

POLICE DOOG 2

HER MAJESTY'S FINEST



By wwwolf

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Chapter 6: Library Card

July 2nd 1993

22:00 Hours

The Kennel, London, England

I spent the evening on the Isle of Wight, under the hospitality of the local Police Dogs. They provided me with one of their boxes to sleep in as the coastal rains swept past.

A proper bed would have been preferable, but the idea of going up against another human, having to explain myself yet again, was something I simply couldn't do tonight. In any event the tight, confining space was a comfort.

I looked down once again at the folders I'd brought with me. They'd sat safe and secure in my backpack all the way here.

Only now did I open Forty-One's file. A smile touched my lips, but I was crying. The little one had lived a good life, a longer one than most any of his brothers.

There was a photo of him as a pup. He couldn't have been more than a month old. Even then his eyes were open and he stared directly into the camera as if to ask 'Who are you?' Another photo and he was standing on two legs. He was still a pup, too young to show the perfection expected of him, but yet he tried. Off in the background another Dog's elbow could be seen on the edge of frame. He was larger than Forty-One, and he stood straighter.

I moved on to the next photo.

This was a group shot. There were a couple dozen of us left at the time. I recognised them all, but Forty-One, Sixty, and I were front and center. Handler Llyal stood behind us, a wide smile on his face. Yet another datapoint to add to our files, for us to be judged and tested by.

I remembered that day. A week later two of my classmates had been killed when a bomb disposal exercise went wrong.

I slipped the photos back and turned to the paperwork. Forty-One was the first of our litter to be born, so his record held the information on our whelping.

There was the normal date and time, along with ironclad records of who our sire and dam had been. The whole point of the breeding program was to create the perfect Dog. They knew our lineage going back to the very start.

I thumbed through the loose papers, unable to sleep. The rain poured down on the box, but I didn't hear it. Something caught my eye.

'Size of litter seven (7) Dogs.'

I reread the line again just to be sure.

Seven.

I recounted the folders I'd been given. I had only six, including myself.

I skipped forward in the paperwork by a month. Now all references were to *six* pups. Not seven.

Eyes narrowing, I went back and began slowly rereading my way through every scrap of paper in all six folders. I was right.

At first all references were to *seven* pups. Forty-One through to Forty-Seven. The seventh pup had been male. There were even a few references to how the final pup had needed to be hand fed for the first few days as the dam didn't have enough teats.

Then came our first genetic analysis. I'd scored a ninety nine naught nine seven – the highest that had ever been seen in the history of the Kennel. And all further references to the Dog Forty-Seven disappeared. There was no note of disposal as I would have expected, no testing records. Nothing.

I flipped back and forth through the papers as rain poured down around me.

On my feet again, it wasn't even a single pace to the door. I snapped it open and stepped out into the driving rain. It ran dripping down my neck, streaming across my leather jacket in rivulets. There was a Dog walking his rounds just across the street.

"What time does the next ferry leave for the mainland?" I called.

He thought for a moment. "They don't run often during the night. Every three hours."

I nodded.

Five minutes later I was back on my bike. The scent of wet fur was all but overpowering in the tight confines of my helmet.

I'd waited in line for two hours at the terminal, but I didn't care. I had to get back to the Kennel as soon as I could. And staring out at the stormy sea gave me time to think.

The hum of my tires against the wet road was all that kept me awake as I sped north. There was almost no traffic this time of night, even as I neared London.

Pulling into the Kennel, I flashed my badge at the Dog who manned the door to the underground parking. He let me in with no questions. I left my bike on the top floor, in the VIP parking. Anyone who wanted to contest it could bring it up with my Handler.

It was six in the morning, but the deeper I pressed into the Kennel the more awake it became. When I stepped into reception for the medical wing it was as if it were the middle of the day.

The human woman running the desk didn't even glance up at me. "Are you here for your check-up?" she asked.

I shook my head. "I need to talk to someone about the records kept on Dog disposal."

She scrunched up her face. "I'm not sure anyone here handles that. And in any event you'd need to make an appointment."

I refused to back down. "I'm on official business. Please be so kind as to summon whoever it is I need to speak to. Now."

She finally glanced up. It took her a moment to realize who she was addressing. "Oh. Of course." She almost, but not quite, added 'Sir'.

I spent a half hour pacing back and forth in the waiting area. Dogs *do not* pace. We stand quietly and wait as required. I'd picked up pacing as a habit long ago, and never seemed to break it. In any event, it wasn't as fulfilling to walk the same length of carpet over and over compared to a long country road.

Eventually I was shown into the office of the ranking doctor on shift. She was an older woman, speaking with a received pronunciation, like a proper aristocrat. It was obvious she'd been briefed on who I was.

"What can I do for you, Officer?"

I laid the papers out on her desk as I took a seat across from her. "I have a discrepancy I need to resolve. I required information on the missing pup."

She quickly thumbed through the papers, far too fast for a human to read. "All disposals are fully documented," she said off-handedly. "We track every Dog from cradle to grave. No exceptions. The government would shut down the entire program if a Dog were to go missing."

"Then where did he go?" My voice was level. "The Kennel's own documentation shows he was born. Where is he?"

She looked down again. "The papers were filled out by human technicians. It must have just been an error. We're only *human*."

If she expected me to rise to the bait, she was severely disappointed. "No. The papers were filled out over weeks. By different people. It is not possible they all could have miscounted."

She shrugged.

"Who else would have had access to these records?" I asked between clenched teeth.

She gave me an odd look. "The records of Dogs aren't confidential. Anyone on staff can request access to them. But every retrieval should be recorded by the Records department."

I stood up. "Thank you. You've been most helpful." I said, forcing out the required pleasantry.

She just watched me, never moving. "You are a most interesting case, Forty-Two. Please, do let me know if you find any remaining Dogs of your litter. You were the only litter by that particular sire and dam. It would be most interesting to learn if any of your close relations could reach your... level. Or if you are simply an anomaly."

I turned and walked out of the office, never saying a word. My black riding leathers creaked as I moved. I'd hadn't bothered to change back into uniform.

I didn't like wearing my uniform in the Kennel. It made me feel mass produced. Made me feel like just another Dog.

I made a beeline for the Records Department once more, now knowing where it was. The door was locked. I'd almost forgotten the time. It seemed that Records was not given the staffing to remain available twenty four hours a day.

For just a moment I debated tracking down the duty officer who could grant me access, but the whim quickly passed. Even if I were to gain access to the archives I'd be lost without the Dogs to guide me.

A quick turn and began wandering the halls, no destination in mind. My unprofessional habit of pacing once again made itself known. I wasn't even sure where I was going. The parts of the Kennel I walked through now hadn't even existed when I'd lived here.

I paused for a moment to take a closer look at the hallway. It felt different. It was the Kennel to be sure, institutional and perfect, everything as one would expect of it. Yet there was carpet under my feet, not simple poured concrete. Even the occasional window cut into the wall.

The next door I passed was open. I poked my nose carefully into the dormitory. Even in that there were obvious differences from when I had been a pup here. The mere fact they were now referred to as *dormitories* rather than simply cage rooms...

Cages still lined the walls, thankfully empty at the moment, but they were larger than what I had known. My cage had only permitted me the space to lay and sit up. These had at least some room to move. But more telling was what lay within. There were thin blankets there, even threadbare pillows. To a human it still would have been beyond barbaric, but to a Dog such as I it seemed almost laughable.

A blanket? We were Police Dogs. We did not get such things, we did not need them. The idea of being given a luxury, something that was not strictly required for us to do our duty... it was almost unthinkable.

It appeared the Service had evolved, if in only some small, slight way.

I continued my journey through the Kennel. A few more twists and turns brought me to exercise room six. The large blast-proof door was down. A red light over the entrance told me there was an exercise in progress.

I stood there for a long moment before walking to the ladder that would lead me to the room's control center.

This was where I had last seen Forty-One so many years ago. This was where I had... I closed my eyes as I continued to climb. It was time I got a new perspective.

The human operators jumped when I opened the door behind them.

"What are you doing in here? This is restricted access!" one of them shouted. It took him a moment to realize I was a Dog, dressed in my leathers as I was.

It then took him another moment to realize *who* I was.

He blinked.

"I'm simply observing," I said, voice calm. "Please, proceed as if I'm not here."

The other operator, the Dogs' Handler, likely knew me by reputation. He never said a word, simply returning to his work.

Looking out the wraparound windows of the control center, I was able to watch the young Dogs far below. They couldn't be more than two years old, no more than pups. The room had been set up as a maze of sorts. Two teams chased and attempted to wrestle each other to the ground. I had to blink. It looked more like they were playing than anything else.

The Handler lifted a microphone to his lips, "Seven, stop being so rough. This is just an exercise."

One of the Dogs below looked up. He was wagging his tail.

"Is there something we can do for you?" the room operator asked, keeping his eyes on his controls.

"No, I'm just observing," I said. I took another step to set a hand against the glass separating us from the pups. My own memories of time in this room were quite different from what I saw below. Structured exercises, brother pitted against brother, and the Handlers always, always grading us. The constant fear of disposal if we made even the slightest mistake.

I watched a pup launch himself from atop one of the barriers that had been erected. How he'd gotten up there I'd never know. He landed on two other pups who'd been wrestling.

The Handler laughed. "I think Seven is being rumbustious today."

I stood and watched for the next three hours as the exercise continued. They sent the pups on mock trials, running back and forth between the obstacles below. Even from here I could see their tails wagging.

"Number Seven shows promise, don't you think?" the Handler said to his companion. "We just have to get his energy under control. But he'll likely be fine once he grows up a bit."

I left the control room and descended back to the Kennel proper. Never once had a Handler said anything of that nature when I'd been trained. You were either perfect or you weren't – any hint of imperfection was dealt with swiftly. It was the only way to ensure that the Service was filled with perfect Dogs.

I looked down at my hands.

It was obvious where that had gotten us. Perhaps this new way would produce superior results.

Returning to the records level again, the hallways were dead as every other time I'd taken this walk. No one came here unless they had reason to.

I snapped the door open before me. The old Dog at the counter looked up.

"Hello," I said, stepping forward.

He squinted at me. "We weren't expecting you back, Forty-Two." His voice was a touch louder than it should be.

I nodded to him and set the files on his desk. "These are incomplete." I didn't say anything more.

He opened them and paged through. "Everything seems to be here, Sir."

I levelled him with a glare. Surprisingly, he stood up to it. "There are six files here. There were seven pups to the litter. Where is the last one?"

He narrowed his eyes ever so slightly. "I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about."

I had to fight to keep my motions slow and smooth. I hooked a claw tip onto one of the papers and dragged it gently out. The sound of my dull black claw screeching across the desk made his ears pull back.

"There were seven Dogs recorded during that whelping. Where did the last one go?"

He looked me straight in the eye. "If the records aren't here, then they don't exist."

"You're lying." My voice had fallen to a feral snarl.

Once again he stood up to me with far more courage than I ever would have expected from one of my kin. "I am giving you the answers I can, Sir. Just following orders."

I cocked my head ever so slightly. "Whose orders?"

He narrowed his eyes. When he spoke it was a whisper. "I'm sure you know that already, Sir."

I turned and struck the stone wall next to us. The impact of my fist against it was flat and dull in the encompassing silence.

"Damn you, Brophy!"

The old Dog's voice was soft. "You look very much alike, you know. Then again, the two of you should."

I stopped dead. "You've seen him? You know him?"

The Dog didn't move. I could hardly even see him breathe. The silence in these catacombs of paper was complete.

"Forty-Seven. A good boy. The two of you were already so close to begin with. You were perfect. He was second most. I was told the two of you were twins. It was the only way they could make it work."

I stepped closer to him, our noses all but touching. "Is he alive? Where is he? I need to know."

"He was given the opposite injections you were. You were made all but a god, he was kept strictly mortal. He was to fulfil your place on this earth. Only he was sent here, to live apart, under it, while you lived among the other Dogs."

"Where is he?"

"I was his keeper. I was the one who was tasked to look after him from when he was a pup. I fed him, I trained him. He grew up here, in Records. He got to read of you every day, see your scores. He knew what he could have become."

“Where is he?”

The Dog gave me a glare. “I was sworn to silence just as you were. By the infernal Dr. Brophy. He swept in here from his office on high, threw a pup on my desk and told me I was to care for him, raise him, keep him healthy and alive. I, a Dog that had been sent here to Records to spend the rest of my existence all but alone.”

“Tell me where he is or I'll bring the entire force down here to look for him! I won't have yet another of Brophy's abominations remain hidden!”

A tiny, tight lipped smile slipped to the Dog's lips. “You think you can find him, Forty-Two? He's spent his life down here, in these miles of tunnels, cataloguing and reading things I've never even known existed. You'll never find him. He was born into the darkness, was reared and trained in it.”

My head was still, but I turned my eyes.

No more than ten paces away a Dog stood in one of the countless hallways that radiated from the room. He was completely naked. His wide blue eyes stared at me.

They stared at me from my own face.

I took a deep breath and stepped back from the desk. The words were on my lips, but I hadn't the slightest what I was going to say. I turned to him, to my brother, to welcome him.

He was gone.

I sprinted to where he'd been. The only scent that met me was that of myself. I'd been here. Not some clone, not some doppelgänger. Me. I turned back to the Dog at the desk. He just shrugged.

Closing my eyes, I tried to imagine what *I* would have done. How I would have grown up, confined to these endless tunnels.

I couldn't do it.

I opened my eyes and prepared to admit defeat. At least for just this moment.

Then something fell from the shelves to land hard on the floor. A folder.

I sprinted towards the sound.

Forty-Seven panicked. I could hear his claws skidding on the smooth stone as he fought for traction, tried to pick up speed.

I narrowed my eyes. Reaching out, I braced myself against the shelves and took off at full sprint. The sound came from just ahead. He was scrambling, not thinking properly, not planning.

I pulled my ears back and darted around the corner. Unlike him I'd been properly trained in tight confines pursuit. I didn't even try to make the turn cleanly. Slamming hard into the shelf, all I cared about was maintaining my momentum.

In a split second any and all advantage I had over him was lost. I saw him up ahead. Closer now.

He was... me.

Dark brown coat, a black saddle on his back. His muscles hadn't seen the same endless exercises mine had, but they were mine none-the-less.

He glanced over his shoulder to see me barring down on him. His ears pulled back in fear.

And I, like a foolish pup, tripped over my own claws. Face first, I fell onto the hard floor with enough force to make the shelves rattle. The very fur would have been flayed from my chest if not for my bulletproof riding leathers.

I was up and running on all fours before I'd even slid to a halt.

The soft pads of my fingers screamed against the hard concrete. I ignored the pain, it was nothing to me. I cornered better this way in any event.

I could just see the familiar tip of Forty-Seven's brown tail disappearing around the next corner. I was gaining on him again.

My nose was nearly taken off by a crashing bookcase.

Papers and parchment tumbled down not an inch before me, along with at least ten kilograms of dust. I fought to claw my way forward, but it was no good. The splintered wood and torn files were impenetrable.

I could just hear the Dog's claws retreating in the distance.

Turning, I took the next aisle.

Any hope I harboured of these cramped aisles going straight was quickly dashed. It wove and angled around all manner of obstacles from foundation columns to rock spurs.

I could just make out the Dog on the other side of the shelf, catch fleeting glimpses of him where no papers had been stored. He looked back, no longer panicked. He was in his element. He was in control.

Up ahead there was an opening between the two aisles.

I had him.

I glanced back over. He was gone.

My claws skidding on the concrete, I all but slid around the turn, racing back to where I'd last seen him. There was a turn off.

All of Records thus far had been lit by buzzing fluorescent lights hanging from the unseen ceiling above. Down this hallway lay nothing but blackness.

I heard his claws in the darkness.

Plunging in, I chased after him. Anything he could do, I could do. We were the same Dog. but I was better.

That was what went through my mind as I raced into the pitch blackness of the underground.

I got twenty meters before smacking nose first into a stone wall while at a dead sprint.

The world around me was black as sin, but I saw swirling pin-wheels of colour.

When next I came to the old Records Dog was peering down at me. My brother was nowhere to be seen.

"You are a fool, you know that?" the Thirteen's tone was harsh.

I sat up, but quickly regretted it. My head was light and spots danced before my eyes. I reached out for Thirteen to steady me. He stepped back deftly, staying out of reach. I nearly fell over.

“What do you mean?” I forced my voice to be strong.

He gave me a look that spat venom. “You had the perfect life, Forty-Two. You're the pride of the department, given privileges that no other Dog has. You're the example they use to train the pups. And then you had to come *here*. You were given everything, handed it to you the moment you were born. And you had to come, to ruin what little life Forty-Seven has scrounged down here. What little I've been able to give him.”

I frowned, holding back a growl. “I was *given* nothing, Thirteen. I had much thrust upon me, little of it desired.”

The Dog dismissed me with the wave of a hand. “You have had every advantage in the world compared to him. And you've come to take it all away.”

Now I did growl. The sound stopped the Dog dead. “I come to take *nothing*. I only seek my family. Forty-Seven is all I have left.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Then you have nothing. He has no brother. He has only a Dog he's never known, a Dog he's been forced to emulate his entire life.”

I made the world stop spinning by sheer force of will alone before standing. “Where is he?” Thirteen had brought me back to the main desk. By the look of the Dog he'd dragged me here all by himself.

He cocked his head.

“I don't know. He's the only one that goes into the deep archives. There are places back there I've never been. For all I know he's even taken one of the back doors to the surface.”

I turned. “Do me one thing, Thirteen?” The Dog didn't respond. “When he comes back, tell him I want to meet with him. On his terms. I'll give him what he wants. Anything. All I want is a family.” I didn't bother telling him what happened to my other brothers.

Up the stairs, my claws clicked on the bare steps. The moment the door closed behind me I couldn't hear anything from the oft forgotten Records Department. It might as well be in a different world.

I began the walk back to my bike, but only made it a dozen paces before my gut reminded me I'd made the drive all the way to the Isle of Wight and back without a meal. And no matter how desperate I may be, I did not care to partake of the kibble that was on offer.

It was ten in the morning. Too late for the breakfast crowd, and too early for the lunch.

The front doors of the Kennel boomed behind me. I wore a scowl that was at odds with the perfect natural mask all the other Dogs showed the world.

I descended the front steps. Only meters away a crowd of people stood and watched, much as they had the day I'd graduated. If I wasn't mistaken, I made more of a splash now than I had back then. The men and women who came here to watch Dogs tended to know a fair bit more about us than the average layman. And it seemed they knew *me*.

A hush came over the crowd as I pushed open the door. It wasn't as though I was easy to mistake. I was the only Dog in all of Christendom that didn't wear a proper uniform. My current clothing had been a gift. I wore my uniform when it was required of me, or when it made things simpler, but my thick, handmade riding leathers were my choice now.

Ten steps and I descended to the street. I could hear murmuring from the crowd. A moment later cameras began to flash.

I'd been here before. I'd acted as a spokesperson for my species. I'd stopped to talk to them, to help break down the barriers between our kinds.

Not today. Continuing on, I hardly spared them a glance. I was confident that they could dress up *any* Dog in a leather jacket and the crowds would think he was me.

Two blocks out and I stopped at a small market to make a purchase. I was tempted to order nothing but carrots yet again, but that would not do my digestion well.

I nodded to the grocer as I ordered a pound of cooked beef and a bottle of water. It wasn't the same as sitting at the Hyatt's table and sharing a proper meal with them, but I would make due. I wondered what Marry, Richard, and Trevor were eating. I'd have to make a trip back up north to see them again, it had been too long.

Taking my prize, wrapped in wax paper, I began searching for some place to eat. The Kennel was no longer fitting, and I did not feel comfortable eating so close to humans I didn't know.

A few blocks of searching and I found a small park. It wasn't much as this part of London was slightly more industrial than one might like – no one wanted to live next to the Kennel – but it was nice enough. A small green space between the buildings and a fountain in the center. The water was enough to help mask the noise of the street, and the constant flow carried away the scent of the city.

I'd passed a dozen Dogs on my way here, and there was even one on the far side of the fountain from me.

Sitting next to the water, I unwrapped my meal. It wasn't the same as having it truly fresh, but it would do for the moment. I forced myself to eat slowly, to fight back the canine instinct to bolt my food. That wouldn't be proper.

I was half way through my meal when I stopped dead.

It was muffled by the water, no human could ever have heard it, even my canine ears had to strain, but I could hear someone crying. And he wasn't human.

I slowly pulled off my jacket and riding pants, exposing the uniform I still wore beneath. I now looked like every other Police Dog.

I circled the fountain, moving slowly, holding my leathers and meal like a parcel before me. Seated on the far side of the fountain was a Dog. Even though there could be no mistaking who it was, it still took me long moments to identify him.

Forty-Seven.

He was wearing a uniform, but no name graced his breast. And most tellingly no badge stood proudly on his chest to catch the light.

He didn't look up as I approached. It wasn't until I stood not a pace from him that he glanced my way.

And nearly leapt straight into the air. I could see fear in his eyes, but not recognition.

I held my leathers to hide the name on my breast. "I heard you crying, brother." I said the word with no inflection, simply one Dog addressing another. We were all brother and sister in the Service.

He was trapped. He couldn't run. That would expose him as a sham of a Dog.

"I... I am fine... brother. I simply had some dust in my eye and took a moment to sit by the mist of the fountain to clear it."

Even if I hadn't known who he was his excuse would have been thin. He did not act like a proper Police Dog, he did not speak like one. It was obvious he knew how he *should* act, but he was like a child trying to impersonate a police officer after only ever having seen one on the telly.

I let my expression soften as much as procedure allowed. Unlike him, I knew how to act like a proper Dog.

"As you say, brother." I took pains not to mention his name. "If there is anything you care to discuss, I am here." And it was with that I made my mistake. If I'd been following any known procedure I would have been infallible. But this was new to me.

He saw through me in an instant, no normal Dog would make such an offer. His clear blue eyes grew wide. His training may be lacking, but his body was perfect. He moved faster than nearly any other Dog I'd ever met, but he could only move as fast as a normal Dog. I could move faster.

His lips rose in a snarl and a growl came from deep in his chest – things that no officer would ever allow.

"You've already taken my life!" he screamed, drawing the attention of those around us. "Leave me alone! There's nothing more you can take from me!"

He lashed out, claws whistling not a millimetre from my nose. They would have left long bloody gashes had I not stepped back.

"I'm not here to take anything from you," I said, my voice level. "I want to give it back."

His growl sounded like *liar*, but the words never escaped his lips. He lashed out at me again as I tossed my parcels aside. He was a great enough threat to require my full attention, but I didn't so much as raise my hands in defence.

"I won't hurt you, Forty-Seven. I never meant to hurt you."

"You and Brophy," he snarled, "You had this all planned. You *knew* what you were doing to me! You worked together!"

My eyes narrowed. "No. The late Dr. Brophy is no friend of mine. As you should well know."

For a moment it almost looked as though I'd managed to slice through the cloak of hatred he held between us. I took a deep breath and stepped forward.

He cocked his head ever so slightly, before lashing out with a kick to my gut that sent me flying backwards.

I'd been unprepared for it, the impact driving the breath from my lungs. An instant later I felt

the cold water of the fountain around me as I was sent splashing into it. It wasn't deep, but it was more than enough to soak me to the bone.

When I looked up again through the spray of water, he was gone. A dozen other Police Dogs were running my way, alerted to the commotion.

I closed my eyes. They'd want to track him down. Find him.

I wouldn't let them.