

POLICE DOG



TO UPHOLD THE LAW

By: wwwolf

Posted on FurAffinity

Date: March 11, 2013

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Jonathan.....	1
Chapter 2: The Scent of Blood.....	14
Chapter 3: The Kennel.....	28
Chapter 4: The Master Constable.....	45
Chapter 5: A Grand Day Out.....	57
Chapter 6: Funeral.....	77
Chapter 7: To Uphold the Law.....	89

Chapter 7: To Uphold the Law

October 1, 1986

05:19 Hours

South London, England

It was a long time before the lights were to click on, but I couldn't sleep. There were countless reasons for it, but I chose to blame it on one of the many 'side effects' of my additional injections.

I'd been receiving them at least once a week, ever since my first meeting in the basement. Every few days we would be sent on marathon training. The other Dogs received routs that changed every so often. I didn't.

Always travelling to the same obscure and curiously empty hallway, we didn't even bother with the pretence of exercise anymore. I simply walked straight through the door now. I didn't even knock.

Every time had been exactly the same. They strapped me to the table and shot me full of things I had no names for. The colours of the shots changed to cover the whole rainbow. I'd long ago learned to silently fear the white injections. The others only tore my body apart, flaying the very nerves from my flesh... the white ones rendered my mind.

They had once jokingly referred to the white injections as 'de-domestication'. All I knew was that they sent thoughts creeping through my mind that had no business of ever being there. I was a Police Dog... or would soon be, and the images that ran through me were not of things that I ever wished to experience.

They always made sure the heavy leather straps were tightest when they gave me the white shots.

Rolling to my side in the sleeping cage, I had to wrestle with the bars around me. I was larger now, larger than anyone else, and there was hardly enough room in my cage to even breathe. I was so much larger than I should be it was hard to think that none of the Handlers had noticed. There was always some slight variation among the different Dogs, but not like this, not like me.

My fur was longer, my body larger, and my teeth sharper. I was less Dog than I was wolf. I'd become talented at hiding it, slouching when everyone else was held straight at attention, never allowing my full strength to be shown in front of the Handlers. It was all part of the game, part of the charade to hide what I now truly was.

Even with all my extra efforts and skullduggery I was still top of my class by far. Right where I should be. Right where I deserved to be. In the darkness, I could feel my lips rise in an action that was

as much as smile as a snarl. The Service was mine. I was the best, and I would rule the police as I saw fit. Soon.

There was still the small matter of my Final Examination.

In the room that a few years ago had held over seventy-five Dogs, had been filled to overflowing with eager furred bodies, there were now only five of us.

There was I, Sixty, of course, two females, and Forty-One. Something else came to life within me when I thought of the females locked up on the far side of the room. It was an unfamiliar feeling, one that reminded me vaguely of the white injections, but one I was becoming more comfortable with every day. I was coming to enjoy those feelings as they grew into coherent thoughts.

But... I forced my mind away from them for a moment, fighting to focus on the more immediate question. Why was Forty-One still alive?

He was a C strain, like me, a blue eyed brother. We spoke little in the cages, but Forty-One had slept beside me since the day I could first remember, long before I'd become *me*. I had no confidants, but he was the closest I had to a friend in this dark, cold place.

"Forty-One, are you awake?" It wasn't much of a question. I was the only one who ever awoke before the Handler came to rouse us. Reaching a claw tipped finger through the bars, I gave him a savage poke to the side. "Are you awake?"

His eyes snapped open an instant later, long accustomed to my early morning demands of him.

"I am here, Sir." His voice was soft.

It had been a little under a year ago that I had claimed dominance over him, shortly before I had done the same to Sixty. It had been a simple matter. He had refused to call me by my proper title when I had first demanded it of him in the morning, so I provided him with an especially savage beating during training for as many days running as was required until he had capitulated. Handler Proust had never called an end to our spars until I had decided we were finished.

A slight shudder ran through me at the memory, not only of his body laying battered and beaten on the mat, but also of his eyes staring forlornly back at me through the bars of his cage the nights afterwards. I had only done it because that was what Handler Proust, Dr. Brophy, and General Train had said was required of me. But, in some small part of my mind, I had enjoyed it. I banished that thought before having time to consider it. I had only done it because I had to... I never wanted his blood on my hands again. I'd never wanted it the first time.

"Forty-One, it's our last day! Do you realize what that means?" I forced myself to sound properly upbeat.

"Yes, Sir." He was quiet and submissive, almost stammering.

I shook my head at his meek reply. "It's our last day, Forty-One, you don't have to call me that anymore." I forced my hand through the bars that separated us, the metal groaning. He shifted a moment before I felt his smaller hand fall into mine. "We're never going to see each other again after today, Forty-One... you don't have to call me 'Sir' anymore."

I felt his fingers curl around mine. His body had been one of the only sources of warmth I'd ever had while growing up. He'd always been there to talk me down from the days that I had failed at something or other, to whisper to me that I was still the best. He hadn't had to do that in a long time.

And he'd never asked questions during the nights I'd fought back hallucinations brought on from

the aftereffects of my injections.

"I don't mind, Si- Forty-Two. I really don't." His hand clutched mine tighter. I truly didn't understand how he had survived so long. He was almost as small a Dog as I was large. But I was thankful he had. "It hurt to call you 'Sir' to start with, but... but, it's okay now." His other hand came up to clutch mine, so tight that I thought I might not be able to escape if I needed to.

"Do you understand what this means, Forty-One? We made it, we all made it. We'll get our commissions!"

"If we survive the day." Forty-One's voice was slow and quiet as he stared out into the darkness.

"What do you mean? Of course we will. We're the best there is, the final will be little more than a formality."

"If you say so, Sir." He let go of my hand and rolled to the far side of his cage, just out of reach. Stretching, my fingers could just barely brush the tips of his fur.

I pulled back into my own cage and rolled into a ball, trying to still the odd palpitations of my heart. It didn't matter. We'd made it. We'd all made it, all of us who mattered.

I closed my eyes and tried to while away the last few minutes of my childhood in the still darkness. My lips pulled gently upwards as I dreamed up hazy, unformed images of what I wanted to do to the females across the aisle.

The lights snapped on that morning, exactly as they always had. Handler Llyal walked into the room, surveying the five of us who remained.

"Good morning, pups." His voice was happy, but hesitant. Joyous, but sounding at the edge of tears, like he was about to see his own children off. "This is your last day in the Kennel." We all looked up at him, well aware of what that meant. Our entire lives had been spent in preparation for the next few hours.

"Okay, folks," he continued, addressing us casually. Handler Llyal was my favourite not only for his soft touch, but he treated us almost like humans. "We've got the order you're to go to the Examination in." He flipped to a page in his notebook. "Forty-One, Forty-Seven, Thirty-Nine," The two females, "Sixty, then last but not least, you, Forty-Two." His smile widened as he looked at me. "But..." He frowned, looking down at the paper again. "It says you are to first meet Dr. Brophy, Forty-Two. Something about your excess fur growth. Meet him in Exercise Room Five before continuing on to your Final Exam." He smiled again, calm and relaxed. "I'm sure it's nothing."

Walking over to Forty-One's cage, he pulled the latch, allowing the thin Dog to rise to his feet in a well-practised motion. "Nice to see you again, one last time, little fellow." His hand reached out to ruffle the small Dog's brown furred head. "Let's get you cleaned up and over to tailoring." They walked out of the room, side by side.

He came back a few hours later for the first of the females, then in due course for the second. That left only Sixty and I in the room that had been our home for so many years. It wasn't until I heard the handler's footsteps disappear into the distance behind the closed door that I felt comfortable speaking.

"So, here we are, Sixty." I rolled lazily onto my back, the bars of the cage comfortably close around me. "What say you?"

"I don't understand, Sir." His voice was hard and clipped. Like a good Police Dog's should be. I was sure he would be a perfect fit for some no-name shire out in the countryside.

I rolled my eyes. "This is our last day, Sixty. What do you think will happen during the Final Exam? How do you think we'll do?"

"I'm sure we'll both do excellent, Sir. We both have exemplary records. We are the top two Dogs of our generation. Possibly of all time."

"You're right, Sixty. You're number two. Always have been." I didn't try to hide the grin that grew on my lips.

The other Dog turned from me as I spoke and refused to say another word until Handler Llyal came to fetch him.

Llyal didn't wait long before returning for me. The man was beaming even wider than he had when he'd first appeared this morning.

He pulled the pin on my cage, allowing the bars to fall open one last time with a harsh clang. I didn't bother to respond at first, just used the extra space to stretch and yawn, taking this one time to delay as long as I felt like. The Final would still be there if I tarried a few moments.

Letting each and every vertebrae in my back pop, I slowly rose to my full height in front of the human, towering over his lesser form and throwing him into shadow. He continued to beam like he was standing before his favourite son.

"Forty-Two." He held his arm out in a motion that confused me for a moment, before I took his outstretched hand in a firm shake. "It's been my pleasure to raise you. I expect great things from you, Forty-Two. We all do." I almost thought he was going to wrap his arms around me in a hug before he stepped back, brushing lightly at a few stray hairs on my pelt. "Though..." He tried, and failed, to work up a sneer on his face. "They're right about your fur. You almost look feral."

He laughed. Thankfully, it wasn't expected that I would join in.

"Go on," he said, giving me a push towards the door, "Go see Dr. Brophy about your little grooming problem." He laughed again. "Maybe you've just got too much testosterone in you."

"Yes, Sir. Perhaps."

I ducked out the door and made my way down the spotless hallway. On all sides I could hear the sounds of other Dogs being trained, all younger than I. Over the last four years the size of the Kennel had more than tripled, and the number of Dogs within had grown by an even greater amount. Our lives had been carefully monitored before, hand crafted. Now the Kennel was little more than a meat factory, a mill that pumped us out as fast as we could be whelped.

I passed a Dog coming down the hallway, many years my junior, already sent on his marathon run. He saluted me as he passed. Technically we were of the same rank, not yet officers at all, but my age gave me seniority none the less.

My mouth fell open in a slight grin that I didn't bother to hide. I was expecting to see far more of that as time progressed. All I had to do right now was find what it was Dr. Brophy wanted of me.

To be honest, this came as somewhat of a surprise. We'd had a session only yesterday, and I'd expected it to be our last. It felt odd to have to jeopardize my Final Exam in order to see him. Up until now they had spared nothing to ensure the absolute privacy of our meetings.

Exercise Room Five was on the far side of the compound, almost a building to itself. A large but squat two story enclosure made almost completely of unfinished concrete. It was reserved for our combat simulations, classes where we learned how to safely subdue human criminals without harming them. The place could be locked tight during an exercise; the entire structure was soundproof and waterproof. It could even recreate weather such as rain and snow with the help of sprinklers in the roof.

I walked down the center of the umbilical hallway that connected the room to the main building. This was the first time I'd ever met Dr. Brophy here. In fact, it was the first time I'd ever so much as walked here alone. Every other time I'd been in the company of my class mates and at least one Handler when I made this journey.

The entrance to the Exercise Room looked more like a movie set airlock or the front hatch to a military complex. The hallway ended, terminating in the dark grey concrete face of the other building, its large metal door filling most of the space. It was closed.

There was a small panel to the side of the door that connected to a control room suspended above the exercise floor, up in the rafters. This room was always locked to ensure that no accidents ever occurred with unsuspecting bystanders wandering into a live combat exercise. The only way to open the heavy metal door was from the control room.

I pressed the single red button on the wall, standing at relaxed attention as it blinked, signalling that my call had been registered. I didn't have to wait long. Only seconds later a small speaker above me crackled to life, Handler Proust's voice relaying forth.

"Forty-Two?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Are you alone?"

I spared a quick glance back down the hallway, no one was in sight.

"Yes, Sir."

The hiss of the speaker clicked off, he didn't bother to respond to me. A moment later a yellow strobe light above the door began whirring, lighting the hallway in bands of colour as a buzzer wailed out a tone that set my teeth on edge.

It was all quite melodramatic and academic, really. At this time of the morning I knew no one would be using the room.

My predictions were confirmed as the heavy metal door crawled up into the top of its frame. I stepped through. Not a soul was to be found in the room, its brightly lit interior was bare of even a single stick of furniture. The rough concrete walls merged into an equally rough floor under my paws, and the ceiling was lost among the bright lights that banished even the slightest of shadows.

The moment I crossed the threshold the door reversed its course and began to crawl shut behind me. Handler Proust must be watching.

I strode brazenly to the center of the room and awaited my instructions. None came.

I stood there for long minutes at attention, but combat ready. No one spoke over the intercom built into the structure.

"Sir?" My voice echoed around the room as I spoke, looking up to the lights where I knew the control room hung. I knew they could hear me. They had enough equipment to track a dozen Dogs during exercises in complete darkness.

"-bzzt- ...two?" This time it was General Train's voice that echoed from the intercom. It was apparent that he was not as sure a hand at its operation as Proust was.

"Yes, Sir." I was beginning to become impatient. They wouldn't cause me to miss my Final Exam... would they? "I am here."

"Good, good." His voice held that snod, self-congratulatory tone that one tends to hear when a person was about to take credit for the work of others. "There is one final thing we need from you before you move on to your commission."

"Understood, Sir." My normally tightly controlled heartbeat was starting to rise. I couldn't seem to steady it. There was a scent to the air now, I could hear the fans mounted on the walls picking up, blowing into my face. I couldn't place the smell... it was hauntingly familiar, but seemed different. As though it was an old friend that had suddenly shown me a racy new side. My nose twitched, no matter how I fought to keep it under control. "What is it you would have of me, Sir?"

I couldn't keep a slight snarl from my voice. I cut off in a strangled exclamation as it came to the surface. A tone like that would have me reprimanded for sure at any time in my life, and could just as well get me disposed of if used with a Handler.

All I got in return was a slight chuckle that wafted from the speakers. It didn't just come from the General. Brophy and Proust were up there with him as well.

"Don't you worry, Forty-Two," Dr. Brophy said as if reading my mind. "You are behaving perfectly. And we'll make sure you get to your exam on time." He must have pressed a button up in the control room, another door began to crawl open on the far side of the room. This one lead into a small storage area. "Tell me, what is the cardinal rule above all others for a Dog? Why is it?"

I closed my eyes as I spoke, trying to block out the enticing scent that forced its way into my brain. My ears folded themselves flat all the same. "I am not permitted to kill, Sir. It is a legacy of the military activity of the Goddard's animals. We are not permitted to kill, even in self-defence. And we are not permitted, in any capacity, to enter the armed forces."

"Very good, Forty-Two. But, then again, even a pup would know that. Wouldn't he?"

I wasn't looking up towards the control room anymore. My hands had risen to wrap around my head, trying to hold back the feeling of something ready to snap within me.

"I have a slight confession to make to you, Forty-Two," Brophy's said, his voice was carrying on like the lazy drone of bees in summer. I could barely make him out now, hardly make sense of his words over the torrent of... pain... no, that wasn't quite the right word. The torrent of alien, but ungodfufly comfortable feelings that slithered through my mind.

"We've done more to you than you could ever imagine, Forty-Two. The other Dogs are to you like a cat is to a tiger. Like a terrier to a ravenous wolf. You are no longer among them, Forty-Two. You are more."

The door on the far end of the room had finished its long climb up. I recognized the form that

stepped hesitantly towards me. It was Forty-One.

His willowy body seemed all the more slender, clad as he was in his perfect white dress uniform. The only thing that marred his appearance was a single slowly oozing gash across his nose.

And the undisguised fear that was alight in his face.

He wouldn't make eye contact as he quickly scuttled towards me, tail firmly between his legs.

"Do you know who this is, Forty-Two?" Brophy was speaking more quickly now, his voice raising in pitch.

"Yes, Sir."

"Tell me, Forty-Two, what do you want to do?"

My hands had yet to come away from my head, claws beginning to raise welts across my scalp. "I don't understand, Sir." My own voice was rising now, cresting into a whimper. It sounded as forlorn as Forty-One looked. He was now little more than a half-dozen strides from me.

"I think you do, Forty-Two. Relax. Do what you know you were made to. We have as long as we need."

I wouldn't admit to it. Not even in the silence of my own mind, but the images that Dr. Brophy must be referring to were growing within me.

The scent in the air was driving me wild. Literally. I could feel my mind unwinding, falling apart like discarded wrapping paper on a glorious Christmas morning. I was still here, I was still... *me*... but it was as though I was looking down at the domesticated parts of my mind after having them cut cleanly away with a razor edged blade.

I could remember the axioms of my kind, that which had been drilled into me from birth. But they were nothing more than words to me now.

I stood there, my mind in perfect balance, for what seemed like hours. Perhaps it was. There was no way to judge time in this empty place. The lights above me never wavered, and Forty-One stood so still as to seem almost dead if not for his breathing. And the beat of his heart.

"This is taking too long," Proust's voice came over the speakers.

"No, no." Brophy was still calm, "We need only wait for the catalyst to take effect..."

A click sounded from above. My head jerked up, sensations almost forgotten. I knew that sound. I'd only just gathered the presence of mind to begin falling to the ground when a gunshot shattered the silence of the exercise room.

The bullet wasn't aimed at me. It struck Forty-One from behind. High, and in the meat of his upper arm. It wasn't a fatal blow, or even crippling, but enough to send him rocking, spatters of blood flying through the air.

A single drop arced towards me. It landed on my mussel, just behind my nose. I couldn't help it, my tongue flicked out to lap it up.

I recognized now what the scent was that intrigued me so. They had been piping it in before opening the door to Forty-One. Then they had turned off the exhaust fans as soon as he had entered the room to let it build.

It was the scent of his blood.

And now that I had the taste, I wanted more.

I very nearly blacked out right there as I fell to the ground on all fours. I didn't care what they had done to me... this was not who I was. I was destined to become a Police Dog, and this was not how a member of her majesty's service could ever act.

It didn't stop me though. Slowly, on all fours, I prowled closer to Forty-One, circling around him.

Forty-One swayed slightly on his feet, hand coming up to clutch his wounded shoulder. He didn't turn to watch me as I circled around behind him. Looking closely, I could just see him tremble.

The shudders that run through him were minor at first, but they grew... ever increasing wracks that had his entire body shaking violently by the time I had come back face to face with him. It was a wonder he was still on his feet now, almost seeming to topple over every other second.

"Please... Sir..." His voice was wet and weak, hardly escaping his lips as his eyes began to track me.

"Don't call me 'Sir'!" Without even realizing it, my arm had shot out in a wide arc, claws slicing through his uniform, leaving ragged gashes in the fur of his chest.

We both just stood there for a moment afterwards. Staring at the blood that dripped from my fingers. There were even a few strands of hair from his coat that stuck to me.

My voice was hoarse when I spoke again, completely unlike like my normally carefully controlled tones. Even the act of so much as forming the words was a challenge. The parts of my mind that I had always relied upon for the simple task seemed to be all but gone, disoriented and starved.

"Run, you fool. Get away."

"I can't... brother." His voice, in contrast, was as cultured and perfect as we'd been taught. He didn't move from where he stood. Even his wavering had all but disappeared. He stood near perfectly still now. His voice fell when he spoke again. "I won't be graduating, Forty-Two. I won't even be taking the test. I've only been kept alive for you, brother."

"What is it you've done?" His eyes bore into my own now as he spoke, "What have you done that is so great as to change the very Kennel itself? I should have been disposed of long ago, we both know that. How is it you could keep me alive? What *are* you, brother? You're not one of us. You haven't been for a long time."

I hadn't any words to answer. There was no name for what I was, not in English, nor the language of our birth. I was Forty-Two. I was a Dog. I was going to be a Police Dog... wasn't I?

I was born to Police Dogs, and I had been raised to become one. Didn't that make me a Police Dog? How could I ever be anything but? To change the very core of what I was would be far beyond my control. That would be of the realm in which only God prevailed.

There were no gods here. There were only Dogs and men.

But yet... but yet I was no longer what I had been born. I had been born to the same sire and dam as Forty-One, the same litter. How could I stand before him now with his blood on my claws while he did nothing more than whimper?

Dear God. He was my elder brother, but yet he cowered before me like a day old pup.

"Forty-Two," Dr. Brophy's voice came from above me again. "What is delaying you? You

know what you want to do."

"I know nothing. Sir." I spat his title, throwing red tinged saliva across the floor as I tried to eject the sweet taste of my brother's blood from my mouth.

"Could it be too soon since the final injection?" Proust's voice came over the speaker, from behind Brophy.

"Nonsense. He simply needs... encouragement to overcome his training. It's been drilled into him for the last eight years, since the day he was whelped. It shan't evaporate without a little effort." He paused for a moment, the sound of papers rustling floated above us as Forty-One and I shared a quick breath of respite. His lips rose in the smallest of private smiles.

"Thank-you, brother."

Dr. Brophy's voice returned, apparently satisfied with his next step.

"Forty-One?" His tone had returned to one comfortable with commanding Dogs.

"Here, Sir." Forty-One's voice was quiet and strained, but he responded promptly and unthinkingly.

"Attack him, Forty-One."

"Sir?" We both startled at the command, though it was Forty-One whose voice rose above my own wordless cry.

"You heard me, Forty-One. Attack Forty-Two. Any pattern of your choosing is acceptable. Though, extreme force is authorized... and required. Attack Forty-Two and attempt to completely disable him."

'Completely disable' was a key phrase in the command vocabulary of the Police Dogs. It was a command that could only be authorized against a non-human target such as a wild animal, or, far less commonly, against one of the few other Goddard's animals that were in use. Such as another Dog. The command pushed us to the furthest we could go against our 'not to kill' axiom.

It required us to break at least one of the target's limbs. Preferably more. No opponent was to be able to rejoin a battle after being 'completely disabled'. They would likely die of their wounds afterwards... but that would be worried about by the human who had issued the order. After the command had been completed.

"Sir, I'm sure I misheard you..." To 'mishear' was one of the few options a Police Dog had to question his Handler...

"You heard me just fine, Forty-One. Get on with it. Now." Dr. Brophy's voice left no question to his conviction.

"Yes, Sir." Forty-One's voice was strong as he acknowledged the command, chin falling to his chest. He spoke slower now, not opening his eyes as he fell back into a combat stance. "I'm sorry, Sir. Forgive me, brother."

A moment later he came towards me, as quickly as the wound in his shoulder would allow.

I didn't bother to try and reason with him, we both knew that he had his orders. And, like any proper Dog, he would not halt until he had completed them. He wasn't even a Police Dog yet, and would never be, but he would still carry out his orders.

The attack was slow and clumsy, exactly what I expected from him. Forty-One was no fighter, and we all knew it. Dancing back, I stood not a hair's breadth from the arc of his outstretched claws. They would have rended my face if I had so much as leaned forward. But, as it was, they did nothing more than swipe the air in front of me.

"I won't do it!" I screamed it up towards the unseen control room somewhere above me as, once again, I stepped deftly away from Forty-One's meagre assault. "I won't kill him!"

They didn't answer.

I would have been able to avoid Forty-One forever, until deciding to disable him myself, if I hadn't paused to look up again.

He came from behind me. I knew he was there, but I'd misjudged how much space I had. I didn't realize how close he had come until the feeling of his claws ripping down my back shook me from daydreaming.

The pain tore through me, sending me twisting around to grasp his outstretched hand in mine. The standard Judo move my mind was setting up for would have me pulling forward to tip him off balance before throwing him harmlessly to the ground in a single smooth motion.

I'd used it on him at least a dozen times in the past. It was one of his weaknesses, and he knew it. He'd learned to stop leaving himself open to such a simple take down last year.

I should have pulled on his arm, should have gently lowered him to the cold, hard floor. But I didn't.

Something in the back of my mind was howling at me. A wordless and incoherent scream that I could yet still somehow understand.

Wrenching his arm towards my muzzle, I opened my jaws wide.

A look of undisguised horror crossed Forty-One's face. I could smell the sharp stench as he wet himself before me.

A moment later my teeth snapped shut, sharp fangs shredding the flesh of his unwounded arm.

He screamed, howled in pain, but I hardly noticed. The taste of his blood on my tongue was intoxicating. It shouldn't be this way... I knew it shouldn't. I'd tasted blood many times before... both in combat training and during tracking class.

This was different.

I'd tasted only a drop earlier, and it had sent my head spinning. The fresh stream that filled my mouth now was enough to threaten to carry me away.

The only thing that saved Forty-One from losing his arm right then and there was the sudden shock of his head jabbing forward to butt mine. My jaws instinctively sprang open to let go as I pulled back, seeing stars.

My brother scrambled away, stumbling as quickly as he could towards the far wall while I sat there stupidly on my tail, looking up.

I didn't move for over a minute, unformed, inhuman thoughts racing around the inside of my head. Forty-One had nowhere to run from me in the sealed room. All he could do was huddle in the far corner and whimper, wounded arms wrapped around his knees.

I rose to my feet again, slowly, lowering my head to the ground as I stalked forward on all fours.

The other Dog had left a nearly unbroken trail of blood in his wake as he'd fled. He was in plain sight, but I lowered my nose to the stains anyway. Lapping at them as I passed. It was only moments until I stood mere feet from him.

"Face me, Forty-One," I commanded him.

"I can't, brother." His voice was weak now, almost so faint that I, not a stride away, could hardly hear it.

"Face me! That's an order!" My own voice rose to a bellow, as if to compensate for his unacceptable weakness.

"I can't, brother. My legs won't move."

I looked at him again, the skin around his eyes and ears had gone a dull grey. He was in shock. He'd lost enough blood over the last few minutes that his body was beginning to shut down, trying to protect itself. He would die without immediate medical attention.

"Attack me, Forty-One. I'll kill you if you don't!" I reached out my blood stained hands to grasp him by the still virgin white lapels of his tattered and ripped dress uniform. His head only lolled back spinelessly as I shook him. "Forty-One!" My hands were staining the nice white fabric of his shirt.

"Do it, brother." His lips hardly moved, "I was never meant to survive this long. I existed only for your pleasure." Slowly, his hands came up to feebly grasp mine. "If I am to serve as your prize, then so be it. There are worse things to be. At least my life, death, will have meaning."

I almost fell back stunned.

"No."

In a last gasping motion, his lips lifted from his teeth as he lunged towards me, as if in slow motion.

One of my hands released his lapels, lashing out to hit him, to protect myself from his fangs.

His head snapped back as I made contact. It hit the featureless concrete wall that he had been leaning against with a wet crack. When it came back towards me his eyes were open, but unseeing.

His body fell limply into my lap. I cradled his broken and bruised form in my arms.

It was still warm. The only warmth that I had ever felt while growing up.

A whimper escaped my lips as I cradled him to me, "Please. Please, Forty-One, tell me I'm good. Tell me I'm a good Dog..."

I'm not sure how long I sat there with his corpse. I never heard the sirens, nor the screech of the big door crawling up behind me. But the next thing I knew, Dr. Brophy, Handler Proust, and General Train had me surrounded, peering down eagerly at the body in my arms.

"Is he dead?" It was the General's voice.

"Forty-Two. Step away from the corpse." The doctor was beside me, forcing me away from my brother's fallen form. A moment later the human had placed his hand to Forty-One's neck. "He's

dead."

The man's smile was so wide that I could have confused him with the Chestershire Cat.

"Gentlemen," The General's said, his voice booming in my ears, "Do you realize what we've done? We've reversed decades of breeding and bull-headed modification. We have here before us the model for the soldiers of the future. No more conscription, no more public outcry every time one of our men falls in battle. We have a perfect soldier who will do nothing but what he's ordered. He'll never baulk, never hesitate. We have the pattern for a soldier who will follow our every order no matter what it takes. A soldier who will fight for Queen and country with the single minded determination of a..." He smiled as he glanced down at me huddled on the floor before him, "A rabid dog."

Dr. Brophy had risen from beside the body of Forty-One, not even bothering to close my brother's eyes. He was counting off figures on his fingers as he spoke, "It'll take us at least a couple of years to get Forty-Two into the upper echelons of the canine service, they're the only ones the public really sees, the only ones that get names... then say a few years of exemplary work, he'll be retired to studing in, what, five years from now? It'll take another eight for his pups to begin to mature and enter the service themselves... we'll have an invisible army ready at our beckon call in under fifteen years. And, better yet, no one will be willing to cull them off even if they are found out. There'll be too many of them, and Forty-Two will be too well known amongst the public to be considered anything but a model Dog."

The General frowned at that. "Isn't there any way we could move faster? Fifteen years is enough time for the world to change. For all we know every other country on the planet could have a program like ours."

Proust grunted and pulled a cigarette from his pocket, striking it to light with the snap hiss of a match. "Unlikely. We can't rush him through the ranks too fast. We need to make sure he's not discovered. As for the pups, there's not much we can do there either. We're always trying to raise them faster, but it takes time to force all that human knowledge into their dull Dog brains." He let out a cloud of smoke. I couldn't smell it.

Dr. Brophy was smiling again. "I don't think we'll have much trouble with anyone else beating us to the punch. We're the only country even using Goddard's animals for anything so advanced as police work. All the Russians use them for is manual labour, and the Yanks have banned even talking about such research – the fundamentalist twats."

"May I go now, Sirs? I mustn't miss my Final Exam." The three of them fell silent when I spoke, as though they had forgotten that I was even here, sitting beside my brother's quickly cooling body. His empty eyes were still staring up at me.

General Train took a step back after I finished speaking. "Brophy, is it safe to be here? We did just override his axiom... How do we know he won't turn on us?"

The Doctor didn't seem to be the least bit concerned as he walked up to me, pulling my blood stained hands forward and casually lifting my lips to inspect my teeth. I didn't make a single move to resist him. I didn't make a single move at all.

"Do you think me a fool, Jack? You saw how much it took for him to kill the other Dog. My, dare I say, brilliant work pushed him to the tipping point and not a hair further. He's still perfectly safe. He couldn't hurt us if his life depended on it. Not yet. We're human. His pups will be born with the complete solution, but he'll only ever be half done as he is. He was born with his genetic safeguards in

place, he was far too old when we started to ever effect a full change. He'll never be able to hurt us. And in any event, he needs the catalyst of blood to engage his baser instincts, and he's all played out for now."

"Why blood, Brophy? Couldn't you have come up with something less dramatic? Blood is the the last thing we'd want."

"Don't be stupid, Jack. What else could be better? It's always available at a moment's notice, plentiful on the battlefield, and..." The doctor averted his eyes for a moment as he cleared his throat, "There were few other choices. Even with his modifications, we needed something to peel away much of his constructed mind. The only tool at hand to revive his lupus instincts was the natural scent of danger." He laughed slightly now, high pitched and nervous, "Danger and food."

"Sirs... my Final Exam..." I had to fight down the urge to sprint back to my familiar, too-small cage. To crawl back to my dark and silent room. If I just closed my eyes I could almost imagine that Forty-One was back there to comfort me. Not lying dead just feet away.

My desire to taste his blood was long gone. What little I had swallowed sat heavy like a lump of lead in my belly.

I wanted to throw up.

"I suppose we must prepare, mustn't we?" Proust brushed Dr. Brophy aside as he pulled me to my feet. "We need to get the blood washed away and have you looking presentable. Come on, Forty-Two. We've got just under an hour to get you cleaned up, in your uniform, and looking proper. And..." He brushed some of the overly long fur from my face, "You need a trim. You're looking a little too feral for my tastes."

The bickering voices of Dr. Brophy and General Train fell behind us as Handler Proust led me from the exercise room. No one had yet moved the fallen body of Forty-One, but I was sure they would dump him in the incinerator as soon as he became an inconvenience, uniform and all. Just like all the other Dogs that had failed to meet expectations.

I was hardly even aware of the world around me as Proust dragged me through the showers, scrubbing every last particle of blood from my pelt... I could smell it with prenatal clarity as it circled red and rust coloured down the drain. He shouted at me a couple of times as I stood there limp and unresponsive. He must have thought me all but comatose.

All I could see as I stared at the moss stained green tiles of the shower room were the blue eyes of Forty-One. He had always been happy, eager to learn and face a new day. He had never been the best, or even particularly good, but that had never dampened his enthusiasm for each moment... as though he knew his time in this world to be limited. All he had wanted to be was of use, to have a purpose in his life.

I couldn't work up a rational reason for why my heart ached so over his death. He was just a Dog, like I. His death should be no more important than the slaughtering of a cow or pig. Just another animal. Even more so, I had never expected to see him again after he had been led from our room of cages. Even if he had passed the Final Exam the chances of us being assigned anywhere near each other, with the great span of England to pull from, was so small as to be all but inconceivable.

He had lived a good life, a longer one than he had any right to expect, and I'd ended it for him with more mercy than many a Handler would have. Then why was I so affected?

I had killed him. And more to the point, I had *killed*.

I was a Dog. I couldn't kill. It was written into every line of DNA I possessed, every thought that passed through my mind. But yet I had.

I shivered at the sudden coldness when Handler Proust cut the spray of the shower. The chill air made me feel small and alone.

He threw a stack of towels at me as he walked out the door.

"Get on with it, Forty-Two." He didn't even favour me with a glance as he walked from the room. "I'll get your uniform ready while you dry off." And he was gone.

The stack of fluffy white towels always seemed like overkill when one first looked at them, but a Dog's fur could retain more water than one would ever imagine.

The process of blotting out was slow, labourers, and completely mechanical. I did it without a thought. Or at least a thought to the process at hand.

It gave me more than enough time to reflect on my own inhuman body. I'd never thought much of it before... why would I? It was what I was born with, was what I had been given. From my triangular head topped with upstanding ears, to the tail that protruded stiffly from my backside, to the padded feet that held me precariously upright. From the teeth that had bitten through my brother's arm, to the black claws that had so quickly ended his life.

Fifteen minutes later I stood dry while the soggy mass of towels on the floor beside me were left dripping. There wasn't a speck of blood remaining upon me, but I could still smell it hiding in the air of the showers.

Handler Proust stood waiting in the change room just around the corner. I'd rarely had need of this space. It had been uncommon, but not unheard of, for Dogs in training to ever be given clothing. We'd only ever been assigned uniforms in order to train in how to take them on and off, and how to maintain our equipment. Only once before today had I ever seen a dress uniform.

The clothing that lay set out before me looked like a dream come true.

But looked only. There were no feelings of joy to accompany it.

We'd been shown dress uniforms once. Long ago, when we were pups. They were being worn by the graduating pack of Dogs as they paraded proudly out of the Kennel after completing their Final Exams. They had been gods to my young eyes, Police Dogs exactly as they were meant to be. They were the perfect examples of our kind, successful and powerful Dogs who had achieved the goal that we had all been born for. They had been Police Dogs.

I reached out a tentative finger to brush the immaculate fabric that lay on the bench before me. It was smooth and soft under my touch.

"Ready for the best day of your life, Forty-Two?" Proust's voice was bright and chipper. He was smiling almost as wide as the general had. It was an unpleasant sight to see on his normally dower face.

"If you say so, Sir."

It was obvious that Handler Proust had more than some experience with dressing us for our finals. The whole complex wardrobe was wrapped around me within seconds. The clothing was so finely tailored that it felt as though I was wearing nothing at all. As though I were still in my pelt

alone, naked and exposed to the world.

After suiting up he had me sit before him on the bench, staring into his face as he fussed over my fur. From somewhere he had produced a comb and pair of scissors. He cut and trimmed my head fur, focusing around my eyes and ears. Making me more perfectly reflect the Police Dog ideal.

Strong. Stable. Compassionate. And above all, Subservient.

That was me. That's what I was, what I had been born and bred to be. So why did it matter how I looked? Wasn't it who I was and not what I looked like that made me proper? Wasn't it the blood that flowed through my veins that made me good or bad?

And hadn't they been meddling enough with that already?

At long last he was done. Locks of my brown fur lay scattered on the floor around us as he brushed the last few stray strands from the impeccable white of my dress uniform.

"One last thing, Forty-Two. Open your mouth." I did as I was bidden. "Gah. Your breath stinks. Well, there's nothing we can do about it now." He patted me on the shoulder as I rose to my feet. "You're as good as God made you... better. Do us proud, Forty-Two, you're our one shot at this."

I didn't want to think about exactly what *this* was. I walked out of the room without a word, without a backward glance.

Handler Proust had raised his hand to me as Llyal had. I never acknowledged him as I strode out to the hallway.