

## The Consequence

The dog in the neighbor's backyard looked progressively more wretched everyday in that cage. Shannon watched it through her window each morning with her coffee, as it watched her, salivating. For a moment, she saw only blackness in its eyes, and its saliva was a black venom that caused the cage's floor to deteriorate when it fell. She closed her eyes and shook her head, and the dog looked normal when she opened her eyes again.

A woman walked outside holding bowls of food and water and unlocked the cage. Then Shannon tried to remember the last time she saw her feed the dog. She couldn't, but she gave the owner the benefit of the doubt, since she could have easily fed the dog while she was at work. However, she never noticed how precariously thin the dog had gotten until it stepped out of the cage. Then she tried to remember the last time she saw the dog outside of the cage. She couldn't. The dog slowly walked over to its food, slumped over in exhaustion with a limp. Numerous gashes plastered its wilted body.

Her mother joined her in the kitchen. She watched Shannon and shook her head with a sigh.

*"Let it go,"* she said as she poured herself some coffee.

Shannon turned to her mother, astonished.

*"Let it go? She abuses that dog. And look how she has it all caged up."*

"First of all, you don't know for sure that she abuses it. You can't make that type of accusation. Second of all, it's a dog. Even if she *did* abuse it, she probably had a good reason. It *should* be in a cage. Those things can be vicious."

“*Are you kidding me?* You don’t think she abuses that dog? Are we looking at the same one? And if I were abused and caged up, I’d be vicious too.”

“Look, how she chooses to treat *her* dog is none of *your* business. Let it go.”

Shannon rolled her eyes as her mother checked her watch.

“I have to go...why are you wearing that?”

Again, Shannon rolled her eyes. She looked down at her blazer and pants, then back at her mother.

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It makes you look old and it completely hides your figure. I wouldn’t have found your father wearing something like that.”

“I’m not going to work to find a husband.”

Her mother’s phone rang, interrupting the conversation. She answered and told the person to hold on.

“You need to change,” she whispered, “Oh, and I’m gonna be working late again tonight.”

She kissed Shannon on the forehead before leaving the kitchen and walking out the front door.

Shannon changed into a tighter fitting blazer with a short skirt her mother would approve of. Then she returned to her cup of coffee in the kitchen. The owner turned around and met Shannon’s reprovng eyes. She decided that instant to free her neighbor’s dog. Her attention was suddenly thwarted by the coffee scorching her brown skin. She moaned and dumped her unfinished coffee in the sink before rushing off to work. As she

drove, her stomach growled and she realized she'd forgotten to eat, having been distracted by that miserable dog and its owner.

She stopped at a convenient store for a quick breakfast. The employees watched her with the same reproving expression she gave her neighbor. Although, she was clueless as to what she could've possibly done, given she just walked in. Nonetheless, she smiled politely and continued down the aisle. Unsure of what she wanted, she looked through several aisles. After a while, she noticed in her peripheral that she was being followed. She chose to ignore it, and continued down another aisle. Shannon had finally chosen a fruit cup and a bottle of water when the employee walked in her direction. She sighed.

“Can I help you?” the employee asked with the same reproachful expression.

Again, Shannon smiled politely, but it was suddenly more difficult, and appeared drastically less sincere than the first.

“No thank you. I found what I wanted.”

The employee made sure to walk behind Shannon on their way toward the cash register. All of the employees watched her exit the store with no attempt to hide the reproving look on their faces. Aggravated, she left the store feigning tranquility and composure.

Shannon unlocked the car door and slammed it behind her. She took deep breaths, in and out. Then she put the keys in the ignition and checked her rearview mirror. She saw the same blackness in her eyes as her neighbor's dog and recoiled. Again, she closed her eyes and shook her head to remove the image from her mind.

As she continued on her way to her job she noticed an old homeless man sitting on the other side of the road. Without thinking, she made a u-turn.

As she walked toward the old man, other men around her whistled and made their opinions about her attractive figure exceedingly clear. Her mother would have been proud. Nonetheless, she ignored their comments. She also ignored the thought of being reprimanded by her boss for her tardiness as she approached him. The evidence of loneliness and heartache she saw in the man's eyes overshadowed that inevitability. Shannon greeted him and handed him the fruit and water, but it wasn't about physical nourishment for either of them. It was the recognition that his identity surpassed that of a grubby, homeless old man to be avoided and cast aside. It was the acknowledgement that he was a human being—something she sought after at every waking moment.

“God bless you,” the old man said with a smile from ear to ear, looking into her eyes, unlike the other men.

Shannon smiled back, withholding tears, and said he was welcome.

As Shannon drove into the parking lot, she noticed Carl and Ethan, two of the men she worked for. She sighed just as she did in the convenient store, knowing precisely what was to come when the employee approached her. She took a moment to mentally prepare herself, and then continued towards the entrance, avoiding eye contact. The two men seemed to be having an in depth conversation until she walked past them. Their conversation suddenly ended. The abruptness of their silence forced her to turn around and

acknowledge their presence, the one thing she was adamant about not doing. Still, they were silent. They both looked her up and down. She wasn't a human being. She was their lunch. Shannon slowly backed away from them and continued her stride toward the entrance.

She rushed to her cubicle and made it just before her boss noticed. Without looking her in the eyes, her boss dropped a huge pile of files on the desk. She was told to organize them and make copies. Then her boss looked her up and down with a grimace and walked away.

After organizing the files, she walked towards the copy room. She was suddenly interrupted by someone mentioning her name in a hushed conversation from another cubicle.

"This is a *professional* work place," her boss whispered, "That top is entirely too tight and that skirt is entirely too short. She's not here to flirt; she's here to work. If Shannon dresses like that again, she's fired."

Shannon sighed, angry with herself, and continued towards the copy room where Carl and Ethan talked. Again, their conversation stopped when she entered the room. She chose to ignore it and used the copy machine as she planned to. Soon after, she heard something drop and turned around to see a stapler on the floor. She shifted her focus back to the copy machine when Carl interrupted her.

"Hey," he said.

She rolled her eyes and ignored him.

“*Hey,*” he said more indignantly.

Again, she didn’t respond.

He repeated himself, but whistled and clapped his hands.

Shannon turned to him, furious.

“First of all, I have a name. Second of all, don’t talk to me that way; I’m not a dog.”

“You could’ve fooled me,” Carl responded.

Ethan snickered.

Shannon bit her lip and refused to respond. She turned back to the copy machine and picked up the papers. Then she walked towards the door.

“Are you gonna pick that up?” Ethan asked, pointing to the stapler on that fell on the floor.

All of her muscles tensed at once as she stopped in middle of the doorway. She imagined flames and bombshells, as she inhaled and exhaled repeatedly. Without looking back or responding, she left the room. She saw a reflection of herself in one of the windows after leaving and saw the same black eyes. She went to the bathroom to throw water on her face and calm herself down.

\* \* \*

Shannon returned home that evening with her mother still at work. Again, she inhaled and exhaled repeatedly. Her attempt to calm herself was interrupted by the sound of her neighbor yelling in her backyard. She rushed to the window and saw her beating the dog excessively with a whip. The dog whimpered as blood started to drip from its skin. Suddenly, the dog growled at her and she recoiled, frightened and bewildered.

“I knew it!” the neighbor yelled.

Shannon watched furiously as she forced the dog into its cage.

She watched her neighbor leave the house at nightfall. She rushed outside with a metal cutter and a small flashlight. The dog growled faintly as she approached the cage. She held the flashlight in her mouth as she attempted to break the lock with the metal cutter. The dog suddenly barked and saliva hit her face. She jumped and grudgingly rubbed it off of her face.

Shannon was finally able to break the lock when she noticed a burning sensation where the saliva touched her skin. She opened the cage and the dog snarled.

“Come on,” she said, directing the dog outside of the cage with her hand, which had now begun to shake uncontrollably because of the burning.

The dog didn’t move.

“*Come on,*” she repeated, moving her hand again, “you’re free.”

Still the dog didn’t move. It just continued to growl.

Shannon lifted the flashlight to see the dog. Its entire body was covered in the black venom that dripped from its fur and mouth. For a short moment, she and the dog stood frozen in silence. The dog growled menacingly and Shannon shrieked as she swiftly ran away. The dog followed and pounced on her back as it sunk its claws into her skin. Again, she screamed, and then grabbed the metal cutter she’d dropped to batter the dog’s face.

Shannon continued to batter the dog until it laid motionless, breathless on the ground. The venom flowed rapidly from its wounds. She covered her mouth in an attempt to stop herself from vomiting.

The burning sensation now practically covered her entire body. She moaned as she picked up the flashlight and rushed to her house before any of the neighbors noticed.

Shannon ran swiftly to the shower, now screaming because the burning sensation was so intense. Afterwards, she walked back to her room, exhausted but relieved. She stopped to look at the scars in her back and wondered what happened to that precious dog—man’s best friend. Then she heard a knock at the door and her muscles tensed. One of the neighbors had surely seen her and called the police.

She put on her bathrobe and walked downstairs to answer the door. Carl and Ethan looked back at her through the peephole. She thought to herself for a moment and grimaced, confused as to why they came to see her or how they even knew where she lived.

Shannon opened the door, and before she could ask what they were doing there, Carl grabbed her and placed his hand over her mouth. Inebriated, Ethan stumbled inside with a bag and closed the door behind them. He watched as Carl tackled her. Shannon shrieked from the agony of her wounded back being plunged onto the floor, as she turned her face away to avoid the smell of alcohol on his breath. She struggled to break free as Carl smiled menacingly at the sound of her muffled screams.



Ethan handed him a cloth and he tied it around her mouth. They both laughed together as she continued to struggle. Then he grabbed a video camera from his bag and moved closer to Shannon and Carl to get a better angle.

“Smile pretty,” Ethan said.

Carl began to untie the bathrobe, and Shannon fought against him. He grabbed her wrists and pinned them down above her head.

Ethan’s smile dropped.

“Hey, what are you doing?”

“You’re not so tough now are you?” Carl asked Shannon. “Look how scared it is,” he said, grinning smugly at the camera.

The word “it” reiterated in her mind and awakened a fury in her heart she’d always denied was present until that moment. This suddenly gave her the strength to gain some control of her legs. She kned him in the crouch with as much force as she could and desperately crawled away, hindered by the throbbing pain in her back. Carl recovered from the injury Shannon inflicted and returned. He looked down at her with a condescending expression. Then he grabbed her by the hair and dragged her back to where she initially laid.

“It’s feisty,” he said snickering, looking at the camera again. “I think it needs to be punished,” he said before reaching into his back pocket and pulling out a knife.

“What are you doing?!” Ethan screamed.

Carl lifted the knife to stab her, but she grabbed his arm. For a few moments, they struggled, and he was both stunned and infuriated by the fact that she could now resist his strength.

Ethan shouted at Carl, telling him to stop. They struggled for a few more moments, and then he looked into Shannon's eyes with a curious expression, as sirens sounded faintly in the background. Carl's jaw dropped and Ethan abruptly fell silent. Shannon wondered what was wrong, until she noticed the paleness in her arm. The color had faded drastically and was rapidly continuing to do so. Then she felt the same burning sensation in her scalp, which traveled down to her neck and back.

Shannon turned her head and saw her reflection in the mirror behind Ethan. Her complexion was whiter than the cream she put in her coffee that morning. Her hair was drenched with the venom and her eyes were the two black voids she'd denied ever noticing before.

Soon after, Shannon's fear was substituted for rage. She looked back over at Carl who was now afraid, and wanted to slaughter him.

Shannon forced him off of her and knocked the knife out of his hand, as Ethan stood there, stunned. Then she bit him in the shoulder and he screamed. The sound of rustling footsteps echoed from outside. Shannon ripped out a large piece of his flesh and spit it out. Then he punched her and tried to crawl away, but she grabbed his legs and yanked him back. Now people were banging on the door, as Ethan remained frozen. She lifted her fists and pummeled his back, breaking bones in the process. Again, he screamed, but that

only made Shannon excited. So she lifted her fists to strike again, but policemen suddenly broke down the door.

Shannon's attention shifted to the cops, who were frightened at the sight of her, and utterly confused as to what was happening. She growled and ran towards them with every intention of ripping them to pieces. Both of the cops shot her multiple times.

Carl and Shannon laid motionless on the floor, bleeding to death. One cop ran to Carl's side as the other kept his eyes on Shannon.

"What *is* that?!" he exclaimed.

Ethan continued to stare at Shannon.

"I knew it," Ethan said.