

*Sometimes when writing, I produce a chapter, or scene, that while interesting, doesn't really move forward the story I'm telling. This Out Take from IRRESISTIBLE FORCE falls into that category. There's also another reason it was dropped from the final manuscript. The scene takes place in Richmond, VA, while the book ended up being set in North Carolina. Writers can change their minds, about everything. Yet the chapter remains, for me, a snapshot of the kind of K-9 teamwork police officer James Cannon and his canine partner Bogart would be involved in on the job. So here it is, a typical night on patrol job that turns suddenly urgent, and scary, for man and dog.*

Jonas Rafferty, a patrolman, tore the wrapper off his Honey Bun before continuing his story for his audience of two K-9 police officers who'd paused for a bathroom run and refreshments at an all-night convenience store.

"So there I was, not more than an hour ago, cruising along over on Cedar near 23rd. I was so bored I would have picked up a hitchhiker just for a bit of conversation. That's when I spy this guy on the side of the road with his hood up. Now you know I'm a sucker of a nice set of wheels. He was standing there beside a Jaguar."

"I hope it was a classic model. I don't like the new ones." Sheila Hooper wrinkled her nose. "They lost their attraction for me when they took the little animal off the hood."

Rafferty sent her dark look over the end of his bun as he bit into it. He hated it when anyone interrupted his stories. That's why Sheila liked to do it.

He chewed his sugar-soothing mouthful before continuing. “So I pull alongside. Just to start the conversation I say, ‘Not your night, huh?’ The guy whips out from under the hood, takes one look at me, and throws both hands in the air. Then he says, ‘So, I’m under arrest?’ I say, ‘What for?’ He says, ‘For trying to steal the battery? And I say, ‘That’ll do.’ First self-arrest I ever had.”

James laughed along with his colleagues as he lifted the lid on his coffee. “Don’t suppose you told him he was looking in the wrong place. Jaguar batteries are in the trunk.”

Rafferty guffawed. “Why encourage them? There’s more than enough stupid to go around in this town already.”

“Amen to that.”

Sheila reached into her K-9 van and stroked her dog, a golden pelted Malinois named Taser. Taser had been watching her interact with Rafferty, growling low every time the policeman, who he wasn’t familiar with, got close to her. Ordinarily, he wouldn’t be concerned if she wasn’t. But they were on duty. It was Taser’s job to look after his partner. Sheila, who loved her partner like a child, understood that he needed the calming reassurance of her touch.

“We’re all really glad to have Bogart back. You figure out what happened?”

James nodded. “It will all be in the report I’m filing after I get off duty.”

Sheila and Rafferty exchanged glances but the look on James’s face didn’t encourage them to ask the questions they had. Rumors were having a field day. The wildest said that his girlfriend was directly involved in the disappearance.

The radio crackled on Sheila's shoulder. After a brief exchange she shoved her braids back up under her hat and picked up her to-go cup from the hood of Rafferty's cruiser. "I'm out. Some of us got a job to do."

"You trying to make Cannon and me look bad, Hooper?"

She gave him an up and down, her gaze coming to rest at the point on his low-riding pants where his buckle peaked out from under the moon of his belly. "You doing that all by yourself. Ever think about joining the bike patrol?"

"Bite me, Hooper."

"Don't even look like a mouthful to me."

The three laughed as she hurried back to her cruiser to answer the call that had come in.

James checked his watch. He had two minutes left on his ten minute break. He was a little out of his patrol area but meeting with other on-duty police helped break up the night. It gave them a way of exchanging information, keeping tabs on what was going on in the city streets on any particular night, swapping stories, and fighting off the loneliness that came with working the night shift. Bogart was good company but he couldn't hold a conversation worth a damn.

After another minute of chat, he turned back to his vehicle. He had already walked and watered Bogart.

He sipped the second of his three-cup limit of patrol coffee as he slid back behind the wheel of his cruiser. It was good to be back on duty. After three days of night patrol, boring and routine, he and Bogart were at ease in one another's company again. The familiarity of night patrol gave them both something on which to focus their minds and

energies. Yardley might be a wizard handler but she was wrong about their need for tightly-controlled retraining.

He took another gulp of his coffee, glad he couldn't see what he was consuming. A person took his health in his hands when buying coffee at two a.m. But it was hot and strong, and for tonight that was enough.

Richmond, VA was doing well as a city. Earlier in the evening the riverfront area had been booming with locals and visitors out enjoying all that the night had to offer. He was probably the only one who had groaned when he spied the first set of twinkling lights over a doorway then rolled past shop window after shop window decked out in full Christmas regalia. It was much too soon, to his way of thinking. But with the Halloween weekend behind them, anticipation had begun a slow build up to what would soon become the frantic holiday season. Merchants couldn't be faulted for wanting to take advantage of every opportunity, he supposed.

However, at two in the morning, the city was still. A light breeze off the James River added a damp breath to the now-dark streets.

James turned out of the Shockoe Slip area of downtown and onto Dock Street, which fronted Tobacco Row. Many of the grand old historic buildings fronting the river, vacated by the tobacco companies like Lucky Strike in the late 1980s, had become gentrified into river-view apartments, condos, offices, and retail space. Thanks to the James River Flood Wall, finished in 1995, the area was supposedly protected from the unpredictability of the river. Ironically, in 2004 tropical depression Gaston dumped twelve point six inches of rain on the area, proving that when Mother Nature had the will, there were still ways to flood the city. Despite that, the municipality was on the upswing. Once listed in the top ten most dangerous cities to live, Richmond had dropped

back to near 50th in ranking in the first decade of the 2000s. Notoriously dangerous areas were now packed with upscale shopping, eateries and living spaces.

Despite the cool of the November evening, James patrolled with his window down, enjoying the first breath of fall in a city that liked to remind visitors that Virginia was the South. Behind him in the K-9 cage that replaced the backseat in a regular cruiser, Bogart stood swaying to the rhythm of the car's motion. The cage was specially designed to protect a K-9 dog from harm in case of a high speed chase or an accident. Tonight, the front access door of the cage was open, which allowed Bogart to poke his head through when he wanted to. It was used, with the driver's window down, to allow a K-9 to be deployed in cases of emergency.

A few months' earlier James had exited his vehicle on a traffic stop only to find himself in a struggle with a very angry drunk driver. At James's shout, Bogart had jumped into the front seat and then out the driver's window. The sight of sixty-five pounds of snarling canine was enough to subdue the driver's rage. "Didn't see the dog," the man had offered in explanation as he allowed James to apply the cuffs.

With Bogart on the leash they made their rounds on foot of the establishments in Tobacco Row. James checked for signs of forced or attempted entry, unlocked doors, and so forth. Night duty could be tedious work because most often there was little or nothing found. And though Bogart was good company, he couldn't hold a conversation or join a sing along. But boring didn't mean it was easy or safe. Nighttime was predator time. At any moment boring could turn hazardous.

Paroling was often a matter of finding the unfamiliar in a world of intimate familiarity. It wasn't a gunshot, or a shout, or even a running footsteps that most often caused a good patrol officer to slow up, scan back, or pause when something at the

corner of his or her vision seemed just a fraction off. Steps just a bit too quick, or too slow for the situation. Someone over-dressed, or under dressed for the occasion, or the weather. Someone or something out of place.

Rounds done, they returned to their vehicle.

Further down Dock Street, empty now of traffic, were the train trestles that formed permanent shade during the day and shelter for activity both legal and otherwise in the evenings.

James felt his adrenaline level tick up a notch as the overhead trestle threw deep shadows across his drive path. He slowed his speed to study the area just beyond his headlights.

In response, Bogart stopped pacing and stuck his head through the front panel to add his eyes to the watch as handler and K-9 began to feed off one another. James had been told the first day of his training with Bogart that experienced K-9 teams came into perfect sync without a word. James smiled to himself. They were back.

Past Pear Street the old warehousing district gave way to open fields and overgrown wetlands banking the river. Crossing the street fifty yards ahead, two people carried an outboard motor, sling-like, between them. The taller one managed his end easily but the shorter, slighter person was struggling as they made their way from the riverside to the shrub-lined side of the street.

It wasn't unusual to find street people out in the middle of the night. Nor was it especially alarming see them carrying an outboard motor. There were often boats anchored along this part of the river near the wharf. But these two seemed in a really big hurry. And the taller one kept scanning back over his shoulder.

James slowed his cruiser. They hadn't yet noticed him.

As he passed them, the bigger one looked back again. This time he saw the cruiser. He shouted something and dropped his end of the motor.

James made a sharp U-turn in the empty street and pulled up close so that the pair were caught in the cruiser's headlights. Often just the sight of a K-9 vehicle was all that was needed to defuse a potentially hostile situation with a suspect.

James exited his vehicle, weapon drawn. "Richmond Police K-9! Stop and surrender, or I will release my dog."

Maybe they had planned an escape action ahead of time but the moment James spoke, the shorter person sprang away, into the path of a lone on-coming car that screeched to a sudden halt as the driver applied the brakes. At the same time, the bigger partner crashed through the line of winter-stripped hedges, headed for the darkness provided by the trestle.

There was a split second of delay in pursuit as James turned to release Bogart, while debating which one to follow. It was a mistake.

Bogart had no hesitation. He was through the screen and out the driver side window and after the larger runner in one forward motion.

"Shit!" James still had Bogart's leash at his waist. It's wasn't like his partner to deploy without instructions but it was too late now to worry about that. Taking off at a run after his dog, he radioed in a suspicious stop, and that Bogart was deployed.

Following Bogart, James burst through the shrubs to the other side, under the trestle. But it was so dark he couldn't find any sign of his dog or the suspect. He stood still for a second, listening as someone crashed through the undergrowth but the sounds seem to be coming from all directions at once. Then he heard Bogart's bark, and his

pulse kicked up its pace. Obviously Bogart was still in pursuit. And the bark had come from the direction they had just travelled past: Shiplock Park.

“Jesus!” James moved out at a dead run. His mistake that Bogart was off the leash. He prayed that, in his single-mindedness to chase down his prey, Bogart wouldn’t run into the street without noticing on-coming traffic. Or mistake an innocent bystander for the suspect, and attack. He needed to get to Bogart before he got in trouble.

The train tracks overhead blotted out even starlight as James he whipped around post after trestle post. Bogart had been trained to run obstacle courses but the hazardous maze presented by interlocking metal framework that held up the tracks proved too difficult for James to maneuver with any speed. Forcing himself to think strategically, he realized he would make better time back out on the sidewalk, where he could run flat out.

Even so, it felt like damned slow progress as he ran down the walkway. The only sounds now were his boot falls on concrete, Bogart having fallen eerily silent. Then he heard trashing sounds to his left, riverside.

Skirting along a chain link fence that either the man and Bogart had jumped, or found an opening that he couldn’t see in the dark, James reached the street entrance that led to the small parking lot in Shiplock Park. Suspecting his suspect might have left his car here, James again pulled his weapon and drew in deep breaths as he forced himself to move with slow and deliberate speed into the open area.

The parking lot was empty but for one car at the far end. He approached it cautiously. He didn’t see Bogart anywhere, which was odd because he wouldn’t have left a cornered suspect. Still, he moved toward the vehicle. There was no driver behind the



wheel so he circled left to the passenger side, gun trained but ears alert for any sound from his partner. Finally, when he had reached the back of the car, he called out loudly, “Richmond Police K-9. Surrender yourself now!”

No response.

Cautiously, James tried all four doors in growing frustration. Losing a suspect was one thing. Losing Bogart, again, was a whole other level of really fucking painful.

Heart pounding, James paused again to listen. Bogart was still silent. Had he lost his prey, or was he silently tracking him?

All at once the night erupted in Bogart’s barks. A man screamed and then there was a great splash. Someone was in the river.

Cursing, James ran across the parking lot to where the trail along the water began. The park boasted beautiful views of the river and downtown Richmond, as well as a primitive greenbelt of walking trails for the more adventurous to follow during the day. Unlit at night, the trails the led along the canal that ran between the park and a strip of land separating it from the river were dangerous in the extreme.

James could hear thrashing and splashing. Using his flashlight to light the way as he pounded along the concrete path that led to the lock system, he prayed that Bogart was not in the water. Or that if he were, he had enough sense not to attack the suspect or they both might drown.

James paused, training his flashlight on the water. At first he didn’t see anything but then he saw the hump of a man treading water as he swam toward the opposite bank of Shockoe Bottom. A little behind him, only muzzle and ears out of the water, came Bogart.

James's heart contracted in fear. His partner didn't particularly like being wet. He'd never seen him voluntarily enter the water before, let alone any this deep with a current. But the thrill of the hunt seemed to have overridden any hesitation Bogart might ordinarily have had about jumping into the river. The question was, could he swim strongly enough to reach the other shore? If he drowned...

Watching helplessly as Bogart drew close to the shore, all James could think about was Yardley's warning that being out of practice could get one or the other of a K-9 team hurt, or killed. If he hadn't already resigned himself to a week in Raleigh retraining, he was now in whole-heartedly. If only Bogart came out of this safely.

"Swim, Bo, swim," James repeated again and again under his breath as he ran along the waterfront. He kept the circle of his flashlight beam in front of his partner in the hope that it would help him find the shore more quickly. His arms muscles began contracting rhythmically, as if by making little stroking motions he could will his energy into Bogart and push him along.

The suspect floundered when he reached the other side, grasping handfuls of dead turf that peeled away under his grasp. Cursing and scrambling, the man kicked repeatedly, trying to haul himself up. James watched him, aware that the water was cold. The current, though not treacherous, was a drag on a tired man. Amazingly, he made it on shore. Staggering to his feet, he let out a yelp of fright when he turned and saw that Bogart had followed him and almost reached the shore. He turned and stumbled off, arms flailing to propel himself forward.

When Bogart had clawed his way up onto the bank James ran a hand over his mouth to keep from cheering, which would have distracted the dog. Instead, he pulled himself together and did the only thing he could think of as appropriate. Bogart had run

down his prey. He deserved the collar. James cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, “*Fass! Fass!*” Bite!

Hearing his handler’s voice, Bogart shot up the bank of the island like a furry rocket, all barks and growls.

Trained to leap and put the full weight of his muscular body into the effort, he tackled the man from behind. The impact sent the man sprawling with a cry of fright. Instinct made him fight but Bogart had the upper hand from the moment they made contact.

“Getoff! Call him off!” the man yelled, not knowing if James was close enough to hear him. Yet he continued to thrash, which only encouraging Bogart to growl and hold tight.

“Richmond K-9 police. You’re under arrest!” James called across the narrow finger of the turnaround in the river. “Stop moving and he won’t hurt you! Stop fighting!”

The man went limp in the grass.

James felt an equal letdown of anxiety. He waited a moment before shouting, “If you remain still I will release my dog. But don’t move or he will attack again.” James only heard a whimper in reply.

“Bogart! *Aus!*”

Immediately Bogart released his bite on the man’s right rear shoulder and moved a step back.

“*Pass Auf!*”

The dog went prone, his head lifted slightly, covering his prey. The man whimpered but did not move again.

Unwilling to try his luck at swimming in full gear, James leaned over the railing and kept his flashlight trained on the prone man and dog on the opposite bank.

It had only been a few minutes but it seemed like an hour before he heard sirens in the distance. Using his radio, he directed one patrol unit onto Byrd St which is where his suspect was being held, and another to pick himself up.

When the other patrols arrived Bogart was still guarding the suspect, who had fallen quiet in the grass, exhausted by his ordeal. Once approached, the man began crying and, after being handcuffed, dived into a police cruiser unaided, just to get away from Bogart.

It didn't take long for the other officers called to the scene to collect the boat motor, which James was certain they would find had been stolen. With other law enforcement personal on the scene now, James's main concern was in getting Bogart back. He was dropped off by a patrolman at his cruiser, which he drove over to pick his partner up.

While he had been given wide berth by the other officers, Bogart jumped up in greeting when he recognized James coming toward him. He practically leaped into James's arms, all sixty plus pounds of cold soaking wet dog.

*"Gute Hund!"* James said in praised as he cradled his soggy load. *"Gute Hund!"* He pulled a ball from his pocket and bounced it where the suspect had been lying.

Bogart bounded for it but with less enthusiasm than was usual. James understood.

He went to the trunk of his car and pulled out a sweatshirt. Bending over to his partner, he wrapped him in it and gave him a rough toweling off.

His heart pounded a little fast as he felt his dog over for signs of injury but found none. He would have to get him home before he would know for certain if Bogart had suffered any cuts or lacerations in his pursuit of his prey. But at least he could make sure he was dry and warm. He picked Bogart up and carried him back to his vehicle.

A patrolman came up to him smiling as he got Bogart back in his cage. “Good catch. That pup’s got heart. I wouldn’t have been inclined to take a swim on a night like this. You and Bogart are going be a Richmond legend in no time.”

James didn’t reply. The truth was he and Bogart were both lucky. He’d made a rookie mistake letting Bogart slip by him unleashed. They might not get that lucky another time.