

THE PITS

Life Literally Bit Me in the Ass

A MEMOIR

CHERYL EDWARDS

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PART ONE

THE ATTACK

1. NO GOOD DEED

She remembered! I thought, fishing the silver key out from under the antique water pump decorating the front porch. As a real estate broker and former latchkey kid, I'd found trusting others to leave the key was usually half the battle.

Little did I know.

I paused at the front door, somewhat hesitant to tromp into another person's house, even with permission—another thing I learned from being in the real estate business for over twenty years. Even though owners usually aren't home for showings, it's still customary to ring the doorbell to announce yourself, just in case. However, even that's not foolproof, as I've surprised a few sound sleepers in my day.

I did a quick mental inventory. My Friend and her daughter were out of town, supposedly having left the night before. And her youngest son, who mainly lived with his father, was away at a lacrosse tournament.

Yup. Nobody's home.

After all, that's why I was there. Someone had to feed the dogs.

No need to ring the doorbell. Why would I when nobody was home to answer it? Besides, everyone knows that's a surefire way to get any dog riled up, let alone three pit bulls.

Once inside, I made my way through the foyer and living room, heading for the kitchen island. A quick tap at my sides reminded me I didn't have pockets in my gym shorts, so I tossed my purse, sunglasses, and her house key onto the marble-looking quartz counter. Four stools were evenly spaced along one side, and I recall noting how it was so big she probably could have fit two more. I loved this house.

Since she said the dogs would be in the garage, I paused when I thought I heard something, trying to figure out who or what it might be.

Even though I never ring the doorbell when visiting my parents or best friends, I still announce myself as I walk in with a cheery *I'm here!* Similarly, if one of the kids *had* stayed behind, I wanted to give them a heads-up to avoid catching them off guard. When I'd surprised those sound sleepers I mentioned before, it wound up scaring the crap out of all of us.

As for the dogs, while they knew me', I'm sure they weren't expecting me, so I suppose I wanted to give them some notice, too. Though, I doubt they cared who fed them, so long as someone did.

"Hey, puppers! Who's hungry? Who's gotta go potty?" I called out in a sweet voice.

No shocker, as soon as the first word escaped my mouth, they all started barking. My Friend's dogs ordinarily barked at people. Hell, most dogs ordinarily bark at people. So, as far as I was concerned, everything seemed fine.

Thinking back, I now realize it might have sounded a little more intense than regular barking, but then again, there were three of them. When their barking subsided as quickly as it had started, I took the outburst as their way of saying, *Of course, we're here. Now hurry up, lady! We're starving and about to pee our pants!*

I knew the home and its layout well because I'd sold it to My Friend's sister three months before. Heading for the garage, I worked my way down the main hall, passing the pantry, her daughter's bedroom, and the kids' bathroom. At the far end of the hallway was her son's bedroom, but just before that, off to the left, there was a small three-foot by four-foot hallway with two doors. One led to the

three-car garage, one led to the laundry room, and both were closed.

This shorter hallway had a recessed wall. In the model home, the builder had installed a bank of built-in cubbies to hold coats, shoes, bags, and backpacks. Buyers with young families loved these drop stations, which were all the rage among builders. However, My Friend had other plans.

Being super crafty and not afraid to use power tools of any sort, she'd designed and constructed a built-in desk to fit the empty space. She'd told me about the desk, but this was my first time seeing it, so it drew my attention. I was impressed. Not only by her workmanship but also by how confidently she tackled more sophisticated home improvement projects. I can hang pictures, chalk paint furniture, and address anything that gives me an excuse to bust out my hot glue gun, but that's about the extent of my DIY skills. I'm no power-saw girl, that's for sure.

The plan, or at least how I saw it playing out, was to let the dogs in from the garage and then shoo them out the back door to tend to their business. Meanwhile, I'd throw fresh water and food in their bowls. Then, while they were busy eating their breakfast, I'd see myself out the front door and lock up.

When showing properties, dogs usually aren't left at home, but it's not uncommon for listing agents to warn that a cat might try to sneak out. Since I didn't know if My Friend's dogs might try to do the same, to play it safe, I thought it best to keep them preoccupied. Having just come from the gym, I'd already had my workout for the day, so I didn't need to be chasing any escapees down the block.

It was around 9:30 a.m. and sunny, but since there weren't any windows in the little hallway and since I hadn't flipped on the lights, it was darker than the rest

of the house. That's why, aside from noticing the new desk, my eyes were also drawn to the line of bright light streaming in from the gap below the laundry room door. The gap was definitely taller than it should've been. The house had been brand new when she bought it, but sadly, it was way too common for subcontractors to cut corners, and I was disappointed that we hadn't caught that detail at her final walk-through.

Dancing in the light I could make out small shadows. I stared, confused, wondering if one of the kids *had* stayed behind. However, upon hearing snorting and the *tap-tap-tap* of nails on the tile floor, it clicked.

The dogs are in there! But wait. She said they'd be in the garage. She probably just changed her mind. Or maybe I remembered the directions wrong. Oh well. It doesn't matter.

Eager to get to the task at hand, I swung the door open.

2. SURROUNDED

The dogs immediately surrounded me. Kaya, the only female, barked nonstop. Her coloring was technically brindle but more black than brown. Even though the barking was annoying, I didn't sweat it. Since some dogs are barkier than others, I suspected that was just her nature. However, when her lips started to curl up on the sides, I could tell she wasn't happy. Still, I just took it as she missed her mommy and wasn't thrilled with the substitution.

Get over it, doggo. Mom's not home. It's me or nothing.

I reassured them with a sticky-sweet mix of "I know, I know," "It's okay," and "It's just me" in my higher-than-normal tone. It's the voice I usually reserve for talking to little kids and meeting new people, but unfortunately, it did little to calm the dogs down or win them over. I wasn't

surprised. If I'm being honest, I'd had mixed results with the little kids and new people, too.

I reached out to give one of them a reassuring pat on the head, but their barking intensified before I could get remotely close. Now, even faster and louder than before, it was crystal clear—comfort from me was *not* what they were looking for.

Enough. Quit trying to make them love you, and just do what you came here to do.

That's when Red, the older, reddish-colored male, began jumping up at me. This was definitely no gimme-paw trick. He was coming at me with his face, and if I wasn't mistaken, he appeared to be aiming for *my* face. I could tell it wasn't to cover me in slobbery kisses, but I blew it off, chalking it up to his way of conveying that he wasn't happy, either. I silently blamed the other dog, Kaya, for overreacting first, as I knew dogs could pick up on each other's vibes.

Gee. Thanks a lot, girl.

I still didn't sense I was in danger, although there was no way in hell I could've imagined what was about to happen. However, I had to admit these guys were proving harder to handle than I expected. It bordered on overwhelming, and more than anything, I didn't appreciate the hassle. This was supposed to be a favor, a quick stopover on my way home.

Yet I could barely move. I wasn't just surrounded by three big dogs. Each of them was in constant contact with me, pressing and shoving their meaty bodies against mine.

When My Friend and I had made plans the night before, she'd mentioned that Red might prefer to hang out in the garage rather than in the house or the yard. He was getting up in age, and she thought he might be more comfortable where it was cooler or where he could be alone.

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Our current situation was far too chaotic for the cramped hallway. And since it was easy to reach the door to the garage behind me without moving, I eased it open. I hoped Red would jump at the chance to retreat to the solitude of the garage, giving me one less dog to wrangle. And he did—kind of.

He started out the door but only made it three-quarters of the way through before looking back over his shoulder. Then, for whatever reason—fear of missing out perhaps—he made a U-turn, and we were right back where we'd started.

I still couldn't move without stepping on the dogs, so I told them, more forcefully this time, to knock it off and settle down. Again, it didn't help.

Since they say the best way to tackle a problem is head-on, I opted to stick with the original plan, making it my sole mission to get them out the back door. And the quicker the better, since I assumed that's where they wanted to be, hence all the fuss.

Seeing how the dogs were still pressed against me on all sides, they had to move before I could. As I leaned into them with my thighs, the pressure and weight of the dogs felt like I was trying to walk in deep water. Moving ever so slowly, I carefully nudged them with each step in the direction I wanted to go. I didn't want to shove them and piss them off any more than they already were, but I had to push them firmly enough that they got the idea. I'd liken it to moving a bee out of the way. You don't want to make any wild movements, make it angry, and risk getting stung, so you push it out of the way calmly and steadily. Same here. I was intent on remaining calm, wishfully thinking the dogs would then pick up on *my* vibe, follow suit, and settle the hell down.

This is how we made our way back down the long hallway and through the kitchen—all three dogs

surrounding me, barking and ramming themselves into me. We moved like this literally the entire length of the house, which was over forty feet. I know because I still had a copy of the floor plan. Although technically, I imagine we walked even farther since we didn't follow a straight line. Instead, the four of us zigzagged our way through the house like a tumbleweed, a tangled mess traveling the path of least resistance, our direction dependent on whichever dog yielded the most.

As they rotated around me, I suspected they were working as a team, instinctually herding me—as their ancestors would've done with some runaway sheep—but it felt like being caught in a dog tornado. However, this was more of the F1 variety. It wasn't severe enough to warrant the National Guard, but I realized I should probably take precautions. And like a real national disaster, feeding the dogs had become super inconvenient and frustrating, so I hoped it would be over soon.

With the dogs constantly moving, it was tough to keep tabs on where their feet were at all times, and since I couldn't see my feet either, I walked with slow, careful steps. The last thing I wanted to do was step on one of them inadvertently, considering their teeth were never more than a few inches from my legs. I still didn't think the dogs would bite me just for the sake of biting me, but I wouldn't put it past them to lash out if I hurt one of them. Each step was like walking through a minefield. I knew one wrong move, and this operation was going to go south real quick.

Each dog took turns walking behind me, alongside me, and backward in front of me. This constant changing of positions seemed funny to me, but only in the preposterous sense. Probably because I did the same thing when I moved something heavy.

For instance, say I was helping to carry a couch, and I was the one walking forward. If it was too heavy, I'd get it in my head that the person on the other end walking backward had the "easier" end, so I'd want to switch positions. Then, after they changed with me, I'd start to think maybe I *did* have the better end to begin with, so I'd want to switch back again. I wondered if the dogs were doing the same thing.

When the four of us eventually made it to the sliding glass door at the back of the house, I metaphorically breathed a sigh of relief.

Finally! Time to get on with the plan.

3. FIDDLING WITH LOCKS

The muddy cowboy boots lying haphazardly on top of the multicolored rug in front of the door made it look like people and pups were expected to wipe their feet. This was already a bigger ordeal than I had imagined, and I needed less to contend with, not more.

Thank God these guys are headed out and not in.

Bumping and tripping over each other—no thanks to those damn cowboy boots—I worried I'd step on a paw or topple over them. Lord knows that was the last thing I needed. If these dogs were so ticked off when I was merely trying to feed them, I couldn't imagine how pissed they'd be if I tackled them, even if by accident.

At first, I thought the thick rug was the heavy braided kind. The ones everyone seemed to have in the 1970s. But the more we slid around on it, the more I suspected it was the newer variety made of scraps of fabric tied together. The dogs were still in herding mode, still circling and nudging me, and as they continued to dance around me, the more the rug bunched up around our feet. The

twisted rug, combined with the weight of the boots, had cemented mine in place—and way closer together than I would have liked.

My situation left me no choice but to unlock the door from where I stood. While I could reach the lock with no problem, as with most sliding glass door locks, I had to fiddle with it a bit. First, there was a tiny plastic stick-like lever that I had to tick to the right or left, but I had no idea which direction meant locked or unlocked—I still don't. Then, just above that lock, was another that I had to slide up or down. Again, I hadn't a clue which did which. Hence my difficulty.

As a realtor, I open and close doors all day long. The problem is that not only is each sliding glass door different, but not every homeowner uses both locking mechanisms. So, sometimes, when I think I'm unlocking a door, I'm actually locking it. That's why I need to play with them a bit. Even though I consider myself a reasonably intelligent and experienced door unlocker, getting My Friend's slider unlocked, with the added stress of trying not to trip or fall, took longer than you might think.

Still convinced the dogs were just doing the pee-pee dance, whenever I did manage to open the door, I expected them to zoom right past me into the yard. I wanted to give them plenty of room to get around me, but at the rate we were going, it looked like I'd be trapped in place by the dogs, with no choice but to remain standing where I was, smack in their way.

Making matters worse, the curtain panels that hung next to the door covered the lock. So, while I could reach the lock just fine, I couldn't see it. My Friend had brought these curtains from their last house, but now, in the heat of the moment, they seemed more decorative than functional, and I cursed them under my breath for being pointless and in my way.

I attempted to unlock it by feeling my way, but after a few failed attempts, it was obvious I needed to hold the curtains back to see what I was doing. They were made of thick velvet, which pooled in a pile on the floor, making them extra heavy. I could have used two hands to hold them back, but I still needed to monkey with the lock, which I fiddled with single-handedly for another minute or so.

When the lock finally disengaged, it made a loud, abrupt sound—like a single clap, but more forceful and metal-sounding.

That's when the dog shit hit the fan.

4. BITTEN

As soon as the lock clicked, I felt a sudden stab of pain in my leg.

It felt like someone had shoved scissors straight into my calf muscle and not the super sharp kind hair stylists use; I'm talking an old, crappy, dull pair, like the kind you'd find in your grandma's junk drawer. If you've ever stabbed yourself in the leg with one of those big three-pronged forks used to hoist Thanksgiving turkeys or gotten your leg stuck in a medieval blacksmith's vice, I imagine it felt similar to that.

To say I was stunned would be a colossal understatement. At first, it didn't even register as a bite. I thought I'd been stung by a bee. Even though we were inside, considering there were no scissors or giant turkey forks nearby, that was the best guess I could come up with. Clearly, my mind was having difficulty making sense of the information it had been given.

Stupefied, I whipped around to look behind me to see what still had a lock on my calf. But just as I turned,