

SHOCK COLLAR

Written by

Timothy Shireman

EXT. SUBURBAN JOGGING TRAIL - EVENING

Misty rain shrouds Whitehaven Estates, an affluent gated community with rows of spacious homes and manicured lawns.

Wet and annoyed, Middle-aged DIANE Curtis walks a small dog. She is focused on her cellphone, impatient and eager to be done with the potty break.

The dog does its business in the grass, sniffs at the bushes and barks excitedly. Diane yanks the leash and chokes the puppy as she tries to drag it away, oblivious to the figure lurking in the darkness.

DIANE

Cut it out, Banjo. Come on--

In the shadows, one gloved hand holds a stun gun, the other offers a treat which Banjo eagerly accepts. OFFSCREEN, we hear a crackling electric ZAP and a soft thud. Seconds later, a gasp is cut short by an odd zipping sound.

Diane staggers to her feet, hands clawing desperately at the zip tie around her throat. Wide, panicked eyes roll back and she crumples to the ground. Her body spasms and falls still.

The puppy wanders over and licks the face of its dead master. Diane's attacker collects the dog waste in a baggie and stuffs it into her mouth. Satisfied, the killer gives Banjo a playful scratch and vanishes back into the gloom.

TITLE CARD: SHOCK COLLAR

EXT. PLAYGROUND - MORNING

BENJAMIN Coates smokes a joint in the middle of a merry-go-round. It rotates slowly, pulled by a St. Bernard whose leash is tied to the kiddie ride. A treat dangles in front of the dog as it walks itself in pursuit of a snack.

Ben takes a toke and accidentally inhales the lit roach. He coughs and gags as he tumbles from his perch and falls comically to the dirt.

The dog wags its tail and gives Ben a sloppy kiss. He hands over the treat and dusts himself off. His flip phone rings. He recognizes GWEN Marley's number and answers reluctantly.

BENJAMIN

What do you want?

GWEN (O.S.)

I need a favor.

BENJAMIN
What kind of favor?

GWEN (O.S.)
Two of my best sitters are MIA. Can you do a few overnights for me?

BENJAMIN
You know I don't work for you anymore, right? You fired me.

GWEN (O.S.)
It's an emergency. C'mon, help me Ben Kenobi. You're my only hope.

BENJAMIN
Okay, but I want 100 nightly per pet or you can find someone else.

GWEN (O.S.)
Oh, I tried. Believe me, calling you was my absolute last resort.

BENJAMIN
My rate just went up 20 bucks.

GWEN (O.S.)
Fine, whatever. It's one dog, four nights. I'll text you the address.

Ben's phone beeps and he reads Gwen's message.

BENJAMIN
It's in The Estates? I would have charged more if I'd known that.

GWEN (O.S.)
Too late. I'll let security know you're coming and send the alarm codes when you get there.

Gwen abruptly hangs up. Ben looks over to the drooling dog.

BENJAMIN
Dammit, Smokey. Just when I thought I was out, she pulls me back in--

EXT. POLICE DEPARTMENT - SAME TIME

A COP exits the building and climbs into an idling cruiser. His partner flips on the flashing lights and they speed off.

COP
Victim #3. Y'know what that means?

EXT. MOBILE HOME PARK - EVENING

Ben's car pulls up to his shabby trailer. A sign on the door warns *BEWARE OF CAT*. He finds a certified letter for Gwen from PET2U. Tempted to open it, he tosses it in the trash.

Next door, DON Crandall snuffs his welding torch. He grabs two beers, walks over and offers one to Ben, who declines.

DON
You coming by to watch the game?

BENJAMIN
Can't. Gotta work tonight.

DON
Walter will be very disappointed.

BENJAMIN
I promise I'll make it up to him.
Where is that rascal? *WALTER!*

A curious Yorkie pokes its head through Don's doggie door. He spots Ben and dashes over to greet his favorite neighbor.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I'm doing some overnight visits
this week and I was wondering...

DON
(chuckles)
Of course I will.

BENJAMIN
You know where the spare key is?

DON
Oh sure, Gwen showed me.

Ben sighs, and Don immediately regrets the comment.

DON (CONT'D)
Sorry, dude. Walter misses her too.

BENJAMIN
It's okay. What's crazy is she's
the one who roped me into this gig.

DON
Really? She must be desperate.

BENJAMIN
Not my problem. The corporate
overlords call the shots now.

DON

I see those PET2U cars all over town. It's what, an app, right?

BENJAMIN

More like spyware. They wrote her a big fat check and she sold out.

DON

No, she GOT out. Out of this place, anyway. Good for her. No offense.

BENJAMIN

You make decent money, why do you still live here? No offense.

DON

I like it here. Besides, the funny thing about greener pastures is--

Walter hunches up and does a sizeable number two.

DON (CONT'D)

The grass is always greener where the dogs are shitting.

BENJAMIN

What're you feeding him, roadkill?

DON

Wolf's Tooth. Vet recommended it.

Ben pulls a baggie from his pocket and hands it to Don.

BENJAMIN

Thanks for checking in on Oskar.

DON

I'm still amazed you guys were able to save him. What a cool story.

Don scoops the dog deuce and twists the bag closed.

DON (CONT'D)

And you're on speaking terms again. That's an improvement, right?

BENJAMIN

I guess. I mean, when she left she told me to eat shit and die, so--

DON

Baby steps, dude. Baby steps.

INT. BEN'S TRAILER - MOMENTS LATER

Cheap furniture, a cat tree, and a stack of cardboard boxes. Ben enters the half-empty room and plops onto the sofa with a heavy sigh. A cat saunters over to rub against Ben's leg. He reaches down to pet Oskar and smiles through his tears.

BENJAMIN

Sometimes I wonder who saved who.

EXT. WHITEHAVEN ESTATES - NIGHT

Ben stops at the impressive security gate. A guard emerges from the booth holding a clipboard. His name tag reads CONRAD. He approaches the car, recognizes Ben and smiles.

CONRAD

Yo Benji! Long time no see, bro.
How's the lovely Ms. Gwendolyn?

BENJAMIN

She dumped me. Thanks for asking.

CONRAD

What? She just called the office.

BENJAMIN

I'm covering a few nights for her.

CONRAD

Wait, so she left your ass and here
you are doing her a personal favor?

BENJAMIN

It's not personal, Connie.
It's strictly business.

A skeptical Conrad hands Ben a visitor's pass.

CONRAD

I don't believe that for a second.

BENJAMIN

Where can I do a jay? Preferably
somewhere those cameras can't see.

CONRAD

I'd say the jogging trail, but the
cops found another body out there.

BENJAMIN

I heard on the news. Seems to be a
lot of that going on around here.

CONRAD

Police been crawling all over this place for days and got nothing. No fingerprints, no DNA and no motive.

BENJAMIN

A serial killer in The Estates?
There goes the neighborhood.

EXT. 664 WHITEHAVEN TRACE COURT - MOMENTS LATER

A well-lit street lined with enormous homes on sprawling properties with immaculate gardens and fenced-in yards.

Ben checks the address, parks in the circular driveway and climbs out. He grabs a backpack and walks to the front door. His outdated cellphone rings and Ben flips it open.

BENJAMIN

Right on time. Just got here.

GWEN (O.S.)

This'd be so much easier if you'd get a smartphone and use the app.

BENJAMIN

No dice. You'll have to pry this baby from my cold, dead hands.

A message from Gwen provides the code to open a lockbox. Ben removes the key and uses it. He enters the luxurious home to the sound of loud beeping and walks up to a flashing keypad.

GWEN (O.S.)

Here's the alarm code.

Ben reads the text and silences the noisy security system.

BENJAMIN

We're in. Where's the pup?

GWEN (O.S.)

In the kitchen. Her name's Poppy.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Ben finds a scruffy white terrier in a cage and offers a hand for inspection. After a few sniffs, Poppy's tail wags and she licks her new playmate as he sets her free.

GWEN (O.S.)

They left detailed instructions and I expect you to follow them, okay?

Ben finds the single sheet of paper and looks it over.

BENJAMIN
Relax. Poppy's gonna be just fine.

He crumples it up and drops it. Poppy barks in approval.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Trust me, I'm a professional. Bye.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Ben slides open the glass door leading to a spacious patio. Poppy scoots by him and takes off into the yard. He follows her out and pauses to light a joint while the dog pees.

The backyard is an oasis of lush grass and rose bushes encircled by a tall privacy fence. Ben smokes and Poppy bounds over to join his leisurely tour of the grounds.

BENJAMIN
Well, this doesn't suck. In fact--

Poppy finds a tennis ball for Ben to throw. He does and she chases it down before returning for another go.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship. Here you GO!

His next toss takes a bad hop and bounces over the fence.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
(dejected)
You gotta be fucking kidding...

Ben hastily formulates a plan when the tennis ball drops silently back into the yard and rolls to a stop at his feet.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
I'm really sorry about that. Guess I don't know my own strength. It won't happen again, okay?

His apology met with silence, Ben shrugs and turns to Poppy.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
Nice neighbors. Real friendly.
C'mon girl, let's go back inside and get something to eat.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

A stoned Ben sits on the floor eating peanut butter from the jar. He shares a spoonful with the little dog and pops it back in his mouth. Poppy smacks her lips at the gooey treat.

BENJAMIN

You like that? Here, try this.

He adds a healthy smear to a marshmallow. Poppy inhales the snack while Ben licks the spoon and stashes the jar in his backpack. He rummages through his supplies and smiles when he finds his edible objective: a pharmaceutical brownie.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Time for a little scooby snack.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Man and dog are fast asleep on the sofa. The sound of the sliding glass door wakes Poppy and she licks Ben's face to alert him. He grunts, rolls over and continues snoring.

A dark figure enters wearing gloves and holding a taser. The intruder offers Poppy a treat, but she stands her ground and growls. The killer takes one more step and Poppy barks.

Ben sits up with a start and brushes the potato chip crumbs from his shirt. He looks around. The sliding door is closed. A very anxious Poppy snuggles up to Ben and whimpers.

BENJAMIN

What is it? You have a nightmare?

He chuckles to himself and tries to comfort the nervous pup.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

You'll be okay, I'll protect you.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Ben lies cocooned in a blanket on the floor. Poppy is curled up on the sofa above. She wakes and hops down directly onto Ben's groin. He groans and staggers to his feet with a yawn.

Ben lets Poppy out the sliding door and steps on something crunchy. He lifts a foot to find the crumbled remains of a dog biscuit and scoops up the bits with a puzzled frown.

BENJAMIN

Ow! Where'd that come from?

Ben dumps the scraps in the trash and joins the dog outside. He sits and rolls a joint while Poppy does her business.

EXT. 664 WHITEHAVEN TRACE COURT - LATER

Ben exits the house with phone to ear and backpack in hand. He secures the deadbolt and stashes the key in the lockbox.

GWEN (O.S.)
How'd it go? Any issues?

BENJAMIN
Nope. Poppy's back in her crate, door's locked and the alarm is set.

GWEN (O.S.)
I know we haven't really talked since I left and you probably don't want to hear it, but thanks for doing this. It means a lot to me.

BENJAMIN
I'm not doing it for you. Poppy needs me and I won't let her down.

GWEN (O.S.)
I see. Just don't get too attached.

BENJAMIN
That's always been my problem.

GWEN (O.S.)
And picking up strays is mine.

BENJAMIN
Touché. Guilty as charged.

GWEN (O.S.)
I know this is awkward, but can we just keep it professional for now?

BENJAMIN
Sure. Whatever you say boss, it's your dime. I'll be back tonight.

GWEN (O.S.)
I never meant to hurt you Ben, I--

Ben imitates loud static noises over the phone.

BENJAMIN
What? -PSSH- Can't hear you. -PSSH- Phone cutting out. -PSSH- Gotta go.

Ben hangs up and starts his car. He rests his head on the steering wheel and quietly sobs. After a beat, Ben composes himself, pulls out of the driveway and heads for home.

EXT. MOBILE HOME PARK - LATER

Ben exits his trailer and exhales a huge cloud of smoke. Next door, Don grills a steak with Walter at his feet.

DON

Hey, there he is! How'd it go?

BENJAMIN

Piece of cake. Headed back to the Estates for round two tonight.

DON

Wait. Whitehaven Estates? Haven't you been watching the news?

BENJAMIN

Sure, but I need the cash. Besides, there's 2000 homes in the Estates. I mean, really, what are the odds?

DON

Pretty good. There's only a 0.05% chance you'll be brutally murdered.

BENJAMIN

I changed my mind. Forget what I said, okay? Never tell me the odds.

EXT. WHITEHAVEN ESTATES - EVENING

Ben drives to the entrance and flashes his pass. Conrad opens the gate and sends him through with a fist bump.

INT. 664 WHITEHAVEN TRACE COURT - MOMENTS LATER

Ben enters and silences the alarm. In the kitchen, he releases Poppy from her cage and she scampers outside. Ben kicks off his shoes and walks barefoot in the lush lawn. The excited pup brings Ben the tennis ball and he throws it.

BENJAMIN

Yup, this is the life.

Poppy ignores the ball and instead sniffs at the base of the fence. Ben ambles over as she urgently paws at the ground.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

C'mon girl, let's raid the fridge.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Ben shuts the refrigerator door and discovers that Poppy has left a trail of muddy pawprints across the kitchen floor.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Poppy and Ben share a bubble bath. He rinses away the suds.

BENJAMIN

You like to dig. It's OK. I get it.

INT. BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Poppy sits in front of a mirror being brushed and blow-dried by Ben. Both of them are wrapped in white towels and robes.

BENJAMIN

See? No harm done. Hole's filled in and the mess is all cleaned up. No one has to know. It's our secret.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ben is on the floor munching popcorn and watching a horror movie with Poppy cowering in his lap as the tension builds.

BENJAMIN

This crap is so predictable. We already know what's gonna happen.

A jump scare startles Poppy. She covers her eyes with a paw.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Oh no. I'm sorry, girl. We can watch something else.

Ben changes the channel. A TV news crew is broadcasting from the main entrance of the Estates. Police cars block the road and a chopper flies overhead. Conrad creeps in behind the REPORTER and smiles at the camera before being waved off.

REPORTER (T.V.)

We are live at Whitehaven Estates, where we've learned that the so-called Zip Tie Killer has claimed a 4th victim in as many weeks. Investigators remain tight-lipped, but sources indicate that this latest killing is indeed connected to the bizarre series of murders that have rocked this affluent community. An FBI task force has--

Ben thumbs the remote. A cartoon cat and mouse fight.

BENJAMIN

Man, this job is definitely not worth eleven five a year.