

The small brown terrier shook the earth from his coat, then flopped down, panting and exhausted.

"That was unexpected," the dog said, giving the girl a sideward glance.

A talking dog, the girl thought. I must be dreaming. Perhaps that's why I can't remember who I am.

"You're not dreaming," the dog said.

"How did you know what I was thinking?" the girl asked.

"That's what people always think when they hear a talking dog," the dog said, then added: "people are so predictable."

The dog stood up and again shook himself until the clumps of earth flew from his fur.

When he was finished, he bowed his head and said: "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Otto. My name is spelled the same both backwards and forwards – so it doesn't matter if I'm coming or going."

"That is convenient," said the girl.

"And what are you called?" the dog asked.

This question brought back all the sadness the girl felt about not remembering who she was. She held her lips tight so she wouldn't start to cry.

Otto sat down and waited for the girl to answer his question. The dog thought she might not have heard him or had forgotten what he'd said, so he repeated the question in different words.

"What is your name?" he asked.

The girl shook her head back and forth and said: "I don't know."

"Well," the dog said, "everyone, man or beast, should have a name."

"Exactly my thought," the girl said.

"So then give yourself a name," the dog told her.

"Better still," she said, "why don't you give me a name?"

"I have heard of people naming dogs, but I have never heard of a dog naming a person."

"So you will be the first," the girl said.