

POLICE DOG



HEADSTONES AND HERESY

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Chapter 13: Headstones and Heresy

June 6, 1988

04:00 Hours

West Woodburn, Northumberland, North East England

It was four o'clock in the morning, and I sat in an upstairs suit at the Duck and the Crown inn. Coalburn had been amongst the people who had been gawking at the charred remains of my box. I didn't remember it happening, but he had taken me by the shoulder and let me in, berthing me in the very same room that Zack had used not a week before.

There was little here, but it was Xanadu as compared to the amenities of my box. I didn't care. I wanted my home back. I didn't want to be here in this room. I wanted everything to return to normal. The way it had been before Jonathan had died.

There was a bed here, soft and clean, everything one might expect to find in a small town inn like this. Even a desk where I now sat, it looked out through a window onto the street.

I didn't care. I wanted my too-tight box back. I wanted my hard stool and my cluttered desk, I wanted my dusty shelves and stained folders. I wanted my home.

And, thinking of home, my miscellaneous fund had been in there when it had been set to the torch, burning what little money I had to ash with the rest of my life. I didn't even know how I was going to pay for the room I now occupied.

I let out a sigh. Even to my own ears it sounded more like a whimper.

There was a stack of papers before me. They were monogrammed with the address of the 'Crown, but it was all I had available – my police stationary being long gone. My hand had already cramped up while I'd been frantically scrawling upon it.

That was that then. I could hold off no longer. That which had befallen the small town of West Woodburn was beyond my jurisdiction. I could not ignore the facts anymore. This was too great for me. Two deaths in a single week, one murder and one possible, a renegade Goddard's animal that I could no longer locate, and two cases of arson. I needed the SERT team.

Of course the storm outside had continued to worsen, knocking out the telephone service to the entire town. I couldn't even call for help. I was cut off.

I would have to convince one of the townsfolk to courier my letter to Hexham at first light. With any luck they would still be part of the world and able to relay it to London.

I wrote down everything I could, retelling my experiences from the day of Jonathan's death up to this moment in time. I had started out in proper police format, but it had quickly devolved over the pages to become little more than ramblings and incoherent conjuncture.

I still failed to include what I was. Of that they would never know.

Assuming Hexham was still available... it would take likely an hour to travel there, then another hour to contact the SERT team. Their scramble time was guaranteed to be no more than four hours to anywhere in England, even in the driving storm.

They would be here by noon.

And I would have to ensure that I was not. There were no other options. When the SERT team arrived I would have to ensure that I was not available for debriefing, or to provide genetic samples for post crisis review.

The River Read was swollen and turbulent now thanks to the rain and runoff. My namesake had met his end there. It would be only poetic if I were to place my own head under the waves in solidarity.

But I would have to journey far from town so as to ensure my body would never be found.

The lights in the room around me flickered for a moment before coming hesitantly back. Outside, the wind howled to an extraordinary new pitch that made me pull my ears back and cringe.

Not only were the lines of communication cut, but the very power itself threatened to follow. At this rate we would be back in the stone age by the middle of next week.

A knock came at the door behind me, almost making me jump from the hard wooden seat.

"Sir? Are you awake?" It was Coalburn. It took a moment to realize he was addressing me. I still didn't do the 'sir' bit so well anymore.

"Yes, Mr. Coalburn, I am here. You may come in. The door isn't locked." This may be an inn, but I still wasn't comfortable locking someone else's door.

My nose twitched as he entered. The scent of food was on the still and stuffy air. Human food, not kibble. That reminded me, I'd likely never taste that ungodly processed mash again. I wasn't sure if I was happy or heartbroken over that simple fact.

Turning around, I could see him standing in the center of the room, looking vaguely uncomfortable. A steaming plate was held aloft in one of his large hands. It was stone still.

"I thought you might want a snack, pup." A world weary grin spread on his face. "You're burning the midnight oil, and I don't think it's out of line to expect you've had a long day."

I bowed my head to him meekly. "Thank-you. I appreciate your thoughtfulness, but I haven't the funds to pay."

He just shook his head. "We went through this already, pup. It's on the house, all of this is. You've spent the last year and a half working for us without so much as a single pay cheque, it's the least we can do to prop you up when things go sideways."

"I... thank-you." There was nothing else I could say.

He set the plate on my outstretched hands. Its gentle weight bore down on me far more than it should.

"And, if you're interested, Constable," He said, turning to leave, "You have a visitor waiting for you down in the lobby. I felt it best not to send him up until you've had a moment to compose yourself. I tried to turn him away until the morning, but he wouldn't hear of it."

I raised an eye ridge. "And who might that be?"

He shut the door softly behind himself as he answered, "Richard Hyatt. Who else?"

I stayed in the small room, pacing like a caged animal. I didn't want to stay here, but I couldn't leave. Richard waited for me down there. I couldn't not see him. But I could stay here. My precious time was ticking away. I'd made the decision to send my letter to Hexham with one of Coalburn's cook staff as soon as they arrived for the day, deputizing one of them for the purpose.

There was little else I could do now. I simply waited, pacing back and forth in the small room. Three strides to one wall, turn, three strides back. I had made the circuit so many times, and so quickly, that I was beginning to become dizzy and lightheaded. The bruised purple paint of the walls surrounded me on all sides. Its feigned beauty was nauseating.

Another knock came at the door. It had to be close to five o'clock now. There was still no hint of light on the horizon.

"Come in, Coalburn. It's still unlocked," I called offhandedly. I didn't even bother to still my pacing.

"Jonathan, it's me..." Richard's voice, however, froze me in my tracks. I had to turn to see him, twisting in the narrow space between the bed and wall.

"Good morning, Sir. I was aware you had been waiting for me." I had to grit my teeth to keep my voice level. I only wished he hadn't called me 'Jonathan'. That had been his son's name. It wasn't mine. "I'm sorry I was unable to come down and receive you sooner."

He sat down on the chair by the desk, idly flipping through my letters and paperwork to be sent off.

"It really is that bad, isn't it?" His voice was level and faultless, but his eyes held near the same terror I felt.

"Yes, Sir." I sat down gently on the bed, facing him. In the background I could see out the window, towards the graveyard in the distance.

"And my son?"

"We still have possible reason to suspect murder. I am unable to reach Hexham for further information due to the storm. I'm sorry, Sir."

He shook his head, lowering it to his hands.

"What did I tell you about calling me 'sir', Jonathan?"

Well, there was no better time to do this than now. It would be best for us all if I were to make a clean break before disappearing. This would likely be the last time I'd ever see Richard, or any of the Hyatts for that matter.

"Jonathan was your son's name, Sir. I'm Forty-Two. Nothing more." The words came unexpectedly easily to my lips. As if I was saying nothing more than simple pleasantries.

He looked up from his hands, voice quiet, "That's what it's come to now then, has it? I'm sorry. I'm sorry I snapped at you, Jonathan," He insisted on using that name as he spoke, it was beginning to make my pelt itch. "...shouldn't have done it, alright? I just don't know how to deal with all this. It's too much. First I lose a son, now you tell me someone may have murdered him in cold blood? What am I supposed to do? You're the great and grand Dog who can't lie, tell me what I'm supposed to do, how I can make this up to you." He paused for a long moment, the only sound being that of the rain falling endlessly outside the window. "I don't want to lose you too, Jonathan. You're part of our family now, and I can't take losing anyone more."

It felt like he was ripping the beating heart right out of my chest. He couldn't have said anything worse if he'd already known what my plans were for the sunrise.

"I'm sorry... Richard. There is more in play here than you know. It's not just you..." God, how I wished I could tell him. But my word was my bond, and I'd made that single ill-considered vow so long ago... "I won't be here for long, Richard. I'm sorry."

"You're being transferred!?" He jerked straight up in the seat so hard as to almost topple it over. "They can't do that! You've done everything you could to prevent this. It's not your fault!" He reached for me, but I pulled back.

I shook my head slightly, hearing my badge clink on the chain around my neck. Belatedly, I remembered that I still had the key to my box clipped there too.

"No. I haven't been transferred." How much could I tell him? What would he do if he knew? "There is more in play than you know. The SERT team will be here by noon to take over the situation, and I can't be here when they do. I'm not like other Dogs, Richard. I can't let them take me back to London for debriefing. The SERT team will arrive to avenge your son, and I can't let them find me. Ever."

He looked at me now, a long, penetrating gaze, as if he had never truly seen me before. For some strange reason I had the sickening feeling he was seeing, for the first time, all the tell-tale imperfections that made me different from other Police Dogs.

"What are you, Jonathan? Who were you when you were Forty-Two?"

"No," I shook my head again, "I'm still Forty-Two. I am what the Handlers and Doctors at the Kennel made me. I'm not normal, Richard. You deserve more, better. I'm sorry. I couldn't save your son, and I'll never be a replacement for him. But I do thank you from the bottom of my heart for giving me the opportunity to at least try. To, for however brief a moment, have a family."

"I don't want a replacement for my son, Jonathan. We want *you*."

"Thank-you." I refused to meet his eyes as I rose from the bed to press beside him, pushing to the table that lay beyond. Reaching down, I collected the papers, sliding them into the envelope I had already prepared. It had instructions on its face for Coalburn to ensure its delivery to the proper hands.

I had no doubt that actions would proceed as planned once it arrived at the police station in Hexham.

"Jonathan, please..." Richard's hand came up to grasp my wrist as I licked the envelope to seal it shut. "You can't just leave us. What would we tell Trevor?"

A slight smile twitched the edge of my lips, I had a bad habit for gallows humour. "Tell him I've gone out to the farm."

"What?" It took him a moment to catch the implication, his voice raising. "You can't be serious. Nothing you could have done is worth killing yourself over."

"Thank-you," I seemed to keep repeating those words around him. "But there is nothing you can do." I took a step and returned to sitting on the bed across from the window. "I think it's time for you to leave now." I'd expected my hands to shake as I held the envelope, but rather they were as stable as the very earth.

"No, I..." He didn't get more than an utterance out when I saw something bright spark to life behind him, "...Jonathan, are you listening?"

Standing up, I could see it better now. Behind him, beyond the window and down the road, a tongue of flame was fighting its way skyward despite the rain that tumbled down upon it.

In the graveyard.

The letter was still in my hand as I turned and dashed to the door, almost knocking it off its hinges as I flung it open with a boom that shook the walls. Behind me I could hear Richard shouting something as he followed out into the hallway.

Amazingly, Coalburn was still up, sitting blurry eyed and dazed in the reception on the main floor. I shoved the letter into his startled hands as I raced past. All I could get out by the time I'd cleared the door was, "Get it to Hexham!"

I just hoped that SERT would arrive before the whole town burnt to the ground.

The rain continued to pound down, I was soaked to the skin within seconds of emerging onto the street. Richard was a half-step behind me, almost brushing my tail.

Footing was precarious as we sprinted down the street, the wind in our faces. I could still see the flames in the graveyard, now mostly put out by the rain. The scent of petrol was heavy on the air, not even the rain could scrub the foul, clinging stench away.

I leapt the short stone wall the guarded the graves, leaving it behind me with little more than a thought. It was only then that I realized Richard was no longer beside me – the wall posed more of a barrier to him. I would have breathed a sigh of relief that he was out of harm's way, but I couldn't spare it as I sprinted on.

A fresh corpse lay atop the grave of the true Jonathan Hyatt, it was still smouldering. The decimated form may have looked vaguely human to anyone who hadn't known him in life, but to me it was as plain as day.

Xopt.

There was little left to the body, whoever had set the flame had been over it with a knife first. And not kindly. No, not at all.

The smell of charred hair and flesh was nearly enough to make me vomit, but the sight of the wounds inflicted upon the body were what stabbed a dagger of ice into my heart.

An instant later a shot rang out in the dark, grazing the whiskers of my muzzle and ricocheting off the headstones. I dived for cover, but it did little good. I didn't even know where the shooter was in the dark, wind torn graveyard.

"I'll kill you all, you demon spawn!" A voice echoed through the rain, too wavering and

distorted to identify. Another shot followed it, sparking off the headstone that my spine was pressed against. "You monsters, and all who covert with you! You corrupt all you touch. God will cleanse your stain from this world!" The voice was speaking faster now, rising in pitch.

This was good. Keep talking. The longer you talk the better I can pin down your location.

Slowly, I edged out from my cover, relying on nothing more than the night to disguise me as I moved forward on all fours.

The shooter must have realized his error as soon as I began to capitalize on it. He fell silent, nothing more than the sound of the rain now boomed between us.

It would do him little good. He had ranted long enough that I had a fix on his location. Back and towards the gates. The only thing that had saved me from a quick demise in his sights the moment I entered the yard was my leap over the wall. To walk through those gates would have put me square in his cross-hairs with no way to dodge.

I heard a set of steps splatter in the night, then a second set.

Wait... what?

There were two people here with me. A second later I heard the gate to the graveyard slam shut with a harrowing metallic boom. Richard.

I couldn't take the chance of giving away my position. I picked a trail of sounds at random and set out, cursing the rain that carried away the scents that would have set them apart.

I leapt upon the form that materialized from the shadows between the headstones a moment later. He crumpled under my weight as I set upon him, dragging him to the ground in a single fluid motion. One of my hands was over his mouth, silencing him, the other pinned both of his arms behind his back.

I could have screamed when, pressing my nose to his skin, I was met with the familiar scent of Richard.

A third shot echoed in the night, kicking up sod not a foot from my head. Taking Richard with me, wrapping myself around him, I rolled to the side, down a slight incline that, at least momentarily, broke our line of sight with the attacker.

"Richard," I whispered into his ear, when we came to a rough stop, not even sure if he could hear me over the rain, "If you value your life, your son's memory, my dignity, you will return to the inn. Now. I am going to end this."

His eyes were wide as he stared back at me in the dark. "You're going to kill him, aren't you, Forty-Two? That's what makes you different. You have free will."

"Go." I didn't bother to answer as I shoved him away from me and towards the back of the graveyard.

There was another gate back there somewhere, I knew it. An ancient old wrought iron affair that would scream to heaven when he opened it. Normally such things were of great annoyance in the general peace of the graveyard. But now I was counting on it.

I waited, hardly moving as his feet pattered away in the distance, but the gate never shrieked.

Perking my ears, I could just make out his footfalls as he looped around in a wide circle, coming back to swing from the side, onto our attacker. The only problem was he didn't know where

the shooter was.

It was hard to tell in the driving rain, but I knew the killer had moved. I couldn't tell where, I could barely even tell when, but I knew that he had pulled back when Richard and I had flown from sight.

This was a smart one. He knew he was no match for me in hand to hand combat, and that I could close almost any distance in seconds, faster than he could bring his gun to bear.

And that meant Richard would be perfectly aligned in his sights when he swung into where he still assumed the shooter was.

I scampered forward, despite my own self-preservation instinct doing its best to slap me about the ears. This was stupid. I was all but walking right into his sights, straight up the shallow gravelled path between the tombstones.

No shots rang out through the air for long moments. I almost breathed a sigh of relief... but he'd just been taking his time to aim.

I felt a sharp stab of pain in my left ear. The bullet had struck it, almost ripping it from my skull and sending me sprawling to the ground with a grunt of pain as I rolled behind the nearest grave marker – a slab of stone that barely reached a foot from the soft turf.

"Jonathan!" Richard's voice echoed through the dark. I could hear him begin running, all pretence of subtlety gone as his feet splashed through the shallow puddles. He fell to the grass not five feet from me, having tripped over an unseen headstone.

We were no more than a half-dozen paces from the grave of Jonathan Hyatt, with Xopf's corpse still smouldering upon it. I watched, almost in slow motion, as Richard began to scramble to his feet. I reached for him, to pull him to the relative safety behind my bulk, but the space between us was far too great.

One more shot rang out, a cloud of blood exploded from Richard's arm, high and just below the shoulder as he almost made it to his feet.

I had to give him credit, he didn't scream. I'd seen a Dog take a bullet almost just like that with nay more reaction...

My blood went cold at the memory.

He began to fall forward again, just far enough that I could reach his one outstretched good arm.

Abandoning my meagre cover, I sprinted out into the open, crossing the path that was now stained with the man's blood, not a stone's throw from his own son's grave.

He bit back a scream as I lifted him from the wet ground, never braking stride in my frantic dash. Stealing a quick glance down that I could ill-afford, I could see him almost biting clean through his own tongue to hold back his cries.

It wasn't until I set him gently to the ground against the back of a large headstone that I had an instant to take in the wound. And smell the blood.

Not now. Oh dear God... not now....

The rain did a better job than I had any right to hope for in washing it away, but it was still there. The hot tang of fresh blood filled the air around me. It coated my fingers as I scrambled to staunch the wound, ripping fabric from his shirt to desperately stem the flow.

I couldn't help it. Haltingly, I raised my blood stained fingers to my lips and tasted the salty iron of Richard Hyatt's heart.

"So this is it, is it, Jonathan?" Richard's voice was weak as he spoke, it nearly knocked me from my dark dreams.

I opened my mouth to respond, never knowing what it was I hoped to say. I was cut off before I could even form the vague thoughts.

The voice was closer this time, bobbing and weaving through the headstones.

"I'll have you, Dog. And all those you have corrupted. I'll send you all back to Satan where you belong." The voice was that of Reverend Benson.

"What do you want of me, Reverend? Have I not done everything you asked? Have I not aided you in every way? Why is it you do this to me, to Xopf?" My own voice rang out through the rain drops that pelted down around us, sounding far stronger and surer than I felt.

"Was that the other beast's name?" A hollow laugh echoed through the air. "We never got to that before I sent him back to his master when he came looking for you. But he did confess to being the one who tried to destroy my church, my home, and my good, God fearing flock. He and you. I know you both did it, you're in it together, even if he would not say so. You and that Godless commie abomination."

"You killed him?" The scent of blood was rising in my mind, weaving through my thoughts like a ball of snakes, tinting my monochrome night vision red. "You killed him!" My voice had fallen, devolving into little more than a base growl that never escaped through my lips.

Beneath me, Richard pulled back, fear clear in his eyes as he looked upon the mask that was now my face.

The Reverend must have sensed the change, when he spoke again he was more distant and continuing to fall back. An echo of fear in his voice. "I did God's work. I'll kill all you abominations, every one of you Satan has spawned, and all who cavort with you. The drunkard Crow was with you and I killed him as I'll kill all who sin..."

"As you killed my son." Richard's voice was weak and dripping away, but his words were prenatally clear, even through the rain. "You killed him. You murdered my son Jonathan in cold blood for no better reason than idolizing a Dog..."

"Do not worship false idols." The Reverend's voice was almost sweet as he spat out the words, cloying in their false sincerity. "That child had the audacity to ask me of welcoming you into my flock, a beast! He even asked if you had a soul!"

"You do not know of what you speak." My voice had returned a half measure, though the words were only just recognizable as such. I had to claw back the impulse to stalk forward, to leave Richard defenceless as I extracted my revenge against this monster one drop at a time.

"I speak the word of God, he speaks through me! What God proclaims is the truth. Law and science be damned to hell, where they belong!" His voice had lost the sweet, Sunday school edge, now it was nothing but a harrowing scream that echoed off the cold stone markers around us.

"Forty-Two..." I felt a weak tug on the chain that looped around my neck, it made my badge jingle. "He killed my son. I know I can't ask this of you, but..."

I gently lowered a finger to his lips, silencing him so we could hear nothing but the rain around

us.

"I have no name now." Reaching up a hand, I lifted the chain with my badge and key free from my wet fur. It took a sharp tug, I could feel the hot pull of tangled fur coming free. I laid it in his lap, curling his cool, ashen hand around it. "I renounce my commission. I have no name now."

His eyes tried to focus on me, but I was gone a moment later, dashing away on all fours, dancing among the tombstones. I sprinted through the close darkness faster than any human ever could, almost too fast to track. The Reverend was out there somewhere before me... and I would have him.

I was a Dog no more. I was stalking him. I would have him between my teeth before the night was done.

A wicked smile curved my lips, exposing my fangs in clear relief. In some perverse way I was glad, I was at last fulfilling my final command. Master Constable Proust had ordered me to kill the Reverend, to finally allow my special training to prove itself.

I would.

If nothing else I had to applaud Benson on his abilities. I wondered idly just how many of us he had killed. He moved every time he spoke, always being careful where he stepped, where he led me. He left no tracks that I could follow on the dark, night shrouded ground, no scents clinging anywhere the rain would not wash away.

Even then it was but a matter of time. There were only two exits to the graveyard, and the rear gate was much too far away for him to flee to.

All I did was leap the fence and take up station on just the other side of the front gate, sliding from sight amongst the shadows. Hiding between him and his church.

I didn't have long to wait. The black robed man backed his way towards me a few minutes later, always careful to keep his gun trained on the unmoving graves where he was sure I still lurked.

Silly human, are you unable to envision a creature that can move in ways you can not? Not even one that you yourself have created?

One last sweep of the empty yard and he shoved the gate roughly open. It swung before him, the time worn hinges almost silent in the night.

I let it clank home behind him, let him take a single deep, calming breath before I stepped silently from the shadows in his path. Materializing like a conjured demon from the pitch darkness to stand no more than a stride from his frail human form.

He froze. For a heartbeat neither of us moved, an ungodly smile was locked upon my lips.

He was quick, there was no doubt about that, he brought his gun to bear almost faster than one could ever imagine. He was nowhere near quick enough.

The motions were cool and familiar to me as my limbs flew. He was a suspect with a gun. I was a Dog who must disarm him. The simple actions flowed through me without so much as a thought, drilled into my head by years of training until they were as much a part of me as speech, as breathing.

Yet I moved in a way that no mere Police Dog could ever hope to. My nerves sang, my muscles

danced. His shooting arm was within my grasp before he could so much as blink.

And now he would be completely disabled in no more than four seconds.

But yet I paused, looking into his wide, dark eyes.

He was human. Could I truly kill one of my own creators?

I paused for no more than a single beat of my frantic heart, but it was enough for his free hand to pull a blade that glimmered in the nonexistent light.

To this I did not react quickly enough. Slashing forward, he cut a long deep line up the inside of my leg, not coming to a stop until he reached my abdomen. He only just missed gelding me.

The thought was cold comfort as I folded, crumpling to the ground. Somewhere in the darkness I could hear his gun clatter to the cobblestones, forgotten.

I couldn't run as I watched his form disappear into the night. I could only stumble after him, my leg feeling like it was going to give out on me with each step. He retreated from me, dashing across the street to his sanctuary.

Despite my injury he only arrived at the heavy wooden doors a heartbeat before me, slamming them against my face as I threw an arm between them to bar their way. My gambit was short lived however, a moment later the ice cold cut of his blade came again.

It drew an inhuman yip from my lips as I recoiled back in pain. I didn't get a second chance to force my way through as I heard the doors click shut before me, heavy deadbolts grinding into place an instant later.

I couldn't find words to put voice to the curses that slipped through my mind. They included all manner of threats and indignities, many of which didn't have translations into the human tongue.

It wasn't until I heard two more locks click that I finally gave up throwing my weight against the door. Other than a gong like echo, I was accomplishing little but to provide a set piece to my own futility.

Silence, save for the rain, opened up around me. Somewhere in the distance I could hear the whisper-like murmur of terrified voices from the townsfolk. Closer, much closer, I could make out the growing shadow of a laugh.

The voice that finally came from the other side of the door skittered like the crawl of cockroaches. It started quiet, almost repentant, but grew with every word until the Reverend was screaming, voice a hoarse parody of what a man's should be.

Even I sounded more human.

"You'll never... never get in, you devil. This is a house of God. He will protect me. As he's always done before. You'll never get me. You'll never get me as you did Father. Killers, spiller of our blood. That's all you are. Your kind killed him... killed him for the war. You won't have me. God won't allow it. GOD WON'T ALLOW IT!"

His voice raised to such a pitch as to cause me to flinch back, hands clasping up to cover my ears. His screams penetrated through the night, cutting into my mind like a shard of glass. It was almost enough to throw me from the trance that the blood had settled me in, that I had welcomed so willingly.

My voice almost sounded normal when I spoke, though I knew it was no more than skin deep.

"Benson. It is me you want. I'm your devil, not innocent humans. Come out and face me. This isn't a police matter anymore. You killed three of my friends and I *will* have you for it. You can't stop me." My voice had cooled as I spoke, coated in ice, coming to a perfect snap at the end when my canines clicked together, almost cutting my tongue.

"So the beast finally shows its true colours. Go back to your master, demon. I will accept no offers from you. I am safe in the house of God. None may trouble me here, not even your commie brethren who came looking for you. He was an easy cleansing as he came crawling to your den."

I wanted to reply, wanted to scream at the top of my lungs for the empty heavens to open upon us and choose only one to remain standing... but I knew it was no good. I was not born to the grace of God. I was but a creation of man's hubris and pride.

"I need not go anywhere, Reverend," My lips curled up in a smile that promised little humour, "I am already with my master. You. Have I not done exactly as you have commanded me, good sir?" I had to hold back the gag in my voice, "I am to serve man, nothing else, and I serve you. You are my master, it is you, your kind, who have created me."

A primal scream came from the other side of the heavy door. I had only a moment upon hearing the chambering of a heavy bolt to dive to the side before a bullet ripped through the thick wood.

The high powered rifle launched a round that sent splinters through the air, scenting the world with sawdust. The slug buried itself in one of the two oaks bordering the pathway that we had raced down to get here.

Running for my life, I heard another round crack the air. He was shooting blindly, not caring what he smite, or if he even hit anything at all.

Rounding the side of the building, my Police Dog reflexes bubbled back to the top of the feral foam that filled my mind. It would only be a matter of time until his wild shots contacted with something or someone in their random flights. He could not be allowed to continue.

For once all of my training, all of my heart and soul, pulled in a single direction.

All the other entrances to the holy home were as fast and tight as the first had been. I was barred as surely as if he hid behind thick castle walls.

Now at the south of the church, I stood before the massive stained glass figure of God. His divine hands were swept low to offer alms to the poor humans of this world, a look of peace frozen upon his face. The Reverend still stood at the far end of the pews, his ramblings having devolved into little more than animalistic grunts punctuated with cracks of human made thunder and sin.

Forgive me, Lord.

The wound in my leg still bled and screamed, but I put it from my mind as I reared back and charged the stained glass, leaping to impact its flawless surface almost exactly halfway through its two story height.

I burst through God's chest, ripping out his heart with my fangs as leaded glass rained down around me, the almost full moon breaking through the clouds to my back. I had only the faintest glimpse of Reverend Benson's wide eyes turning towards me as he watched his saviour explode into a thousand stinging shards, giving birth to me as I tumbled towards him.

As strong as my legs might be, they were much too weak to propel me to my prey at the far end of the chamber. I fell well short, tumbling to the floor, limbs giving out beneath me, leaving me to lie

in a crumpled heap before him.

For a moment I couldn't move, could hardly breathe. All I could do was wait for the high powered bullet to pass through my brain, to splatter my mind across the still water stained hard wooden floor. I wouldn't even hear the bang. The chunk of lead would end my life as quickly as they did the short existence of pups back at the Kennel.

But it never came.

I remained there for long heartbeats before I could slowly raise myself up from the shattered glass that had rained down around me. It was God no longer. The stained glass was nothing more than that, glass that had been stained and fouled an off colour by my blood.

Before me, not five strides away, was the Reverend. He was kneeled forward, hands clutched before him as his voice whispered hoarse in Latin. The rifle lay forgotten on the floor, within easy reach if he so much as wondered for it.

The final few steps towards him were slow. Not only did every bone and joint ache, but my motions ground the shattered glass that permeated my fur. My bare feet were cut with every stride on the slivers that carpeted the floor.

For a moment the moon reflected off the glass beneath me, flashing it a blinding white, it almost looked as though I was walking the waves of the ocean under a noontime sun.

"Reverend Benson?" I fell to my own knees before him, the lifeblood trickling from my thousand cuts. My voice was rough, torn to shreds in my own throat. He didn't look up, only began to chant faster. "Look at me, you monster!" Now my voice boomed, sounding like thunder as it rolled about the empty room.

He stopped, slowly raising his eyes to me before speaking in a careful, measured tone. "There is but one monster here, demon-spawn."

"What have I done to you, dammit! My kind has done nothing but follow you for millennia! My ancestors came to you on their bellies for the scraps of food you threw us! We submitted to you, bent ourselves to your every whim, and when that wasn't enough we allowed you to reshape us in your own image, all to your own ends! What have we done to you?"

My hands reached for his throat, ready to tear him, to spill his essence upon the hallowed floor... but I couldn't do it.

No life touched his features as he spoke now, looking like a pup who had yet to learn human expression. "You are nothing but weapons of war, nothing but tools of the Devil for murder and destruction. You can be used for nothing else. Your kind murdered my family, tore my father apart before my very eyes long after the war had past. All because it fulfilled the mission that was given to you."

Tears were edging my eyes now. "But what have *I* done? I have committed no such great sin against humanity..." My voice broke as I remembered Forty-One. "I have done my Good Works in atonement. I have made my peace. Why me? Why *me*?"

"Because you are of no woman born. You are an abomination, a beast. No more. Do it, demon-spawn. Kill me. It is what you were created for. I will be with my God again."

Slowly, I rose to my feet, feeling every one of my ten long years on this world. Reaching, I picked up his rifle from the glass strewn ground, a round was still in the chamber.

The weight of the killing machine felt cool and comforting in my hands. It was fitting. I would kill him with his own contrivance, not my claws.

This was what Master Constable Proust had ordered. I would kill this monster who kneeled before me. Then I would seek out Proust and demand he take me back. And I would breed for him.

The reign of the Goddard laws would be at an end as soon as my puppies were grown.

Raising the long barrel to his head, I held the weapon steady in my hands. I could feel the warmth of my body seep into the metal.

"Do you have any last words for this mortal world, Reverend, before returning to your God to beg his forgiveness for your sins?" My voice was articulate, pronunciation perfect, showing none of the rolling chaos that I could feel in my gut.

"Do it, beast." His response was shallow, breathless.

The gunshot rocked the room, splattering his blood and bone across me. I almost cried in terror and triumph for what I had done before realizing that my finger had never pulled the trigger.

Richard Hyatt stood by the window of the church, leaning heavily on the shattered still. One arm hung limply, the other clutching the now smoking gun that the Reverend had dropped in the street.

"That monster killed my son." His voice was chipped, flat and emotionless, the effects of shock having long set in.

"Thank-you." I tossed my weapon to the floor where it clattered to a rest with the tinkle of glass shattering beneath it. A moment later I followed.

The SERT team would be here in short order to take us all into custody. It would all be over by the time I woke.