

POLICE DOOG 2

HER MAJESTY'S FINEST



By wwwolf

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Chapter 3: Quiet Halls and Softer Footfalls

July 1st 1993

14:00 Hours

The Kennel, London, England

My thick leather jacket creaked around me as I stepped off my bike, the soft purr of its engine fading into the omnipresent hum of London rush hour.

As far as I knew both were unique.

I was the only Dog to wear this jacket. Mary had stitched it for me and me alone. Its leather had been tanned and shaped by hand, not so long ago having been part of one of their cows.

The bike... it had also been a gift, but from someone far more widely known.

The side door to the Kennel was nothing much to speak of, off a quiet side street. I'd only chosen it because I knew there would be parking here.

I barked out a laugh. Parking in London. You'd have better luck finding the Loch Ness Monster.

Unzipping my jacket, I let the thick fur of my chest show through. My familiar blue shirt was nowhere to be found. I had no need of a uniform any more.

My first stop after stepping through the door was to grab the ear of a pup who scurried down the hall. The little Dog looked up at me wide-eyed.

I wasn't sure if he knew who I was, but he'd remember *me* nonetheless.

"Archives?" I asked.

He nodded, head bobbing up and down like a toy. Not a word escaped his lips, but he did point.

My claws clicked loud on the hard tile hallway, far more noticeable than the soft tread of the other Dogs. The black claws on my feet had grown over the years, not being worn away like those of the officers here.

The directions led down three sets of stairs. The first was a grand staircase, stone and tile, clean and sparkling. A main artery of the Kennel, this hall used by thousands every day.

The second staircase was somewhat more economical. It was a simple affair, but well enough maintained, what you would expect from any government building. I even passed another Dog as I descended it.

The third staircase took me a good ten minutes to so much as locate. It was down at the end of a disused hallway, the light above it long burnt out.

The sign that would have pointed me the right direction had fallen from the wall sometime in the distant past and never been replaced. No one other than I seemed to have noticed.

The door hid a mean little stairwell. I reached out to grip the rail, it rattled in my hand. For not the first time I debated the value of what I was doing.

I took a deep breath and descended the steep, narrow, creaking stairs.

There was hardly enough room at the bottom to even open the door. I did notice, however, it had a loop for a padlock to be affixed. As if they wanted to keep what was held down here from escaping.

I was rather surprised to be greeted with a cheery, "Hello," a moment later. A Dog stood in the half-darkness before me.

I had to blink a moment before I could properly make him out. Then again, it was clear why he'd been assigned to this dismal post.

The Dog, his uniform proclaimed him Thirteen, was obviously of inferior stock. His fur didn't lie cleanly, and there was a hump to his back. And yet more damning, one of his eyes was milky and white.

But there was a smile to his lips.

Dogs do not smile as humans do, but he smiled nonetheless. I found myself smiling back. It was against all our training, but I'd long ago given up following what I'd been taught here, and it seemed so had he.

"Are you the records keeper?" I asked. I couldn't tell you for sure why, but my voice was hushed. It seemed only appropriate. Behind the old Dog aisles of shelves stretched out. They receded into the darkness, seeming to go on forever.

He nodded. "I am. And you are Forty-Two?"

It took me a moment to make sense of his question. I still had yet to become accustomed to not wearing my name on my breast for the world to see.

"I am."

Did I see the slightest wag to his tail?

"It's been a long time since we've been graced by the presence of one so well-known as you, brother. We received word you'd be coming just this morning." He cocked his head slightly. "Tell me, what brings you down to this mean and wretched little corner of our shared home?"

I leaned against the counter. Something about the imperfection of this Dog put me at ease.

"I'm looking for information," I said. "Growing up, I knew one of my brothers."

His head cocked further. I could see the confusion in the set of his ears.

"One brother?" he asked. "We are all brothers and sisters in the service."

I huffed out a breath.

"A *biological* brother," I stressed. "Of the same sire and dam. I want information of my heritage. On my family. My brother was... close to me. I wish to know if there are others."

He didn't bother to question me. "As you wish. I've been given explicit orders to show you anything you ask for, as long as we can find it. We've had odder requests. Though most who come down here looking for such records are human..." He paused for a long moment. "In fact, I can't place a single Dog who's ever inquired here."

I let out a small chuckle.

"I am the first of our kind to do many things. I've long gotten used to it."

When the Dog moved from his desk it became clear he was far older than he looked. His steps were halting and his joints stiff. He had to be forty years if a day.

Closing my eyes for a moment, I wondered what *I* would look like at his advanced age. The scientists who had designed our bodies had envisioned us burning short and bright, not to last. We Dogs do not enter old age gracefully.

Reaching out, I offered him my hand. He looked at it for a long moment, seeming not to understand.

"Let me help you," I whispered. I doubted any who had come before me had offered such a simple courtesy.

We slowly worked our way down the dark, narrow aisle for more than twenty minutes. There were parts of the room that were nearly spotless, every piece of paper exactly as it should be. Then there were parts that appeared far more slapdash. As we journeyed further and further back it seemed that we passed through different eras.

"The different Dogs who have been assigned here," the record keeper whispered. "This is not an enviable position. Only those who narrowly pass the Final are assigned here. Often those with... deformities. Some keepers have done magnificent jobs. Others... were put here for good reason."

Back thirty years, we found a section that was neither clean nor in disarray. The old Dog seemed to know exactly what he was looking for. He set slowly upon the shelves, moving methodically, as though they were full of priceless treasures.

"You'll have to pardon me," he said, voice rough with dust. "My assistant would normally be here to aid me, but he seems to have disappeared. What is your full name again?"

I rattled off the number, not even thinking.

There was the scratch of ancient papers sliding against each other.

"Here you are." Despite his age the Dog moved with an efficiency that made me wonder where he would have been assigned if not for his eye.

A moment later he set a folder in my hands. It was packed to the brim with papers. I'd seen one very much like it before – if not this very one. Dr. Brophy had held it when he'd selected me for my special treatments.

I suppressed a shudder.

“Most litters are of six pups,” the keeper said, paging through the folders that rested here. “Six, you see. They like to make them as large as possible, but keep them so they can still nurse with their dam for the first few days. If there are more than six they tend to let the runt of the litter for disposal.”

In a far away and clinical part of my mind the thought of sending an innocent, hours-old pup to disposal didn't sicken me. I had become so accustomed to the idea of it over my life, growing up in the Kennel with the spectre of disposal so close at hand that it shouldn't even twitch my whisker.

“So these are them?” I asked. There were six folders in the small cubby. All nice and neat.

He sniffed.

“Would seem so. I can't think of anyone having checked them out in years. The last time it seems...” he glanced at a paper he'd brought with him, “Was yours. And that was years ago.”

I nodded.

“Fine. I'd like to take these with me.”

He didn't even miss a beat.

“Very good, Sir. You'll just have to sign for them at the desk and they're yours.”

Some time later we were back at the front desk. I scrawled my name on the dotted line. All the paperwork was, as always, proper and accounted for.

I drew a breath and fought to hold back a sneeze. I needed out of this dreary, time-choked place.

“Thank you for your help, Thirteen,” I said, turning to leave.

He chuckled softly. “The pleasure was all mine, Sir. The most excitement I've had in years. And I hope you find what you're looking for.”

I spared him a glance over my shoulder.

“Not what, Thirteen. Who.”

Back up the stairs, and stairs, and stairs, I let out a sigh when I was able to catch a breath of fresh air once more – even if it was still clogged with the scent of far too many Dogs.

It was noon, and I was in the Kennel. The time made no difference to the Dogs who cycled through the meal rooms, but noon was when the humans ate. There was no bell like what calls the Dogs, but the humans all appeared nonetheless, as if on cue.

Clutching the papers to my chest, I followed one of the humans. She wasn't a Handler... not really. She was an office worker. I followed her as she made a beeline down the hallway.

A moment later my nose twitched. I could smell food. Or something like it.

A few steps later I turned the corner to peer into the human's cafeteria.

I'd never been here before. There were technically no parts of the Kennel that were 'No Dogs' but there were places we just tended not to go. This was one of them.

The room was fairly large, but not large enough for all the men and women who sat crammed into it. Along one side of the room a wall was nearly covered with vending machines, they dispensed everything from colas to wrapped sandwiches. The lineups to reach them nearly snaked out of the room.

I watched as they waited their turn in line and dutifully plugged their coins into the machine to be rewarded with a plastic-wrapped morsel. They each chose differently, but to my nose they all smelled the same. Salt, fat, and preservatives.

From there they jockeyed for a place at the too-small tables. Some of the humans talked to each other as they ate, but most simply stared into their food and chewed like they'd been ordered to, not seeming even to taste it.

I cocked my head.

I left a moment later, not even tarrying long enough to stop by a Dog's cafeteria. I wasn't in the mood for kibble.

Out once again into the busy London day, I peered up at the sky. For perhaps the first time I could remember in this damp place there wasn't a cloud to be seen.

The real world closed in around me no more than a block from the Kennel. People hurried back and forth, wrapped up in their lives, street vendors called out their wares, lorries rolling past.

It took me a few blocks to find a greengrocer. He seemed rather surprised to see me. I'd bet he'd encountered many Dogs, being so close to the Kennel, but never one like me.

I pulled out my worn leather wallet. It wasn't bulging with money, but it was pleasantly heavy with both bills and photographs.

"This should cover a pound of carrots," I said.

He just nodded, never saying a word.

A moment later I had my prize in one hand, my papers in the other, and the clear blue sky above me. It was looking to be a good day.

It was more than a fair walk to Wandsworth Park, in fact it took me over an hour. But it was worth it.

Sitting on the bank of the Thames, I pulled out the first of my carrots. It snapped crisply between my teeth.

People walked up and down the path behind me as I sat on the grass. I waved at the occasional child. And occasionally they waved back.

Taking a deep breath, I turned my attention to the matter at hand. I turned down to read the first of the folders before me. The papers fluttered and tried to slip away on the warm breeze. My hand

shot out to grab them in midair. I didn't even think about it as I studied the cover.

The first report was, unsurprisingly, on Forty-One.

I thought back to my big brother. How he'd always been there in my life, growing up next to me in the Kennel. How he'd always slept by my side, kept me warm, always been there to cheer me on.

How I'd killed him.

I closed my eyes.

When I opened them I was looking out across the river. There was another park across the way. With all the greenery about I could almost imagine I was in the country.

Forty-One had only once been to the country. I'd never gotten the opportunity to ask him what he'd thought of it.

I'm sure Forty-One would have liked West Woodburn.

Reaching down, I grabbed one of my carrots and threw it as hard as I could. It arced out into the sky, landing with a splash in the river.

A moment later it bobbed to the surface and began the long, slow ride out to sea.

Forty-One had never gotten the chance to bathe in the sea.

I put his folder aside, unopened.

The next folder was my own. I idly paged through it, not really reading. Page after page of glowing reports, perfect and near-perfect test results.

One thing did catch my eye. It was a report I'd filled out when I was two. Already my writing was easily legible.

"I want to be the best I can. I aim to bring honour to the Canine Authority and the Service. I want to help people."

I set the rest of that folder aside as well.

The next was Forty-Three. She had been female. I didn't remember her. A cursory glance over her papers explained why. For whatever reason it was with me my litter had been cleaved in two parts. Forty-One and I had been sent to one room of the Kennel, the rest to another. We'd been separated a week after whelping. I doubted we'd ever seen each other again.

I began paging through her file. There was a small black and white photograph clipped on. She looked like a nice Dog.

The sixth sheet of paper in I began to see red ink.

'Failed a regular mental acuity test.'

'Came in under standard deviation on a physical.'

'Hearing in her left ear appears to be impaired.'

The last report was from her seventh year. She'd managed to score well on a tracking test.

Then there was a simple carbon paper slip. They didn't even bother to list why it was she'd been disposed of. On the fifth of March she'd been ordered to report to the second sub-basement. She'd done as ordered.

Three-twelve in the afternoon she'd laid on the table and was given a lethal injection by the on-duty technician. By three-fifteen she was dead.

Her body was committed to the flames. This single, smudged slip of carbon paper was all that remained.

I closed the folder and looked out across the river. Around me the trees rustled.

The next folder was for a male. Forty-Four. It was noticeably thicker.

The Dog's papers recorded him as, seemingly in all ways, average. He in no way stood out, nor did he draw attention to himself. He came in as perfectly normal in almost every test.

He had no particular strengths and displayed no notable weaknesses.

I flipped to the next page. There was a fatality report.

Not six months from his Final, Forty-Four had been involved in a martial arts exercise. Exactly the same as the thousands he'd been through before. The Dog he'd been sparring against made a lucky blow to his throat. Forty-Four's windpipe had been crushed by the other Dog's fist. He'd suffocated there on the training mat.

Not an hour later his body had been disposed of, consigned to ash like all the others.

A small note added that the Dog that killed him had also been disposed of.

It was a half hour before I opened the next folder. Looking at it again and again, it took me that long to work up the courage to finally open the thin thing.

Forty-Five. Her records didn't even include a photo.

Born with a congenital heart defect, it had somehow managed to escape notice by the whelping staff, but became glaringly apparent as she began to grow.

At only four months she'd failed to achieve her expected performance goals. Two days later she'd been brought in to the medical section.

She never left. Her body was consigned to the flames of the in-house crematorium.

What struck me beyond all else was that her condition had been *treatable*. For any human it would have been a minor thing. A week's stay in hospital and she would have come out fine. It wasn't even a genetic defect.

Nonetheless, she'd been disposed of. The powers that be did not wish the spectre of imperfection to haunt the force.

I raised the folder to my lips and gave it a soft kiss. She'd hardly even known life.

The final Dog was Forty-Six. I took a deep breath before opening his folder.

The signs from the first day were not good. There was red ink on nearly every page.

The Dog had been sub-par in almost every way. He was physically weak, mentally slow, and excelled at nothing, yet he had somehow survived.

He passed every culling by nothing more than the skin of his teeth. Even his Final Exam mark had been an eighty one point two.

He'd survived.

I scrambled through the papers to find where he'd been sent. With a record like his it was obvious there was no chance he'd be here in London. For just a moment I wondered if he could have been my neighbour up north.

There was nothing. His record ended with his certification of passing the Final. Nothing more.

Tucking the papers securely under my arm, I started the long hike back to the Kennel.

I made it in half the time it had taken to get out here.

"Thirteen! Where's the rest of this file?"

The old Dog nearly leapt over his counter as I burst back into his quiet sanctuary.

"I beg your pardon?"

"This." I set Forty-Six's file out on the table. "Him. Where was he assigned? I need the rest of his file."

The Dog cocked his head.

"Everything we have is in there. I'm sure of it."

I gritted my teeth. "No it isn't."

He looked up at me, helpless, eyes wide.

"If it's not there, then it hasn't been sent to the archives. Try the active service."

Fifteen minutes later I stood in one of the many control rooms of the Kennel. Around me dozens of Dogs ran about in all directions.

I had a single piece of paper on the desk before me. It was dated two months ago. From Rookley, on the Isle of Wight.

I nodded to the Dog who had given me the paper. "Thank you."

His expression was unreadable. "I'm sorry we don't have anything more recent for you, Sir. We normally receive reports monthly, but I can't find anything newer."

I shook my head. "No. That's fine. I know where he is. That's all I need."

"Should I arrange transport for you, Sir? We have a truck leaving in two days."

I let a smile slip to my lips. "I don't ride in the back of trucks anymore. I have my own transportation."

Out of the Kennel, I walked to the officer's only parking lot. The vast majority of vehicles here were sensible sedans and town cars – the types of things you'd expect to see middle-income earners of the force drive.

My motorcycle was jet black. My custom-made helmet hung from the handle bar. It had been tailor made exactly fit my inhuman skull. I grinned ear to ear as I stepped up, throwing a leg easily over the saddle.

The engine roared to life on the first try.

Pulling out of the parking lot, I estimated I could make it to the Isle of Wight before the end of the day if I moved quickly. I was looking forward to seeing the road fly beneath me.

I got fifty meters before being stopped dead, stuck in the middle of a London traffic jam.

I should be almost all the way to the Isle of Wight now. I *should* be waiting for the ferry.

I sighed.

Night closed in as I picked my way through South Downs National Forest, Petersfield in the near distance. The sun was long gone, the only light that of my lamp.

Taking the next turn-off, I slowed to village speeds and began looking for a place to stop. It was almost eleven at night now and I held little hope of finding accommodation.

Not so long ago I would have simply found a hollow in the ground and made my night there, I didn't feel like doing that anymore.

At long last I found an inn. It wasn't much to speak of, a stout two-story brick structure, but it was enough for my needs.

Slotting my bike into a waiting stall, its engine fell to a content purr before dying into the quiet night. Around me the sounds of the forest took over.

Pack on my back, I started towards the office. A small sign proclaimed there to still be rooms available.

A bell tinkled above me as I stepped through. The office was cosy enough, if small. Motes of dust danced about the lights, and no one stood behind the scarred wooden counter.

A moment later I heard the sound of a telly in the background.

“Be with you in a tick,” someone called.

It was a good ten minutes until the advertisements came on and an elderly man hobbled from around the corner.

He stopped dead when he saw me.

“What the...”

Oh. Only now did I realize I'd never removed my helmet.

Pulling it smoothly free in a practised motion, not a strand of fur was out of place. A moment

later my riding gloves were similarly off.

“A *Dog*?” His voice was nothing more than a whisper.

I nodded curtly. This was not the first time I'd dealt with such reactions.

“Am I in trouble? Is this a raid?” He was just short of breathless. My medical training kicked in. If he didn't calm soon the man could very well be in danger of a heart attack. I wished I'd worn my uniform under my coat, but it was safely packed away.

A deep breath and I slipped the most official tone I could to my voice, standing straight as I addressed him. “No, Sir. That is not the case. Neither you, nor your establishment are, as far as I am aware, currently under investigation.”

It had been some time since I'd last had to speak like that.

He put both hands down on the counter and took a deep breath. There was still far too crimson a cast to his cheeks.

“Then why are you here, *Dog*?”

I was at the front desk of an inn, late at night. Why else would any intelligent creature be here?

I checked myself before responding. “I'd like a room for the night.”

Like that his nerves seemed to disappear. He looked up at me, a brow raised. “What? *Dogs* don't ask for rooms.”

I didn't bother to debate him. Reaching down, I once again pulled out my wallet. “How much for one night's stay?”

He looked at me, eyes narrowing. “*Dogs* don't ask for rooms.”

I put a bill of not-inconsequential denomination on the counter.

He didn't say a word.

I scowled.

A moment later I placed a second one alongside it.

“*This Dog* wants a room for the night.”

I had no luggage save the pack on my back. Finally receiving my room key, I made straight from my accommodations.

My backpack made a soft thunk as it hit dead centre on the bed. I reached down and unzipped my leather jacket a moment later, the musky stench of sweaty and unwashed *Dog* filled the room.

I sighed. I should have stopped to get clean at the Kennel. I'd been living off my bike for weeks now.

A moment later my gloves and leather riding pants landed on the bed as well. The only part of me that remained uncovered when I rode was my feet. I sniffed the air.

This would not do. The stench of my unwashed body was too great in the small, oak-panelled room. I would have to clean myself before sleeping.

Pulling a bottle of specialized soap from my pack, I walked to the attached bathroom before stopping dead.

Turning, I pulled out the one thing of value I kept with me.

My badge. It rested in the breast pocket of my jacket. I took it into the bathroom with me.

The water came on with a snap. Midnight was a poor choice of time to have a shower, but I didn't care.

I swept the complementary soaps and shampoos aside. They were designed for humans and of no use to me.

A moment later I stepped into the stream, letting its warmth, quite literally, soak into me.

Squeezing out a sizeable amount of the Dog shampoo, I began to work it into my fur. Unlike the human varieties, it was not pleasantly scented. It stank of chemicals and harsh cleaning solution. I didn't care.

It took some effort to ensure none of the suds slipped into my eyes, but I was well practised. My hands began to travel down my head, neck, back, then chest. I smiled. Despite my change in lifestyle – and diet – I still maintained the ideal Police Dog figure. My chest and abdomen were textbook perfect – I *was* the new textbook example.

My hands slipped lower and the smile faltered on my lips.

My finger brushed my sheath. I sighed.

It was three years ago I had first bred. By this point I had over one hundred pups whelped to my name. As far as I knew greater than eighty of them were still alive. I should be proud.

I wasn't.

I looked down. Like all parts of me, my reproductive abilities had been precision designed by thousands of scientists. They went unused by the vast majority of Dogs, but we all had the ability.

And, for some reason I still could not understand Brophy, Proust, and Train had decided to modify *that* part of me as well.

The slightest of growls slipped to my lips. It was masked by the fall of running water.

Richard had tried to explain it to me once. *Physiological warfare* he'd called it. Something about how the size of an organ that had nothing whatsoever to do with war could still demoralize the enemy.

I reached for the bottle of soap and continued scrubbing.

As far as I was concerned it just meant there was more to wash.

The next morning came sooner than I would have cared for. I was unaccustomed to sleeping on a human style bed, but still determined to do it. Curled into a ball atop the sheets, I had laid there naked the night long, wondering who – or what – I would find on the Isle of Wight the next morning.

I was gone before even the cooks awoke to prepare the day's complementary breakfast. I ate a

bag of specially formulated kibble. I no longer shared the same food as the average Dog. I was a breeder, the drugs in the standard kibble would not suit me.

My bike roared to life between my legs as I set off. Moments later I was on the main road out of town, the trees of the national forest nothing more than a blur about me.

My room key was still warm, resting on the front counter.

Past Portsmouth and onto Southsea, I boarded the ferry. The ticket takers took one look at the police plate that graced my bike and waved me on. If they'd looked closer they would have noticed it was unlike any other plate they'd seen. It was unlike any other plate that existed.

The ride was, thankfully, a short one. It took no more than an hour for me to set toe on the Isle of Wight. This was among the few parts of Great Briton I'd yet to set foot on.

Someone had a stereo blaring just out of sight away. It was playing the Beatles. There should be a Dog around to deal with the infraction.

I briefly debated handing out a ticket myself, I still had the power. In fact I now had more, but it wasn't worth the effort.

Slower now, I headed south on the main road. Things were quieter here, more sedate than the mainland.

As a point of order I should have stopped in at the station in Newport and reported to the presiding officer on the island. The island wasn't big, but it was large enough to merit a proper police force of its own – both canine and human. No one liked having an unknown Dog running about in their jurisdiction.

On through Newport, the main road led directly in front of the police station. I didn't even slow my bike.

A quick glance through the window and I could see a human and two Dogs. They were working diligently away, none even noticed my passing.

The remaining drive to Rookly was smooth and calming. I ran through what I would say over and over again in my mind. What was standard procedure when one was meeting his long lost brother, unannounced, for the first time?

I shook my head. I was thinking like a Dog. Dogs don't have families. They have the service.

The main road led directly through Rookly, much like how Dere Street bisected West Woodburn so far away.

I slowed further, keeping an eye out for the familiar blue box design. And there it was, discretely tucked away on the side of the road. It was in reasonable repair, through it could use a coat of paint. It almost felt like I'd come home.

I let my bike coast to a stop before it. The engine faded to a soft purr.

Kickstand in place with nothing more than the soft press of my toes, I and the bike moved together like clockwork. In seconds I had my helmet off, and my gloves tucked within. My jacket and riding pants followed a heartbeat later. I'd made sure to dress in my proper uniform under it this

morning. First impressions mean so much.

I walked up to the box, breath catching in my throat. I didn't really expect to find him here, but I knocked nonetheless.

There was no response.

No surprise. A proper Dog spent much of his time on the beat, interacting with the community. I could just wait here. He should be back in no more than two hours.

Three hours later and I was becoming agitated. It was not proper for a Dog to remain away from his box for so long.

Turning, I began walking up the street. I'd seen a pub no more than a few blocks away.

The Wolf and Lion was exactly the type of pub you'd expect to find in a quiet little village such as this. Much like the 'Crown I so remembered.

Stepping through the open front door, I was glad it was the middle of the afternoon. The main room was empty except for the barkeep.

He looked up at me, surprised.

"Officer?" His voice held no venom. If anything he seemed pleasantly surprised to see me.

I stepped up to the bar, but kept a respectful distance. "Good afternoon, citizen," I said. My voice had fallen back into the perfect clip of the service. "I would appreciate your assistance in a matter."

He sat down his cleaning cloth, giving me his full attention. "Sure." He paused for a moment. A smile grew on his lips. "Are you the replacement?"

I stopped dead.

"Replacement? Pardon?"

He looked as confused as I felt.

"Aren't you the replacement for Forty-Six? He died a month back. Our replacement Dog was supposed to show up last week."