

A STREET DOG
NAMED

Pup

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*For
Roger, for his kindness and compassion
to all the animals in his care
and for
Georgie, Beth and Jemma, who are my world,
and for
Liz Cross, who met Pup first*

In memory of Murphy
'Starlake Sirius'



*When a dog gives you its love, it is a gift.
A gift to be treasured with all your heart and soul.*



PUP

BREED: GERMAN SHEPHERD
/BELGIAN MALINOIS CROSS

A dog with a big heart.
He will follow you to
the ends of the earth.
Will howl when lonely.



FRENCHI

BREED: FRENCH BULLDOG

A true friend. Will help
anyone in need.
Being a short-nosed breed,
he can find it hard
to breathe.



REX

BREED: PIT BULL
TERRIER CROSS

Soft and gentle soul.
However, he will fiercely
defend those he loves.

Very mistrustful
of strangers.



SAFFY

BREED: LABRADOR

Kind and gentle.
Always ready to give hugs.

Sometimes others will
take advantage of her
trusting nature.



LADY FIFI

BREED: JACK RUSSELL/
SHIH TZU CROSS

A small dog with a
big attitude.

Will bite unless regularly
pampered.



CLOWN

BREED: BOXER

Full of life and fun.
Mischievous and mayhem
follow him wherever
he goes.



REYNARD

BREED: FOXHOUND

A gentle, sensitive soul.
He will happily sit for
cuddles all day.

Scared of loud noises,
he often seeks quiet and
dark places for comfort.

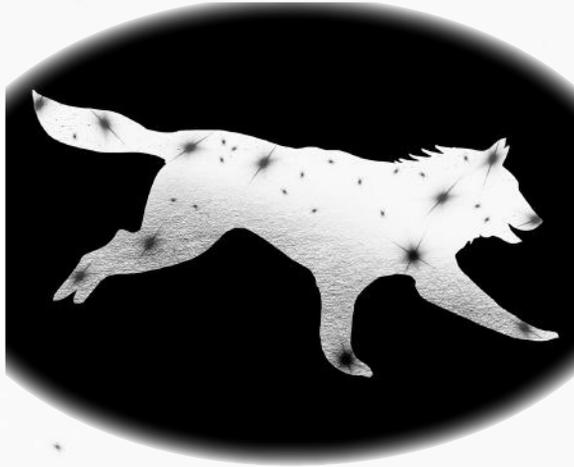


MERLE

BREED: BORDER COLLIE

Highly intelligent and active.

She can become bored
and anxious if unable
to work.



Prologue

THE GREAT SKY WOLF

There is a story that every mother dog will pass to her newborn pups. She will tell it to them before their eyes have opened, when they are still blind and squirming at her belly, searching for her milk. She will tell it to them when their warm plump bodies are snuggled together in sleep. She will tell it, even though her heart breaks and breaks by telling it, for she has only a short precious time when she can truly call them her own. For it is every mother's grief that she will lose her pups to man.

She will curl her body around her pups and lick each of them in turn. ‘Hush now,’ she’ll say, ‘for the stars are bright tonight and the Great Sky Wolf is running fleet-footed across the night. We must run with him, back to the time when dogs formed their bond with man. You must know this story, my little children, and hold it deep inside. For this bond was forged in the stars, when ice and fire shaped this world. In your lifetime, man may falter and forget this bond between you, and so it will be up to you to remember, and let it for ever be your guide.’

The pups will whimper, squirm closer to each other and then settle as she begins the story.

‘In the time before time,’ she’ll say, ‘there were great forests and fast rivers that roared down from the mountains. It was a time when man and wolf were equal and when the gods Orion – the great hunter – and Lupus – the great wolf – roamed the skies. Man and wolf spoke with the same tongue. They lived the same lifespan, a year for a year. But they were wary of each other for they shared the same landscape and hunted the same game. For many years, there was plenty for all and so wolf and man would bow their heads in greeting to each other but keep their distance. Wolf and man had different skills. Wolf was fast-footed, fierce and brave. Man was an inventor, and he learned to be the master of fire.

‘But a great creeping cold came over the land. Ice formed where rivers had once flowed. And as the deer moved south, the wolves and men moved south with them. But the cold followed, freezing the ground as hard as rock, and soon there

was little left to hunt. Both wolf and man grew hungry and began to fight each other for what was left. The sky gods, Orion and Lupus, called a truce and said that their people could share their skills to survive. And so wolves and man came to live with each other. They hunted together. They shared their lives together. They grew old together. And in return for a place by the fire, the wolves protected men from the wild creatures of the night.

‘Now it came to pass that the great ice rivers retreated to the mountains and the deer returned to the valleys. Many of the wolves slipped away into the forests to live as packs once more. But one wolf, Sirius, and his family chose to stay with man. And on a cold crystal night, beneath a winter moon, Lupus came down to Earth to speak with him.

“Sirius,” said the Great Sky Wolf. “It is time to return to the mountains and end your partnership with man.”

“I cannot,” said Sirius, “for I love his children as I love my own.”

‘Lupus growled thunder across the land. “This is not the way of the wolf. If you do not leave him, I shall take away your language, so you can neither speak words with man, nor howl with wolves. You shall be known as Dog, a servant of man.”

‘Sirius closed his eyes. “I cannot leave him, for he needs me more than he will ever know.”

‘Lupus cast his words and Sirius could now only speak in yelps and barks. Yet it made no difference, because man and dog still understood each other without the need for words.

“You are a dumb animal in the eyes of man,” said Lupus. “I will give you one more chance to become wolf again.”

‘Sirius bowed his head to Lupus. “It is my wish to protect man and his family. We love each other as equals. We live together and grow old together.”

‘Lupus was greatly angered. “You betray wolfkind. I will not allow it. If you do not leave man, I will cut short your life, and you shall age seven years to his one. You shall grow old, while your human does not.”

‘Sirius bent his head in grief, because he knew what was to come. “I cannot leave man, for I love him more than life itself.”

“Then so be it,” thundered Lupus, and in his rage his words shot like lightning from his mouth.

‘Man woke to find Sirius old, grey-muzzled and dead at his feet, and man grieved for his lost brother and the years they could never have. He held Sirius in his arms and wept. “I will protect your family, now and for always,” he vowed, “for you truly are the greatest friend to man.”

‘When Lupus saw what he had done, he howled for all the world to hear, because it was only then he understood the great bond of love and trust between man and dog. He gathered the soul of Sirius between his paws. “My friend,” he said to Sirius. “Your children may give their heart to man in their lifetime. But I ask them not to turn away from their wolf-brothers, for they share the same wild soul. I ask that when their time on Earth has ended, they give their soul back to me.”

“We will,” said Sirius. “Now and for always.”

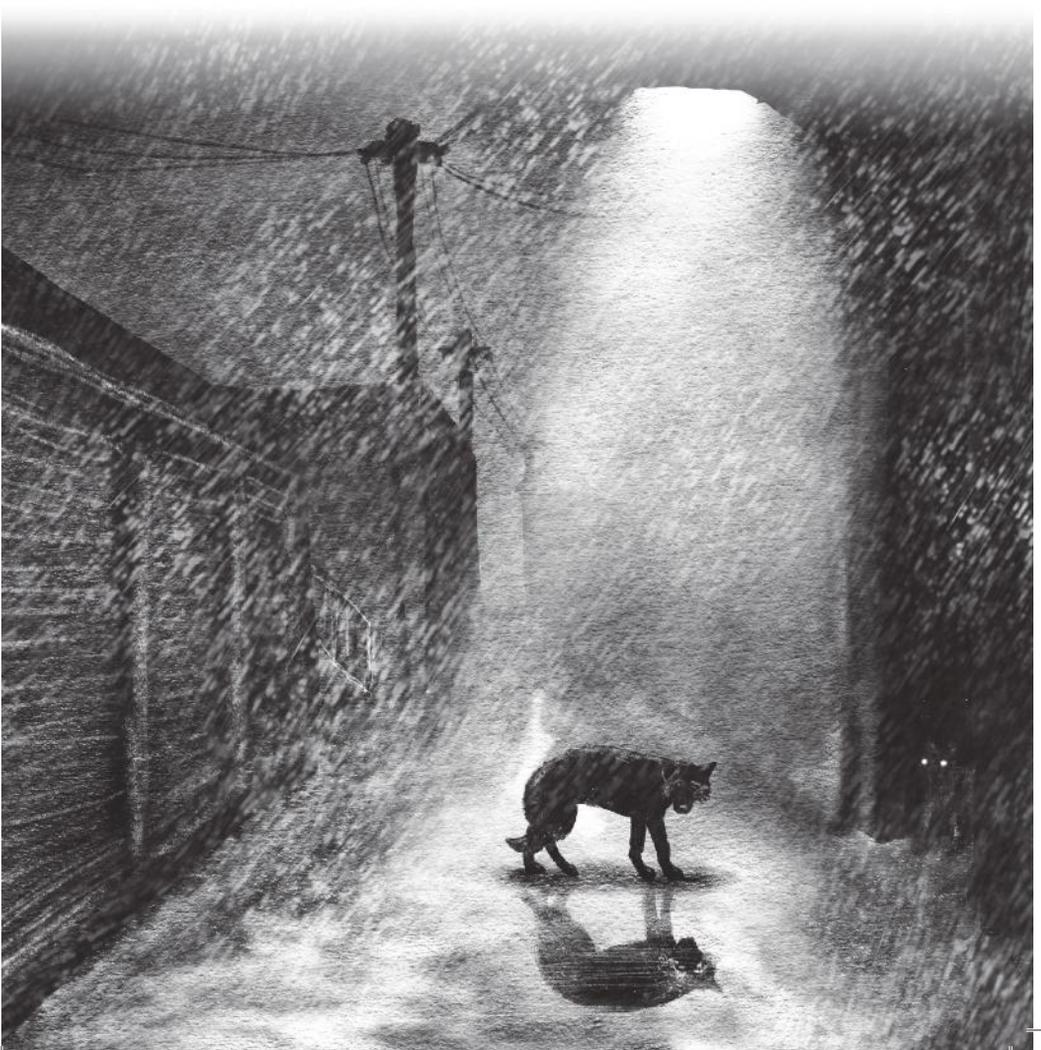
‘The Great Wolf lifted Sirius up into the skies and set him next to Orion as a sign of loyalty for all to see. And now the brightest star in the sky shines from the great dog’s heart. It is a reminder of that bond between man and dog. It is a bond of faith that must never be broken.’

And the mother dog will finish her story and gently pull her puppies closer, knowing she can only protect them for this short time. She will tell them that even if man forgets the vow he made, they must always keep their faith. In times of trouble, when they are lost or frightened, they must look to the brightest star and remember this story, because the sacred bond made between man and dog is the only thing that will keep them safe.

Then her heart will break and break and break again. For she cannot know if it will be kind and gentle hands that first hold her beloved pups.

She cannot know what lies ahead for each of them, when they are taken from her, into the world of man.

Chapter 1
DEAD DOG
ALLEY



PUP CURLED UP IN THE footwell of the car. He tucked his nose into his fur and shivered. Nothing felt right. Freezing air blasted from a vent beside him, bringing the smells of cars, burger bars and wet tarmac. Street lights flashed by as the big man steered through the city. The windscreen wipers clunked from side to side against the heavy rain. Pup shivered again, but it wasn't from the cold. Worry chewed at him. Something was different. The car was the same. Pup usually sat on the boy's lap in the back seat. *His* boy, who smelled deliciously of football socks and cheese puffs. *His* boy, who held him tight and told him that one day he would grow into his big puppy paws and be the *biggest dog ever*. *His* boy, who he tumbled with across the park in warm sunshine, pushing the football with his nose, while his boy ran after him laughing and shouting.

But his boy wasn't here this time.

It was dark and cold.

'Good dog,' said the big man.

Pup wagged the tip of his tail, but this didn't feel right. Other dogs were easy to understand, but the language of the humans was confusing. What they said with their body was often different from the words they used. Nothing else about the big man said *good dog*. The big man was silent and closed. His hands were on the steering wheel, staring ahead. Pup couldn't read him at all.

Pup wanted to whine and yip, but he worried the big man

would shout at him and slap him across the nose. He always did when Pup made a noise.

If his boy had been in the car, Pup would have crawled up into his lap and tucked his head onto his chest and listened to the thump, thump, thump of his boy's heart. His boy would have scratched just behind his ears and held him safe.

But his boy wasn't here this time.

His boy was still at home, in bed where Pup should be with him now. In his mind he could still see his boy in bed and himself curled up beside him. The boy always wrapped his arm around Pup, holding Pup's paw in his warm human hand. They would lie curled up beneath the fleecy blanket, while the boy fell asleep, breathing warm breath into Pup's soft fur. But this night had been different too. The boy's mother had come in. She had lifted Pup up, placing a teddy beside the boy where Pup had been.

Good dog, she'd said, while she placed the sleeping boy's arm over the teddy instead.

We're going for a walk, she'd whispered to Pup. But there had been no lead, or ball. Only the big man waiting at the door to put Pup inside the car.

Pup tucked his nose deeper into his fur as the car lurched and swung along the roads. He could still smell his boy in his fur, and there felt some safety in that.

Pup fell into an uncomfortable sleep, jolting and sliding on the rubber mat.

When he woke, the car had stopped in a dark street. The big man got out and lit a cigarette.

Pup climbed onto the seat and peered out. This wasn't

the park. It didn't smell like the park. It didn't smell like anywhere he'd been before. The road was lit by a single lamppost at the far end. A halo of rain-fizzled light circled the lamp. There were no houses, just an old garage, boarded-up shops and an empty car park. Pup felt himself lifted up from the car seat and taken outside.

The big man slipped off Pup's collar.

Pup felt strange without his collar, naked and unowned.

'Be quick,' the big man said.

This was the command to go to the toilet. The big man would praise him if he went outside. Pup wanted to please him, so he trotted to a wall and lifted his leg. There were the scents of other dogs on the wall, and Pup wondered who they were. A shiver ran through him.

The car door slammed.

Pup spun around to look, but the man was already inside the car. 'Uff!' called Pup.

Had the big man forgotten him?

'Uff!' Pup ran towards the car, but it started up in a belch of exhaust smoke and sped away, spraying dirty water in Pup's face. Pup ran after it. He ran and ran, but his big puppy paws tripped over each other and he tumbled and slid face first into an oily puddle.

'Uff!' barked Pup. He scrambled to his feet and began running again but couldn't keep up. 'Uff, uff, uff! Wait for me. Wait for me. Wait for me.'

Pup's heart thumped inside his chest. The big man had forgotten him. Surely he'd realize Pup wasn't in the car and come back for him?

The car turned the corner, leaving Pup in the darkness. He stopped and stared at the place where the car had once been.

A cold wind funnelled down the street, blowing loose paper into the sky. Rain soaked deep into his fur.

Pup looked up and down the empty street.

There was no one.

Nothing looked or smelled familiar.

Dark alleyways led off from the road.

He tucked his tail between his legs.

The wind whistled through the telephone wires and rattled the tin roof of the garage.

Further down the street, a metal bin lid clanged to the floor and rolled out from an alleyway.

There was a cough too. Someone was there. Pup wondered if it might be someone who could help him. He kept close to the wall and edged down the street until he stopped at the alleyway.

Something was in there. Pup could hear a snorting and snuffling in the shadows. It was coming closer and closer and smelled of another dog. It might be one of the scary big dogs at the park – his boy used to lift him up into his arms and protect him from them.

But his boy wasn't here.

Pup whined, tucked his tail further between his legs and backed away.

A deep rasping voice spoke out from the darkness.

‘Welcome,’ it said, ‘to Dead Dog Alley.’

Chapter 2
FRENCHI



THE DOG THAT EMERGED FROM the shadows was much smaller than Pup had guessed. He was smaller than Pup. Or at least he was shorter. He had a barrel-shaped body, short bandy legs and a stubby tail. His ears were large and rounded and he had a face so squashed that he looked like he had run full speed into a brick wall. He was all white, except for a large patch of black over his right eye. He snuffled and snorted through his nose, and when he breathed his wide tongue hung so far out he looked like he was gulping air.

The dog circled around him. ‘A pup, eh? A big one, though. How old are you?’

Pup just stared at the dog. The dog’s ears were pricked and his stubby tail upright. He didn’t look fierce, but he didn’t look like he wanted to play either.

The dog continued walking around him, inspecting him. ‘Hmm, huge puppy paws, but starting to get long lanky legs. A bit skinny too. Six months old, are you? Not looking so cute any more, I suspect.’ He pushed his face nearer to Pup. ‘What was it? Chewing everything? Yelping all day?’

Pup backed away and found himself pressed up against the wall. He blinked hard in confusion. ‘What was what?’ he said.

‘Why did they dump you?’ asked the dog. ‘Why did your humans dump you?’

‘They haven’t dumped me,’ Pup said.

‘So what are you doing here?’ said the dog.

Pup glanced back up the street, hoping to see the headlights of the big man’s car. ‘The big man forgot to pick me up,’ he said.

The dog tipped his head on one side. ‘Forgot?’

‘Yes,’ whimpered Pup. But now he wasn’t so sure. His thoughts felt all tangled up and he kept thinking about his boy still in bed, where he should be now. ‘He’ll come back.’

The dog sat down and attempted to scratch his ear with his back foot, but couldn’t quite reach, so he rubbed his ear on the corner of the wall instead. ‘That’s what they always say. But we all get dumped here, sooner or later. That’s why it’s called Dead Dog Alley.’

Pup whined and tucked his tail between his legs.

‘What’s your name?’ asked the dog.

‘I’m Pup,’ said Pup.

‘I know you’re a pup,’ said the dog, ‘I can see that. What’s your name? What was the first name you were given?’

‘It’s just Pup,’ said Pup again. ‘That’s my name.’

‘Well that’s a daft name for a pup like you, if you ask me,’ said the dog. ‘You won’t be a pup for ever and you’re going to be huge.’ He peered a little closer. ‘I reckon you’re a barker. Did you bark much?’

‘Sometimes,’ said Pup. ‘Only when they left me. But they always heard me, because if I kept barking they came back in the end.’

‘I expect your barking brought the neighbours around too,’ said the dog.

‘How did you know?’ asked Pup.

‘And,’ said the dog, ‘I’m guessing you think you’re an excellent guard dog. Every day, the same person would arrive at the house, shove paper and packages through a hole in the front door and then go away.’

Pup curled his lips to show his line of pointy teeth. ‘That’s right. Every time they came, I barked and barked at them, and they never dared come in. I scared them off each time. They just left packages and went.’

‘And you ripped up the packages and pieces of paper?’ said the dog.

‘Ripped them to shreds,’ Pup said proudly.

The dog sighed. ‘Your humans dumped you, Pup. You might as well hear it from me. Humans don’t like chewers or barkers. They don’t want you any more.’

‘My boy wants me,’ said Pup. ‘My boy will find me.’

The dog licked at a red sore on his left front paw. ‘So there’s a boy, is there? How old?’

Pup felt the worry chew at him again. ‘I don’t know.’

‘How big is he?’ said the dog.

‘He came up to the big man’s shoulders,’ said Pup.

The dog sighed and shook his head. ‘Well, I reckon he’s about ten human years. Old enough to miss you. And that’s hard,’ he said.

‘What’s hard?’ said Pup.

‘Even if your boy wants to find you, he won’t know where to look,’ said the dog.

Pup felt the worry knot inside him. It was the same worry he felt every time the humans left him in the house on his own. But here he was in a place he didn’t know, with a dog

he didn't know.

The dog sighed. 'You may as well follow me and get out of this rain,' he said. 'My name's Frenchi, by the way.'

Pup just stared after the dog.

Frenchi started walking away. 'Well, are you coming?'

Pup looked up and down the road. It was bleak and empty. He sat down and whined.

Frenchi turned. 'I expect you're wondering if you can trust me?'

Pup whined again. He didn't know this dog. He just wanted his boy.

Frenchi shook the rain from his coat and took a step towards Pup. 'Look, it's a hard lesson to learn, but you can't trust anyone, not any more. You're on your own. You have to trust your instincts now.'

'I'm staying here,' said Pup. 'My boy will find me. He always does. My boy will come.' The worry bubbled up inside him and came out as a howl, a long howl rising into the night.

'Blimey!' said Frenchi. 'A howler. And that's an impressive howl. No wonder they dumped you.'

Pup took another deep breath and howled again, a cry from his heart calling out across the city. Calling out to his boy.

'Well,' said Frenchi. 'Can't hang about. With all that noise, the Snatchers will be here soon.'

Pup stopped mid-howl. 'The Snatchers?'

Frenchi shuddered and backed into the shadows. 'You don't want the Snatchers to find you.'

‘Who are the Snatchers?’ asked Pup.

But Frenchi was already trotting away into the darkness of the alleyway, huffing and snuffling as he went.

Pup stared after him, then turned back to the road. He would wait. The rain seemed to come down even harder, soaking deep through his fur. He shivered and hunched his back against the wind. He was good at waiting. Sometimes at home he had to wait for hours for his boy.

Sure enough, headlights swung into the road, filling the darkness with beams of light. Pup wagged his tail. Frenchi had been wrong. Pup knew the big man would return. He sat up straight, paws together and waited for the big man to find him. Maybe his boy would be in the car too, and Pup would be ready to leap into his boy’s arms and lick his face while his boy held him tightly. Pup’s legs felt like coiled springs. He couldn’t stop himself – he jumped up and bounded towards the car.

But then he stopped, his paws sliding on the wet pavement.

This car didn’t sound like the big man’s car. It was bigger too. It was a van that stopped a little way down the road. Two humans climbed out. The smell of them drifted down towards Pup and he didn’t recognize them. They smelled of many things, of humans and other dogs and bleached floors. They smelled of lots of dogs all mixed up together. One human carried a long pole with a rope, while the other carried a torch, swinging the beam from side to side, scanning the street.

Fear rose up inside Pup. His paws felt stuck to the tarmac. The beam of the torch swung closer and closer to him. Soon

it would reach him.

This didn't feel right.

It didn't feel right at all.

He had to make a choice, between a dog he'd never met before and two humans approaching with a rope and pole.

Trust your instincts, the dog had said.

Pup took a deep breath and slipped into the shadows. 'Wait, Frenchi,' he called. 'Wait for me.'