for information. Tunstall gave her a big shrug, as if to say, *She's my partner. What can I do?*

Mistress Noll busied herself with pressing dough on a small table by the cook pot. "As if anyone didn't know, poor little mite. It's a disgrace, it is, taking a quarrel with the old man into his family. Barbaric. Mayhap they carry on so in Scanra, or Barzun, but not here. Whoever did it won't last long breaking the Rogue's law like that."

Tunstall grimaced. Goodwin sniffed. The Rogue is old and should make way for someone younger and strong who could keep order among the city's thieves. Instead he's fixed the Court of the Rogue to keep himself alive. He doesn't look out for the people of the Lower City anymore, only his chiefs and the folk who add to his treasure chests.

Pigeons started landing on the stall's canopy. "Scat, you nasty things!" cried Mistress Noll, grabbing a broom and jabbing at the canvas. "Don't you go leaving your mess on my goods! Beka

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