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A New Year

by Miriam Silver

“Come on, it’s gonna be ok.”

I was lying on the back seat of his car when I heard that. I’d been there all night, he’d found this, a battered old thing, fit for the knackers yard really, at least it kept the rain out and I hadn’t been ‘moved on’. Coppers busy celebrating didn’t even notice it was ‘off street’, can’t be anywhere else, isn’t taxed or insured or ever likely to be.

New year can’t be any worse than the one that’s just gone, bad luck doesn’t really describe it. We’d done a job, got caught, lost everything and each been given nine months. Stupid me to be so easily influenced, he’s my friend should have known better.

“Come on, I’ve just seen this,” he said as I blearily read the paper he pushed at me.

“Business man offers substantial reward for recovering valuable dog stolen recently.”

“Another of your good ideas is it?” I sneered.

“I think we could begin to make enquiries....” Joe suggested.

“All our contacts still inside,” I replied uselessly.

“Don’t be so pessimistic Alf,” Joe went on, “Eddie’s out, he’s always on the ball, leave it to me.”

Trying to brush myself down in order to join the outside world I ignored him,

“Must get going, find a bed for tonight, see you later,” I said as I climbed out of my rusty bedroom.

The good ole’ Sally Ann turned up trumps as usual and I left there with a voucher for a bed only to be distracted by, “Oi! Alf, it is you isn’t it, long time no see,” and there he was, Eddie.

“Not much of a new year so far,” I observed, “I mean, bit down, an’ all that,” I added, walking away towards the hostel trying to avoid his dodgy attentions.

“Never mind, met your friend Joe, he told me to look out for you,” adding, “coffee time, follow me.” Which I did, stupidly, as he took my arm and led me to the pavement outside the Coop, “sit down, don’t move,” and he put a piece of cardboard in front of us.

In no time at all there were two cups of Starbucks and a sandwich in front of us.

When it got too cold he pulled me upright, talking all the time, “yer know, I heard there’s a reward on offer waiting for us,” he said as I was led away to the seafront.

“No one around us here mate, listen, I know the breed of that stolen dog,” he began.

“Ok, so what?” I asked disinterestedly.

“Well, all we gotta do is find one, yer know, all dogs look the same.”

“Not to their owners they don’t,” I said in an effort to steer him away from the whole subject.

“You worked with a vet didn’t you? Remember? Back in the days when we were boys.”

“Doesn’t mean anything”, I said listlessly.

“Even you can remember what a bulldog looks like and I know where to find one, an’ you owe me for that cuppa.”

I always knew I was weak, I should have gone to find that bed but just followed him again until we were in the quiet suburb of Meads.

“Over there,” Eddie pointed to a mock Tudor double fronted house, “a bull dog lives,” adding in a whisper

“Come on let’s make plans.”

With the empty day stretching ahead what else was there?

“All we gotta do is go, as soon as it’s dark, get in there quick before someone else does.”

“An’ what do we do if it barks and won’t come with us?” I asked hoping he’d be put off the whole idea.

“Thought of all that, my pills in some meat, that’s all we need for a nice quiet dog.”

I should have left him there and gone to reserve my hostel place., but I didn’t because I’m useless.

All went as planned, the dog quickly recovered from the doped meat, so we calmly walked it to collect the reward.

Pity, we forgot, dogs are electronically tagged these days.

Resolve to do better next year.