

COLIN COHEN

STRAYS

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<https://evenpunkgirls.github.io/>

IN HER SHORT life she had known only hunger, cold, and abuse. But nothing prepared her for this moment of terror.

Right then, she was cornered under an unlit marquee by three soccer hooligans wearing Olympique de Marseille jerseys, who were large and drunk and kicking her around like a ball, in celebration of their team's victory over Paris Saint-Germain. And all she could do in response was whine and crawl, hoping for mercy. Though this did nothing but increase the men's fury.

Which Rudi couldn't help notice as she rushed along the other side of the street. She also couldn't help stop, despite knowing she had to be somewhere else, and fast—for her own safety. She stopped because she somehow understood that the dog was much like her—left at a young age to fend for herself, without the means to do so. The only difference between the two was that there had been people who cared about her, and who rescued her from a fate not much different than the animal's. Rudi further understood that this night would be her turn to care, and she slowly marched across Avenue Montaigne with her fists clenched and her eyes on fire.

"Leave the dog alone," she stated matter-of-factly to the men once steps behind them.

At once, the men jumped in surprise—not having heard Rudi approach. Then, they spun in the direction of the voice and saw in front of them a petite but angry punk girl. And they smirked at her—and afterward they smirked at each other before laughing without control.

"Leave the dog alone," Rudi repeated—this time through her clenched jaw.

"Maybe we should kick you instead," retorted the largest of the hooligans.

"Or do something better," joked a second man.

Ignoring this, Rudi walked over to the dog—a mix between a German shepherd and a collie—and no more than three months old. Which is when she saw that the animal was not only bleeding but so frightened that she was spasming. So, Rudi reached down to calm her.

However, the largest man stopped her, by grasping her shoulder—almost swallowing it in his hand, and he growled, “That’s our mutt.”

Rudi responded to this by calmly turning to the hooligan and grabbing hold of his thumb, prior to not-so-calmly snapping it back—causing the man to fall to the ground in the most excruciating pain he never imagined. At the same time, one of his friends rushed at Rudi and cocked his huge fist in anticipation of a wallop. But he never got the chance, because Rudi swung her heel up into his groin—and he collapsed next to his friend, in even worse pain.

Rudi then turned in the direction of the third hooligan, but he was already halfway down the block, flailing his arms like a madman as he desperately tried to get away. Also trying to get away was the dog, who was crawling along the sidewalk, just as frightened of Rudi as she had been of the men. Though this fear didn’t last long, because seconds later one stray picked up the other, and began gently caressing her.

It was the first time the dog had felt the hand of human kindness, and it somehow made all her pain vanish—and she whined for a much different reason than before.

the end