

Kyle

by Andre Hall

24

There he was again. Kenneth noticed him out of the corner of his eye through the kitchen's sliding glass door. Kenneth's teeth grinded together with so much force that most would fear permanent damage. Damage was the last thing on his mind now. All of his teeth could shatter for all he cared. There was so much anger coursing through his body he didn't know what to do with it. His knuckles turned white as he tightened his grip on his *#1 Dad in the World* coffee mug. The sight of that wretched beast emerging from the wetness of the foggy forest made his blood boil.

It gave its body a shake as it stepped around the bear traps placed oh-so-strategically around the outskirts of the trees. Hot coffee began to splash out of Kenneth's trembling mug and onto his shaking wrist. The burning sensation on his skin simply made him angrier. He couldn't even begin to express how badly he wished to inflict an even greater pain on this revolting creature. The mangy monster launched itself over the barbed wire fence that separated the forest from suburbia. It stopped and aimed his horrible head toward the sliding glass door. It's vile eyes locked onto Kenneth like two soul-eating vortexes. Kenneth's inferno couldn't burn anymore intensely. Today was the day this demon would finally die.

"Kyle's back!"

Kenneth cringed as he heard the eager youthful cries of his sons as they sprinted towards the sliding glass door. He whirled around and extended his coffee-free hand. The kids came to a disappointed halt.

"Dylan! Aiden! What did I say about that thing!"

"But Dad," whimpered Dylan, "Kyle's just hungry!"

"We just wanna give him some food!" added Aiden.

Their father shook his hot head, "You are forbidden from interacting with that shaitan ever again!"

Kenneth felt a gentle hand on his shoulder. He

turned to see his wife offering Dylan an opened can of vienna sausages. “You two just go give this to Kyle and then run right back in,” she said with an encouraging grin on her face.

The kids beamed. “Thanks Mom!” Kenneth watched in horror as they ran towards the sliding glass door. The desperate desire to hold the door closed was diminished by his wife’s hand resting on his shoulder. The kids slid the door open and ran to feed their visitor. Kenneth wanted to scream. His kids were running straight towards the beast. He hastily turned to face his wife. She winced as the speed sent coffee flying from his mug and into the vase of daffodils on the kitchen table.

“What the heck, Cindy! Do you want our kids to get devoured by that mangy little devil!?” Kenneth jabbed an accusatory finger towards his wife.

Cindy calmly lowered her husband’s trembling finger. “Jesus Ken, they’ll be fine.” She smirked at him. “Besides, he’ll be so full of sausages that he won’t be hungry enough to even think about eating them.”

Kenneth slammed his mug onto the table. Cindy winced again as a wave of coffee splashed all over her grandmother’s red silk tablecloth. Kenneth’s angry finger returned. “You think this is funny?! You wanna make jokes about our only two children being consumed by that wretched beast!?”

Cindy lowered his finger once again. “Ken, it’s just a coyote. A coyote’s never hurt anybody!”

Kenneth’s eyes widened. “You kidding!? Never hurt anybody!? Why don’t you say that to these two!” He yanked a newspaper off of the table. He gave it a little shake in an attempt to get it to stop dripping coffee, then extended his angry finger to point at the headline.

“Two Children Dead After Irresponsible Mother Allows Them To Feed Coyote!” read Kenneth.

Cindy took the newspaper and began skimming the lines of the article. She rolled her eyes and tossed it back onto the table. She frowned as it glided along the puddle of coffee and fell to the floor, then turned to her husband. “This mother told the kids to give the coyote cheese slices. The

kids didn't even unwrap them, that poor coyote."

Kenneth's agitated finger began to rocket up again, but Cindy forced it down before it could finish taking off. He grumbled, "You feel bad for that grotesque monstrosity?! Are you gonna feel bad for this repugnant abomination when it eats our kids?!"

Cindy let go of his finger. "Why do you keep calling him these awful things? What did you call him in front of the kids, a *shaitan*? What does that even mean?"

"It's an evil spirit in Islamic theology."

"Repugnant abomination? *shaitan*? Where are you getting these words?"

"My word-a-day calendar."

"Oh God. I guess that's the last time I let the kids pick out your Christmas gift."

They looked out the window to see the coyote eating a sausage from Dylan's hand. The boy chuckled as the coyote nuzzled its head against his knee. "I love you, Kyle!" exclaimed Dylan.

Aiden bent down and gave the coyote a hug. "Yeah, you're the best, Kyle!"

Kenneth banged his fist against the glass. "No it's not! That thing is not the best!"

Cindy put her hands on her hips. "Kenny, what do you have against this coyote?"

Kenneth spun around to face her, eyes wild. "Why do they love that *thing* so much! That *thing* doesn't even do anything! All it does is mosey into our backyard and hang around until it gets food! What's so great about that!?"

Cindy cupped her face in her hands. "It's cute!"

Kenneth raked his fingers through his hair. "Cute!? You kidding? The dress shirt that Dylan tried to shred in the filthy garbage disposal looked better!"

Cindy began to throw her hands up in protest, but ended up accidentally snagging the bottom of the tablecloth with her right pinkie. She quickly withdrew her hand to dodge the coffee droplets that were launched into the air and glared at Kenneth. "No way! That shirt was so nice, it didn't even look like a shirt afterwards!"

Kenneth's raging finger directed itself out the window.
"That thing doesn't even look like an animal!"

Kenneth glared at the coyote. Its matted fur was an indecisive concoction of gray, black, and brown patches, all of it carrying a subtle yellowish tint. Its obnoxious, almost cat-like ears fluttered as the wind brushed against them. Scraggly whiskers that you could pick a lock with jutted out from its snout in every direction. Aiden giggled as its feather duster of a tail brushed against his hand. Dylan scratched underneath its chin. The sight of his boys' delicate skin coming in contact with that bristly, wild fur made Kenneth's skin crawl.

"You think there's nothing wrong here? That our children are just putting their hands all over that disease-ridden scoundrel?" Kenneth demanded.

Cindy's dimples emerged as if to mock Kenneth's tone.
"How do you know he's disease-ridden? Have you seen his medical records?"

Kenneth swiveled around and erected two angry fingers towards his wife. "Two coffins!"

The furrow of her brow sent the dimples away. "Huh?"

"Two child-sized coffins!" Kenneth could feel the vein bulging in his sweaty forehead.

Cindy's eyes grew wide. "Woah woah, Ken--"

"Our two beautiful little boys in two child-sized coffins at their child-sized funerals because you let them fondle a rancid beast from the woods! Is that what you want, Cynthia!?"

Cindy raised her hands in defense. "Okay, okay! Jesus Christ, Kenneth! Scream any louder and your stubble will vibrate off of your face." She slid the sliding glass door open. "Dylan, Aiden, it's time to say goodbye to Kyle and come back in."

"C'mon, just a little longer," whined Dylan.

"Yeah, just five more minutes," added Aiden.

"You get *zero* more minutes!" hollered Kenneth.

The boys' bottom lips came forward to pout as they bent down to give Kyle goodbye hugs. "Happy now?" Cindy said with a tone much darker than the one she had used for most of the conversation.

Kenneth took a deep breath. “I’m satisfied,” he mumbled, attempting to regain his composure. He retrieved his mug from the table and brought it to his lips. He frowned as he realized it no longer had coffee in it. He dragged it along the table in an attempt to scoop some coffee up from the puddle. He sighed angrily as his cup just ended up splashing the now lukewarm liquid onto his black felt slippers. Cindy shook her head and moved the vase from the table to the counter before carefully removing the coffee-covered tablecloth. She disappeared into the laundry room.

Kenneth started a new pot of coffee as the kids trudged inside with their heads hanging down. Dylan slammed the empty sausage can onto the table. Kenneth tried to give them an encouraging smile, but they maintained eye contact with the floor. “Sorry for yelling, champs. Just trying to keep you safe,” he assured with as much affection as he could convey in his voice.

“Kyle would never yell at us,” Dylan stated flatly, keeping his eyes down as he retreated upstairs with his brother.

Kenneth’s breath seemed to get caught in his throat, like an elevator unable to ascend any further. How do they not understand that he was just trying to help? He looked out the window to see his nemesis still standing there. Once again, their eyes met. Kenneth felt the anger begin to bubble up inside of him again. He didn’t know it was possible for a coyote to have a face so smug. For a filthy wild animal, it knew exactly what it was doing.

“You’re not gonna win that easy,” Kenneth whispered to himself. As if it could hear him, the coyote lowered its left eyelid with very deliberate and cocky force before scampering off into the woods. A mischievous wink as one last slap in the face. Just to rub it in even further. The coyote knew that it had won this round, and it knew that it would win the next one.

Kenneth was fuming. He wanted nothing more than to thrust his trembling fist into the sliding glass door and shatter it, then scream out in agony as blood trickled out from his knuckles. He’d take his bloody knuckles and shove the jagged shards of glass down that cocky coyote’s throat. What right does that thing have to turn his kids against him?

He took a deep breath and slumped against the table. Anger didn't get him anywhere last time. Violence and shouting wasn't gonna cut it. He had to get into that coyote's head. Make it feel the same way Kenneth felt. He had to give it a taste of its own medicine.

Cindy strolled back into the kitchen with a coffee-free, black-and-white-checkered tablecloth. Kenneth stationed himself in front of the coffee maker to pour the freshly brewed drink into his mug. She sprawled the tablecloth onto the table. "I called Vince," she said.

"Why?" Kenneth took a sip of his piping hot beverage.

"He's a self-employed animal control guy, remember?" She rolled her eyes as she lined up the creases with the corners.

Kenneth whirled around to face her. "For the coyote!?"

Cindy yanked the vase off of the counter and returned it to its spot on the now checkered covered table. "Yes, of course for the coyote! You've always had a temper, but Jesus, Ken you were talking about coffins for our kids, and then you screamed at them! If Kyle is gonna do that to you, I don't want him around."

Kenneth slammed his mug onto the table. Cindy balled her fists and groaned as a wave of coffee splattered itself all over the checkered tablecloth. "You want that psycho to go after that coyote?" Kenneth questioned.

Cindy clutched a strand of her blonde hair in her fist as if contemplating whether or not to yank it out. She pursed her lips. "That upsets you? Are you suddenly feeling bad for the thing you called a 'repugnant abomination?'"

Kenneth clutched his wife's shoulders. "Vince is gonna kill that thing!"

"I told him not to hurt Kyle and just get him away. Take him to a different forest or something."

Kenneth shook his head. "He's just gonna kill it anyway, no way he's gonna listen."

"Why do you even care!?" Cindy demanded.

"That thing can't die until I've had my revenge!"

Cindy let her eyelids fall shut as she sighed. "Revenge?" she asked, dread in her voice.

Kenneth started towards the den. He yelped as he slipped on the coffee drenched newspaper still on the floor.

Grumbling, he forced himself back onto his feet and walked into the den to get his cell phone from his recliner.

"I'm gonna skip passed why and just ask *how* exactly you're gonna get revenge on a coyote," Cindy asked as Kenneth returned to the kitchen with his cell phone.

"I'm calling Randy," he declared as he put his phone to his ear.

Cindy laughed in disbelief. "The so-called 'dog whisperer?'"

Kenneth nodded, "Yep."

"Can a dog whisperer even whisper to a coyote?" She transferred the table's vase back to the counter.

Kenneth shrugged. Randy's nasally voice leaked through the phone speaker. "Hello?"

"Randy! Can you come over right now! I need your talents!" Kenneth shouted far too loudly for a phone call. Cindy transferred her husband's *#1 Dad in the World* mug to the counter.

"Sure thing! Just let my grab my finger cymbals," Randy said.

"Terrific!" Kenneth hung up and placed his phone on the table. He grumbled upon realizing that he placed it in the puddle of coffee and pulled it out. He dried it on his robe before placing it on the dry section of the tablecloth.

"Tell me, please," Cindy started, "what is a dog whisperer gonna do for us?"

Kenneth grinned. "He's gonna infiltrate that little monster's mind! He's gonna get that coyote to antagonize the kids so they come crawling back to me!"

Cindy stared at him, dumbfounded. She shook her head and yanked the coffee-covered checkered cloth off of the table. Kenneth winced as his phone clattered to the floor.

"You should call Vince and cancel," Kenneth said.

Cindy shook her head. "No way. You're scaring me, Ken. This coyote needs to go."

"Well then let's hope Randy can get to it before Vince can." Kenneth went to pour himself another cup of coffee.