

The Shakedown



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THE SHAKEDOWN

By
David B. Reid

Parole Release Date: April 22, 2008. Crime: Malicious Wounding.

I've read more than my fair share of Department of Corrections face sheets. But this one was different. This one was personal.

It takes me back to the time he asked me, "Do you think they ever change?"

How in the world was I supposed to answer that question? I was only an intern. If I said, "Sure, I think they can change," he might accuse me of being naïve. On the other hand, if I asserted, "No, of course not. We should lock them up and throw away the key," he might tell me I lacked faith in people's ability to change. Perhaps he'd tell me to abandon my dreams of becoming a psychologist.

He pressed me again. "Sara, you haven't answered my question. I realize you're still a student. But for God's sakes, you've been working with these men for the past ten months. Just give me your opinion on the matter."

At the time, I was a 25-year-old graduate student, and one of only two women to set foot on prison grounds on a daily basis. Dr. Blair intimidated me the moment I met him at the gates of the Dayton Correctional Institute. He was a looming, six-foot-five black man who'd been forced to abandon his pursuits of playing professional football after tearing a rotator cuff in an untimely automobile accident. He went to graduate school instead, studied forensic psychology, and eventually became third in charge at the largest correctional institution in Ohio.

Sitting before him, not certain how to respond, I did the one thing I thought was in my best interests: I pled ignorance.

"I honestly don't know, Dr. Blair."

"Hmph. That's fine," he said. "At least I can respect your honesty."

I smiled, relieved.

When he smiled back, I knew he had just succeeded in playing me like a country fiddle at a backyard hoedown. My suspicion was confirmed when he pushed himself away from his desk and said, "Let's say we go find the answer to my question."

"What's that?" I asked, gripping the arms of my chair.

He motioned me to follow. "Let's see if we can answer the question."

"How can we do that?" I asked, sounding more assertive than I intended.

"Pick an inmate from our group," he suggested, referring to our Monday morning group therapy session with convicted pedophiles.

"Do what?"

"Pick an inmate from group," he repeated. "I don't want to appear biased or divisive, so you pick someone."

I wasn't sure what his intentions were, but trusting that my selected guinea pig

would not be unjustly punished, I boldly announced: "Fine. How about Hoolihan?"

With that, he unclipped the walkie-talkie from his belt and requested assistance from the Corrections Officer on cellblock D.

An unfamiliar voice barked back immediately. "Block D here, Doc . . . Over."

"I need a shakedown on inmate Hoolihan," he quipped. "I'll be by with Ms. Jordan momentarily. Over."

"We'll snag him right away for you, Doc," the broken voice cackled back. "C.O.s Anderson and Melloy are on the block now. I'll get them to assist. Over."

Walking across prison grounds was never a pleasant task. The self-conscious stroll always made me feel a bit like a soggy saltine floating amongst a school of starved piranhas. With Dr. Blair at my side, the walk was less bothersome, though I still made only fleeting eye contact with passing inmates.

"When we get there," he said, his baritone voice serious, "stand off to the side of the cell, opposite Hoolihan. Don't address him. Don't acknowledge him. Don't look at him."

Never having witnessed a shakedown before, I didn't know what to expect. Lost in thought as I imagined worst-case scenarios, I failed to respond to his directive.

"Is that understood, Ms. Jordan?" he asked, keeping a hurried, purposeful stride.

"Yes sir. Understood." I swallowed hard, trying to suppress the anxiety I knew he sensed.

Within a matter of minutes, inmate Hoolihan walked through the pod and immediately spied the small group of individuals hovering outside his cell. His initial hesitance told me he was well aware of what was about to happen. The tension on his face quickly faded, replaced by a self-assured grin, worn in the hopes of convincing all onlookers that he had nothing to hide.

His grin widened with each step taken. *Did he think this was some kind of joke?* It was as if he had just swung open the door to his own surprise birthday party. Like usual, Hoolihan was a disheveled mess. His state-issued navy-blue shirt was soiled with spill stains and bits of crusted food particles. He looked like a well-used napkin after Thanksgiving dinner. His shirttail hung out like a limp flag on a windless day, and his pants, bunched in the front creating makeshift pleats, were two sizes too big for his gaunt frame. Peering from a pockmarked complexion were two dark eyes that had likely witnessed heinous acts born of the most evil of intentions. As I watched him saunter toward his cell, I wondered if this was the same mischievous grin he held while violating his young victims.

Dr. Blair was the first to address him.

"You have anything you want to show us before we rummage through your belongings, Mr. Hoolihan?" he asked.

"No sir," Hoolihan replied with a sense of confidence that nearly convinced me of his innocence.

"Very well then." Turning to the guards, Blair said, "Gentlemen, proceed with your shakedown."

With that, the corrections officers began searching every nook and cranny of Hoolihan's cell, leaving no pillow, mattress, or desk drawer unturned. From my vantage point, I could hear more than I could see, but it became readily apparent that inmate Hoolihan would be spending the better portion of the next 30 days in solitary

confinement.

It was over within minutes. Dr. Blair exited the cell with a stack of papers and what appeared to be a three-ring binder in his left hand.

He stood next to Hoolihan, whose gaze remained fixed forward. Leaning in as if sharing a secret with the inmate, I heard Dr. Blair say: "I'll see you tomorrow morning in the hole. If it's as bad as I think, you just banked yourself a good four weeks down there."

Hoolihan remained silent, his crooked grin long gone.

Turning to me, Dr. Blair said, "Ms. Jordan, come with me. I think we may be able to answer that question."

The walk back to his office, usually no longer than a five-minute trip at a casual pace, seemed longer that day. Perhaps it was my own eager, voyeuristic curiosity to review the stash concealed under his arm that slowed down time. More likely, it was the fear and apprehension for what I was about to see that rattled my innards and lengthened the silent walk.

Once in his office, he dropped the stack on his desk. Speaking for the first time since leaving the cellblock, he invited me to have a look. It was an offer I was happy to decline, but couldn't.

The images, predominantly hand-drawn, were vile and repulsive. Detailed, close-up sketches of erect penises penetrating pouty mouths and inserted into children's anuses covered most pages. Pristine photo clippings of the young actor who played Doogie Howser and a potpourri of other prepubescent celebrity pictures from *Teen Beat Magazine* were glued into the spiral-bound notebook like it was some kind of makeshift family photo album. These, Dr. Blair later explained to me, were sacred trophies collected by Kevin Hoolihan.

As I continued to timidly peruse the perverse collection, Dr. Blair finally answered his own question. "They can't change, Sara. Incarceration or capital punishment is the only effective means of treatment. Don't ever kid yourself into thinking otherwise."

That was a decade ago. Despite graduating from Ohio State University seven years ago with a doctorate in clinical psychology, I have yet to sit for my licensure exam. After giving birth to my daughter, Elizabeth, I became a stay-at-home mom and swore no depraved monster like Kevin Hoolihan would ever lay a contaminated finger on my child. But even a maternal oath like that can't always be kept.

Now, standing in line with several women before me—a row of orange jumpsuits looking like a human pumpkin patch—I await my turn to be processed into the Dayton Correctional Institute for Women. I glance at the DOC face sheet in my hand.

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Silently, I wonder how the man who sexually molested my daughter will be free in nine months, while I must serve the larger portion of a three-year sentence for having good aim.

I frequently reminisce about the day of Kevin Hoolihan's shakedown. I remember what Dr. Blair said to me: "They can't change, Sara."

THE END