

Ogre

By Jason P. Henry

She walked the same path twice a day. Once was just before breakfast, the other just before dark. From her front porch it was three quarters of a mile to the stop sign. Right turn. One half mile to the abandoned house then across the street to sit on the large rock in front of it. The rock did not seem to serve a purpose but worked just fine for sitting. Fifteen minutes at the rock and then back to the other side of the street and one quarter of a mile to the crosswalk where she crossed left. She could have stayed on the same side of the road as the large rock and saved the crossing at the end of the road, but the sidewalk there did not seem as suitable for walking. Once across the road it was half a mile to the General Store with a large front porch and a covered swinging chair.

In the store, she purchased the usual sixteen ounce bottle of spring water. She did not say hello to Mary, the cashier, because she was wearing green today. With her bottle of water, she went to the swing and sat. Carefully, she twisted the lid off the plastic bottle and listened for the discreet tell-tale snap that meant the seal was broken. She placed the lid in her left pant pocket and set the swing to motion with her right foot. She did not use her left foot for it always seemed to create too much side-to-side and not enough to-and-fro.

She counted the backwards lifts: One. Two. Three. Four... and on the tenth she stopped the swing, again with her right foot. There was a railing behind her and she turned to peer over it. Carefully, she raised the water bottle and tipped it slightly. The crystal clear stream of 'natural' spring water began its calculated and precise descent toward an empty pail on the ground below. As always, the trickle landed perfectly, and the bottle emptied, forming a small pool in the bucket.

She turned away from the railing and removed the bottle's lid from her left pant pocket and twisted it firmly back on to the bottle's top. There was a waste basket just to the right of the swing and she dropped the bottle into it. She stood up slowly and stopped the motion of the swing that had been created by her leaving it.

Then it was half a mile from the porch to the crosswalk. She crossed the road and went one quarter mile before crossing to the perfect sitting rock and enjoying it for fifteen minutes. Then it was back across the street and one half mile from the abandoned house to a left turn at the stop sign. Three quarters of a mile more brought her safely to her front steps.

She had not always made the walk alone:

Her name was Tricia. Patricia Marie Jensen to be precise. She was thirty-two years young with short-cropped wavy blond hair and pale green eyes. She was stunningly beautiful and mentally detached- the result of a nervous breakdown in her early twenties. Her parents had both passed from cancer and her first husband was a louse. The stream of tragedy, poor luck and bad choices left her in a hospital, on a leash of anti-depressants. When the meds took hold, she was placed under daily exposure to group therapy until a rookie shrink, still wet from his emergence out of the Psychologist applicant pool, signed his name and stamped 'rehabilitated' on her release papers. Her leash was loosened and the State found her a modest house, bought with the trust fund left by her deceased parents, in a small town out of harm's way.

Four times a week, she was visited by an assigned life-skills assistant who drove her to and from the important places, making certain she had all of life's necessities. On the days that time allowed, her aide sat with her and kept her company - sometimes talking, sometimes listening but always studying. It was usually the same person who showed up to help her. The state felt that the familiarity accompanying a devoted case-worker would 'simulate' friendship and promote the improvement of Tricia's ability to become more independent. Still, the assistant was an employee who needed time off and took vacations. During those periods, a substitute was used. During those times, Tricia was not always cared for properly.

During one of Cynthia's vacations, a temporary assistant was assigned to Tricia. One week with this stranger in her house put Tricia back in the hospital for a month. She had been pushed around, berated and left in a grocery store so the sub could visit her boyfriend. When the police arrived, Tricia was in the Dairy aisle, tugging at her hair and screaming. Being past due on her anxiety pills, she had already thrown eight one-gallon milk jugs down the aisle, causing two different customers to slip and fall.

It was this incident that inspired Cynthia. Once Tricia was released from the hospital, Cynthia convinced the State to allow a companion animal. On the grounds of companionship, protection and an opportunity to care for a living thing – promoting responsibility and independence - the motion was granted. It was Cynthia who took Tricia to pick out her companion.

They spent two weeks driving from pet shop to shelter to pet shop again. Tricia mostly kept her distance from all of the animals. Not dog nor cat seemed to get her interest. It was a Friday when Cynthia parked her car and took Tricia for a walk through the park. Every now and then, a random stop was made to help Tricia deal with change and separation from routine. As they made their way through the public park, they came across a man with dreadlocks. On the ground in front of him were a large box and a sign that said 'puppies for sale'. It took a moment for Cynthia to realize Tricia had stopped to look. One puppy,

a small and roly-poly bundle of dark brown/black fur was peering over the box top and yipping as a puppy does. Slowly Tricia stepped closer and with each step she took, the pup showed more excitement. Tricia knelt on both knees in front of the box and the man with the dreadlocks lifted the puppy and sat it on the ground. The little bundle of fur immediately leapt at Tricia and began bathing her face with its tiny tongue. It was one of the rare moments that Cynthia actually heard Tricia laugh. Cynthia inquired about the breed of the pup and cringed when she got her answer. Still, the bond that already seemed to be forming between animal and patient seemed too solid to deny. A couple hundred dollars later, the pup and Tricia were on their way home to begin a life together.

The once-small pup grew at a rapid rate. Within a year, the dog was well on his way to two-hundred pounds and his head was the size of a large pumpkin. The German Rottweiler was huge *and* intimidating. Cynthia knew that no one would threaten her patient as long as Ogre was at her side.

Ogre's companionship had the desired effect on Tricia and she improved faster than she ever had. Just less than two years saw her living independently and doing most things on her own. A ride was provided if she needed to go anywhere that her feet would not take her, other than that, she was alone. Cynthia stopped in from time to time just to check on her, but those visits grew further and further apart. Eventually, Cynthia relocated and stopped showing up completely.

Caring for the pup had provided Tricia with a purpose. She had to feed the dog. Water the dog. Play with the dog. And walk the dog. Walking the dog was fun for her. She was taller for a woman, about five foot nine, but Ogre made anyone seem small. Before Ogre, Tricia did not venture out much. She was laughed at, ridiculed, threatened and sometimes pushed around. Rumors spread that she was a prostitute, pretending to be inept only to stay out of trouble with the law. To avoid the humiliation, Tricia simply stayed home.

Ogre left her no choice. The dog had to be walked and a dog that size needed to walk far. So the trip to the market and back became a ritual. She always stopped at the big rock to play with Ogre, once on the way to, and once on the way back. At the store, the monstrous animal had to stay outside. Tricia loved the swing and always sat in it as she provided her pet with a drink. An old bucket on the ground at the base of the porch served as a water dish. One sixteen ounce bottle was poured into it and she swung, forward and backward, while Ogre drank.

One day, about six months ago, Tricia had been harassed by a group of young men who had not known that Ogre was at the side of that porch. The boys teased and taunted Tricia and began approaching her. They were merely a few feet from the steps when the ring leader found himself on his back, held

down by the largest canine he had ever encountered. Ogre's teeth were bared by the curled back lips of his giant, salivating mouth. He growled, snarled and barked, sending drool flying in all directions. Tricia laughed as the once tough guy pissed himself with fear. His friends took off running as soon as they saw the dog but he was unable to follow them.

Tricia calmly and slowly stood from the swing and descended the three porch steps. She knelt on the ground beside the boy with the wet pants and her protector hovering over him. She smiled bigger than she had in a long while and taunted the kid.

"Who's on their back getting' it doggy style now? Maybe he'll give you a big wet kiss." she said as tears filled the captive's eyes.

"Get him off, please. I'm sorry. I'm sorry." The boy pleaded.

Tricia stood and walked all the way to the corner, slowly and laughing, before calling her guardian to her side. *"Come, Ogre, play time is over."*

The boy did not move until the dog was at its master's side. Only then did he stand and run as fast as his legs would carry him in the opposite direction of Tricia and Ogre.

A month later, Tricia was sitting on the swing waiting for Ogre to finish his water when she saw the teen who had harassed her coming down the road. He stopped when he saw dog and owner and went the other way. Tricia smiled with great satisfaction and left the porch. She patted her leg and called her dog but he did not come around the corner. She called a second time, though she never had the need before, but still he did not come. Worried, she rounded the porch corner and there on the ground lay Ogre. His head was beside the empty bucket and his body was still. Tricia ran to him and fell to her knees at his side. She shook him, called him, and tried to lift him. There was no life in Ogre and Tricia screamed.

Mary peered over the porch rail and the shop proprietor, also summoned by the cries, ran to her side. He did what he could to revive the dog, but it was too late. The shop owner had tried to turn the dog and when he removed his hand, it was covered in blood. He moved Ogre's giant head and found a crossbow bolt sticking out of his neck. He tried to console the distraught woman who had just lost her only friend. She would not allow his arm to go around her and only screamed louder when he tried to talk to her. Not knowing what to do, he went to a shed at the back of the store. He returned with a red wagon and a shovel. Even though it made the banshee like scream worse, he lifted the large dog into the wagon. It took all he had but he was able to pull it off, knowing she would not have managed.

"I can help with the rest if you need me, too. But only if you want. I'll be inside." And he left her to her pet.

Tricia sat there for a long while, staring at her murdered friend. Tears fell from her eyes like waterfalls, soaking the summer dress she had been wearing. When she finally stood, she did not call for the shop owner. She grabbed the shovel with one hand and the handle of the wagon with the other. Swinging the shovel over her shoulder, she heaved until the wagon began to roll. Once it started, she kept the momentum and did not stop. Car brakes squealed, people shouted, a truck swerved but her lonely funeral procession did not stop until she was in her own back yard.

She dug until well after dark, the ground lit only by the moon and the sixty watt bulb of her back patio light. When the hole was deep enough, she tipped the wagon and Ogre fell in. It took her two more hours to finish throwing the dirt back into the hole, covering Ogre until she could see only a mound of damp soil marking his grave. In her side yard, she found a rectangular section of plywood that she used as a tombstone. In her kitchen drawer, she found some acrylic paints and a brush... and a knife.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust,
Rest now, if you feel you must.
When morning sun fills the skies,
Then, again, will you arise.
You'll walk beside me as before,
My Protector, forever more.

She read the epitaph aloud, her voice filled with fury and vengeance. She held her left arm over the grave and with her right, she slid the blade across the outstretched wrist. A vermillion river flowed from her pale, moon-glow skin to the mound of moist earth below. The ground seemed to swallow her offering as if it had thirsted for decades. Unseen clouds moved in front of the moon, a final sheet of darkness blanketed the night and she went inside to bandage her arm.

That night her sleep was tumultuous and restless. She tossed and turned, nightmares of her late friend were rampant in her mind and haunted her slumber. When the first sunbeam intruded through her bedroom curtains, she sat straight up and screamed again. She was still clothed in the sundress she had worn the day before. It was now covered with earth and blood – some hers and some Ogre's. She did not bother to change as she left for her walk. It was, after all, a ritual.

She walked the same path, twice a day. Once was just before breakfast, the other just before dark. From her front porch it was three quarters of a mile to the stop sign. Right turn. One half mile to the

abandoned house then across the street to sit on the large rock in front of it. The rock did not seem to serve a purpose but worked just fine for sitting. Fifteen minutes at the rock and then back to the other side of the street and one quarter of a mile to the crosswalk where she crossed left. She could have stayed on the same side of the road as the large rock and saved the crossing at the end of the road, but the sidewalk there did not seem as suitable for walking. Once across the road it was half a mile to the General Store with a large front porch and a covered swinging chair.

In the store, she acquired the usual sixteen ounce bottle of spring water. She nodded a hello to Mary who was not wearing green. With her bottle of water, she went to the swing and sat. Carefully, she twisted the lid off the plastic bottle and listened for the discreet tell-tale snap that meant the seal was broken. She placed the lid in her left pant pocket and set the swing to motion with her right foot. She did not use her left foot for it always seemed to create too much side-to-side and not enough to-and-fro.

She counted the backwards lifts. One. Two. Three. Four... and on the tenth she stopped the swing, again with her right foot. There was a railing behind her and she turned to peer over it. Carefully, she raised the water bottle and tipped it slightly. The crystal clear stream of 'natural' spring water began its calculated and precise descent toward an empty pail on the ground below. As always, the trickle landed perfectly, and the bottle emptied, forming a small pool in the bucket.

She turned away from the railing and removed the bottle's lid from her left pant pocket and twisted it firmly back on to the bottle's top. There was a waste basket just to the right of the swing and she dropped the bottle into it. She stood up slowly and stopped the motion of the swing that had been created by her leaving it.

Then it was half a mile from the porch to the crosswalk. She crossed the road and went one quarter mile before crossing to the perfect sitting rock and enjoying it for fifteen minutes. Then it was back across the street and one half mile from the abandoned house to a left turn at the stop sign. Three quarters of a mile more brought her safely to her front steps.

She kept the same routine every day, even after Ogre passed. However, it was only that first day that she wore the soiled and blood stained dress. No one spoke to her. No one bothered her. Her water at the store was always free. She always sat in the swing and poured the bottle into an empty bucket at the base of the porch. Sometimes people could hear her talk to Ogre. Some even said that she appeared to stop and play with him. Her delusions consumed her and she seemed unable to let go of her friend.

Two months passed and she was on her evening walk when the young man who had wet himself made another appearance. She was sitting on the porch swing when he and three friends showed up in

front of the store.

"Here, Puppy. Come here, Boy." he taunted. *"Where's your big tough dog, Whore? I want to play with him."*

Tricia smiled bigger than she had in a while. She stood from the swing, descended the stairs and stopped. She patted her leg and called for Ogre. She waited only a brief moment before walking towards the corner.

"What a psycho bitch! She's calling her dog. Where is he, huh?" The boys hollered and laughed.

Tricia simply smiled... and walked.

She crossed the road at the abandoned house and went to the big comfy rock, perfectly made for sitting. It was only moments before her antagonists made their presence behind her known. They had followed her quietly from the store, waiting for an opportunity.

"Let's see who ends up on their back this time, Bitch!" the ring leader yelled. *"Not so tough without your dog, are ya?"*

Patricia Marie Jensen did not move. She sat, smiling. The boys made their way closer to her. They were within five feet and Tricia used one hand to slowly ease a spaghetti strap off her pale shoulder, exposing the smooth skin at the top of her breast. She repeated the motion with the other strap and her top slid slowly down. She cupped one breast with each hand and began to rub gently, slowly... seductively. She never stopped smiling.

"You want it? Come and get it." she whispered.

The creep in front of her bit his lip with eager anticipation and said, *"I always knew you were a cheap whore."*

Tricia's eyes narrowed and her smile straightened as the teen took another step closer. She pulled her top back up just as Ogre came from the side of the house and tore into the first punk. Tricia sat and watched as the first three boys fell to the ground. The one with the big mouth stood, petrified as his friends were ripped open by the mammoth dog.

Ogre was in front of him now, snarling and growling with fangs bared. The boy did not have a chance to move before his throat was in the dog's mouth. His screams were silenced before they even formed, before he even hit the ground. Blood poured from the edges of the Rottweiler's mouth as the young man's body trembled and shook, as his arms and legs flailed wildly. There was one last convulsion and his body went limp. His eyes went vacant. Vengeance was had. Tricia watched as her protector dragged each corpse behind the abandoned house.

When all bodies were gone, Ogre came to his master and they frolicked for awhile in front of the big rock. Clouds moved in front of the sun, dimming the daylight.

"Come, Ogre, play time is over." Tricia called to her pet.

She finished the walk home with her companion at her heel and led him to the back yard. The dirt mound of the grave had begun to grow new grass. Brown was now a pale green as new life spouted from the earth. She leaned down and kissed Ogre on the nose.

"Who's mamma's good boy?" She cooed as she scratched him behind the ears.

The dog barked, silently, and tried to wag its stubby tail.

"Now go lay down." She ordered.

Ogre immediately obeyed and leapt into the air. He slowly faded into the ground as he landed and Tricia went inside. She ate dinner and went to bed early, sleeping better than she had in a couple of months.

Bright and early the next morning she awoke, had breakfast, and went to her front porch. She patted her leg and called Ogre for his morning walk. As he came running around the corner, tongue hanging from the side of his mouth, doggy-slobber spraying everywhere, she laughed harder than she had in a while.

© 2011 Jason P. Henry