

Curse of the Cockapoo

The scene of exquisite horror in the dining room was the most chilling one DI David Johnson had ever seen. He examined the room, taking notes, wondering what could have caused such an unexpected tragedy. But the oddest, most surreal thing about this occasion was not the macabre scene before him, but the family's cockapoo. The dog sat in his cage, eerily calm. This was Johnson's third encounter with the puppy.

The first owners were a couple that had just moved in together. According to reports DI Johnson had gathered, Chanel and Jay had decided to adopt a puppy as a way to give a warming effect to their new home. Jay was an electric engineer, a sensible, down-to-earth and loving gentleman, while Chanel was an interior designer. While also sweet and hardworking, Chanel could be a bit bossy and controlling sometimes, according to Jay's parents. Chanel had taken it on herself to find the house and decorate it, and she apparently had her and Jay's entire future wedding planned down to the last detail. Jay was to propose to her at twilight on Le Pont des Arts in Paris when they were 28 and 29.

While DI Johnson had not witnessed any of these happenings in person, he liked to imagine how events might have unfolded. A man of scrutiny, he lavished the minutest details, because those could offer keen insight that others had overlooked. After interviewing family and neighbors, he had reconstructed what he considered a fairly reliable narrative. Since Jay was allergic to dogs, they needed a hypoallergenic dog, and after much research and debating, they settled on a miniature cockapoo. Chanel had found Teddy advertised online and was immediately transfixed by the photo. Something about the puppy's eyes entranced her. Without bothering to phone Jay at work and ask him, she hopped into her Mini and floored her way to Staffordshire.

The breeder's house was out in the country on a quaint farm. Johnson had interviewed her about the day Chanel came to adopt the puppy. Morgana Strange was a lady with silvery hair and eyes that had a violet hue, who looked to be in her mid-thirties. She welcomed Chanel in, talking in an almost nonchalant tone as she showed her guest to the sitting room. "He was the only male in the litter," she explained to Chanel as she welcomed her inside. "All of his sisters have already been sold." The 10-week old puppy was huddled with his mother, a cocker spaniel with a gorgeous red coat that shimmered in the light streaming through the window.

The puppy was like a tiny ball of fluff--he had poofy white fur with streaks of auburn, which he had clearly gotten from his mother. His beady eyes shined and he wagged his tail as Chanel approached. Looking into his warm, brown eyes, she felt drawn to him. She knelt down and stroked his tiny head. He licked her hand.

"That's odd," said Morgana. "He normally growls and nips at strangers."

Chanel didn't even seem to notice as she picked him up and drew him close to her face. He wagged his tail and he licked her face. She felt as if she had drowned in his eyes.

"The father's out back," Morgana said, clearing her throat.

It took Chanel considerable effort to pull her eyes away from the puppy, as if pulling herself out of bed after waking from a wonderful dream. She laid the puppy back down next to his mother and followed the breeder outside. A miniature poodle with a white coat ran up to them, barking and propping himself up on Chanel's leg. Chanel smiled and scratched the father's head. He licked her hand. Both of the parents were beautiful--well-proportioned for their sizes with healthy coats and symmetrical features. This puppy would be handsome.

"I've been breeding dogs for years," aid Morgana as they walked back inside, with the father slipping in behind them.

"Mhmm," said Chanel, as if not even hearing the breeder. She hurried back over to the puppy, who was now running around the room, and picked him up again. She cradled him in her arms like a baby and kissed him. Again, those eyes melted her heart. "I'll take him."

"What?" said Morgana, blinking in disbelief. "Are you sure? Don't you have any more questions? Don't you want to play with him and take him out in the field for a bit?"

"No, I'm sure," said Chanel, not even looking up. "How much?"

"There's probably something I should mention--"

Chanel cut the breeder off in mid sentence: "I said, 'How much?'"

When Jay returned home that night, he found Chanel sitting in the kitchen, the puppy in her arms. The lights were turned down low, and in the faint light, an uncanny smile flickered on Chanel's lips.

"What..who...is this?" blabbered Jay.

"His name is Teddy." Jay was sure not what, but something in the look of Chanel's eyes made the hairs on his neck stand on end.

The puppy whined incessantly through first the night, and Chanel got up every time to comfort him. “Must you get up every time he whines?” Jay asked as Chanel returned for what seemed the fourth time.

“Yes,” Chantel said, slipping under the covers. “He needs me. He’s my baby.”

“I think you’re being too clingy.”

“Like I care.” Chanel faced the edge of the bed and turned out the light.

At first Teddy was territorial and possessive. He growled and nipped at Jay whenever he tried to touch him, and he even growled when Jay got close to Chanel. He watched Jay hauntingly with his brown eyes. Regardless of his partner’s preoccupation with Teddy and the dog’s eccentricities, Jay couldn’t find it in himself to grow angry at him. With one look into Teddy’s eyes, Jay’s simmering anger cooled. Within a few days, Teddy warmed up to Jay, and he, too, could touch and cuddle him without a growl or a bite.

Then everything seemed to fall into place. Everyone was smitten with Teddy. Although the puppy growled and bit, no one could find it in their hearts to be angry at him. His pleading, loving look made people forget about the growls and the bites. Teddy was so loving and affectionate that he followed Chanel and Jay everywhere--he kept a protective eye on his new parents, scrutinizing all guests with the eyes of a guard dog. It seemed like every moment, Teddy was whining and nipping at Chanel and Jay’s ankles, begging to be picked up and cuddled. Wherever Chanel or Jay left, Teddy would whimper and paw at the door and then burst into hyperactive sprints around the room when they returned. Within a month, Teddy went to sleep cuddled between Jay and Chanel on their bed.

Then, one windy and rainy autumn night, a police car pulled in front of Chanel’s and Jay’s house. Neighbors watched in shock and horror as, in a few minutes, a police officer led Chanel handcuffed, splattered with blood, out of the house and into the back of the police car. “Her face was utterly frazzled,” said one neighbor. “It was like she wasn’t herself.” Not long after, an ambulance pulled up to the house. The medics left the house carrying a body bag on a stretcher.

At the police station, DI Johnson sat across a table from Chanel, whose hands lay on the table. A tape recorder lay on the table next to him. Johnson was a slightly pudgy, middle-aged man with a comb-over that poorly covered his bald spot. It had been a long day--the police were understaffed and overworked. He had been arresting and questioning homicide suspects all day. Homicides, especially knife crimes, had skyrocketed during the pandemic. TV shows and crime novels made the homicide division look glorious and exciting, but his job was hardly a

made-for-TV special. Just that afternoon, he had questioned a woman who had stabbed a six-year-old girl to death in a park.

Johnson looked at Chanel's assigned lawyer, who stood in the corner with a disaffected look on his face. He was a tall and skinny man, his brown eyes glazed over. A few wisps of white hair remained on his scalp. He simply shrugged. Johnson signed heavily. Chanel had said nothing when offered a lawyer, and so one was called for just to follow protocol and protect themselves. Public attorneys. Who knew how many clients had been assigned to this man today? Twenty? Thirty? So much for justice.

Johnson eyed the defendant. 5'7", dirty blond, hazel eyes, skinny. She didn't look like a murderer, but the criminal mind was complex. He hit the tap recorder and began: "Can you tell me anything that could explain the situation?"

"Teddy made me do it," Chantel said, coolly, almost as if it weren't her talking.

DI Johnson's eyes widened. The tone of her voice sent chills through his body. "Teddy? Who's Teddy?"

"He made me do it."

Detective Johnson eyed the lawyer, but he just shrugged again. Johnson kept pressing her for details, but all he could get from Chanel was, "Teddy made me do it." It wasn't until he questioned her parents that he discovered that Teddy was the dog.

The next morning, Chanel was found hanging from the ceiling of her cell with her bedsheets tied around her neck.