Twilight Hound (after cuts) By Emily Slater

“Kerry…” Jack whispered. “You have to get up now.”

Kerry turned over, groaning. “Why?” she moaned.

“You know why!” Jack hissed. “Kian will have our guts for garters if you don’t come now!”

“Could just sleep in,” Kerry said with a little smile, rolling off her bed, suspiciously already dressed. “Overseer Kian never checks if we’re there anyway.”

Jack scowled as Kerry ran a comb through her long, tangled ginger hair. “He will today, Kerry.”

“Why?” she asked, her eyes full of interest.

Jack huffed and Kerry’s grin widened. She loved winding Jack up, it had to be admitted. “Well,” he began, “Overseer Kian said that today Princess Lora was coming today. She wants a new pet.”

“Ah,” Kerry said. “Did Overseer Kian say she wanted anything in particular?”

“Err… no.”

“Oh. Oh dear,” Kerry sighed. “Shall we go?”

Jack nodded, and the twosome headed from their small sleeping quarters out into a massive courtyard. Tall towers reigned supreme over the tiny living quarters of the students of Thorndayl ‘School’ (if one could call it a school; more like a place for the Princesses of the Kingdom to purchase ‘pets’ – AKA a student at Thorndayl transmuted using the Great Wizard’s power into an pet for the Princess) as the students stood and shivered in the freezing morning breeze.

Overseer Kian stood at the very centre of the crowd, well-equipped in his fur jerkin and warm sealskin boots, lined with the softest polar bear fur, which Jack thought was disgusting. Kian’s large nose stuck out from his face like Everest over the other Himalayan Mountains. His sunken eyes were ever watchful of the children, just waiting for one to show him up so he could deal out the consequences. Beside him stood a regal girl, dressed in the same finery as he, with silky brown hair and commanding blue eyes.

“Thorndayl,” Kian began, his voice booming across the courtyard. “Standing before you today is Princess Lora. She is here to choose a pet. Lora!” he cried. “What pet will it be?”

Lora let loose an incredibly high-pitched giggle. Jack covered his ears. It sounded like nails scratching down a backboard, only a hundred times louder. “Well, I want a dog.”

“Then a dog it shall be,” replied Kian. “Who will you pick?”

She raised her hand to point at her choice. “I choose… you!”

Suddenly, Lora pointed at Jack. Jack glanced around the crowd; found Kerry. She looked terrified. Then she was gone.

“Then, it shall be done,” came a voice from the heavens. Suddenly, Jack felt his throat constricting. He felt himself shrinking, shrinking, scrunching down to the size of a small puppy. He shed himself of his clothes and dropped onto all fours, a tiny human desperate to regain his true form. Then, thick fur sprouted from all of Jack’s body. His ears lengthened and became much floppier. A tail burst from him in a flurry of glossy black fur. He growled experimentally.

Jack had become the Twilight Hound.