

THE TALE OF A STUPID DOG

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A Story

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NOBODY really knows where the little dog came from. All I can say for sure is that the little beagle just showed up one day while I was putting air in one of my bicycle's tires. Henry, my brother, and Julian, my next door neighbor, were with me as we were getting ready to go bike riding around the neighborhood when almost out of thin air this playful 3 or 4 month old white and brown pup showed up and started poking its nose into our work.

All three of us immediately began playing with the little dog and pushing it around as we teased it and called it out for it to respond to our calls.

"Here, boy! Here boy! Come on, doggie!"

It responded by wagging its tail happily back and forth while also running from each one of us to another. It playfully pawed at us and bit us softly as it quickly made itself at home.

After we were done fixing our tires and all the other parts of our bikes, we looked around to see if anyone around was looking for the little dog. We knew that our next door neighbor, Maria Ruelas, hated dogs so we automatically disqualified her as the potential owner. She was a nice enough single lady, but she had often told us that she did not want any dogs as pets. The apartments at the next block were gated and they did not allow any pets in the premises as well so they too were eliminated as potential homes for the little dog. And then there was the house across the street where a retired couple, Mr. and Mrs. Aleman, lived and they already had a couple of little Chihuahuas that they pampered and cared for as if they were their own children. They too did not fit the profile of a family looking for a little dog. So after a few more minutes of contemplating our options we decided to keep the dog on the premises where he could hang around for as long as necessary for its owner to pass on by and hopefully see it and take it home. At least that was our first and only plan.

"Hey, Joe, go get some water for it to drink. It's probably thirsty," my brother commanded.

I immediately ran around the house and grabbed a little plastic beach bucket that lay in a heap of old broken toys piled neatly near a pile of leaves that we had raked together earlier in the day. I filled the red bucket with water from the faucet and returned and offered it to the little dog. It lapped at the water eagerly and drank for a good while until its thirst was quenched.

"Now go see if you can find some food in the refrigerator and give it to the dog. Don't let Mom see you!"

Again, I ran into the house and looked inside the refrigerator and got a couple of wieners and a bologna slice and took them outside to feed the dog. I lay the food on the sidewalk and it eagerly ate the food and sniffed around for more. It was now wagging its tail more forcefully and it jumped on all three of us as if wanting to play. We forgot about our bikes and returned the little dog's playful approach.

"Here, doggie, here boy!" I called out to it and it jumped happily from me to Henry and Julian. We were enjoying the little dog's playful exploits when suddenly Mom's voice brought us all back to reality.

"De donde vino ese perro?" she asked, wanting to know where the dog had come from.

We turned and saw Mom standing inside the slightly open screen door.

"No sabemos. Vino solito," I answered explaining that we did not know where he came from and also explained that he just showed up by himself.

Almost as if wanting to introduce himself, the little dog approached Mom and jutted his snout forward as if half wanting to enter the house. Mom instinctively tried to give it a soft kick to shoo it away, but the dog dodged her kick and countered by snipping at her foot and grabbing the tip of her sandal with its front teeth.

Mom let out a little shriek and tried to pull her foot away, but the dog would not let go.

"Ay, sueltame, perro menso," she uttered telling the "stupid dog" to let her go. I ran and picked up the dog and it let go of Mom and turned to play with me.

After calming the dog down, I told Mom that the dog did not seem to have an owner nearby. I also explained that I would take care of it for a little while or at least until the real owners came by to pick it up. Mom was very clear on telling me to get rid of the dog as soon as possible, by telling me she did not want any dogs on the property and also telling me that I had been forewarned.

"No quiero ver ese perro aqui. No quiero perros. Ya te dije!"

Almost as if challenging her authority, the little dog lunged at Mom and she instinctively shrieked and shut the screen door.

"Ay! Perro menso!" she shouted as she walked away from the door and into the house's interior.

"No, doggie, no!" I uttered as I picked it up and pulled it from the door. And while I held it in my arms it turned around and playfully licked my face. I turned around and asked Henry and Julian what I should do. Henry had a simple answer.

"Just tie it with a rope and keep it in front of the house. That way if the real owner happens to pass by he will see it and stop by to ask for it."

"And you can also take it for a walk down the street for other people to see it. And when you come back you can tie back again." added Julian.

I decided to take them up on their suggestions and I got a light chain and tied it next to the garage door so that it was in a very visible location. It did not put up any type of fight and it was soon lying comfortably in front of our house waiting for its "rightful" owner to appear.

By evening no one or anyone had stopped by. This surprised me because it was in plain sight for all to see.

"By tomorrow someone will surely come and get it," I thought to myself.

But the next day came and went and yet nothing happened. By the end of the week, I resigned myself to the reality that it was highly unlikely anyone would ever stop by to claim the little dog. Mom had seen me care for the pup and she had made no attempt to interrupt my efforts in trying to make it as comfortable as possible for "Doggie." However, when we sat at the kitchen table for supper, Henry asked me point blank what I planned to do with the dog.

"So, what do plan to do with that mutt? You know you can't keep it."

"I'm gonna let it loose tomorrow and I'm just gonna let it go to wherever it wants to go." I answered. "Maybe it'll remember where it came from and leave."

"What if it gets run over by some passing car or something like that? You already know how fast some people can drive around here," my brother asked.

I did not answer him but instead I thought about the actual possibility of taking him to a dog shelter.

"How much does the humane society charge for taking in a stray dog?"

"They don't charge anything. That's why they're called the humane society; they take in stray animals."

"So that's it," I said. "I'll take him to the humane society tomorrow."

My brother immediately dashed those plans with his next sentence.

"But you have to keep in mind that if nobody adopts him within a week or two he gets euthanized."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that he gets put to sleep. He gets a shot that puts him to sleep forever."

I was stunned by this new revelation.

"But I thought that the humane society took care of stray animals. How can they just put them to death when they don't want them?"

"It's not that they don't want them but instead they have to make room for other dogs and cats and even other animals. If they kept every animal that

they have alive for as long as possible they would run out of room for others in only a month or two."

What my brother said suddenly made sense. And again, I was left with the dilemma of what to do with the little dog that had suddenly taken control of my life. As much as I hated to go against Mom's wishes I decided to try to convince her to let me keep the dog. But I would not even dare to try the direct approach. I would just have the dog around the house and not let it get in Mom's way.

For the next few days I just tied the dog in back of the house and tried to keep it out of everyone's way. This only worked for a day or two because Mom saw the dog back in our enclosed yard and warned me not to let it get close to her precious flower garden that she had had for years and tended to like an expert gardener.

I don't know if the little dog understood us whenever we spoke about him but almost as if on cue he messed up Mom's favorite flower pot that very same day. It just so happened that later that afternoon Mom went to her little flower garden to pick out and remove some weeds that had sprung up here and there in her garden. "Doggie" decided to join her in her weeding chores and watched her as she tugged and pulled at certain plants until she removed them from the earth. I guess he was just trying to impress her by showing he could do the same thing as she did and he began to pull at some flowers that were growing quite nicely in an old flowerpot. Since Mom did not seem to notice his efforts, doggie decided to growl loudly as he tugged and pulled at the stubborn flower growing in the pot. His growling noise soon got her attention, and she immediately yelled out to him, "Perro menso! Deja alli! Shhhtaahh! Vamonos de aqui!"

She instinctively grabbed a clump of dirt and flung it at the dog and it hit the ground near him splattering into a million grains of dirt as it jumped up and away from Mom. I had been sitting outside on a metallic folding chair watching this scene unfold before me and Doggie made an immediate dash in my direction in an effort to get away from Mom's reach. He ran past me and sat behind me, sure that I would protect him from my mom's wrath.

I was sure she would come after the little dog with a vengeance, but she was more concerned with the condition of her flower and her flowerpot. She picked up her pot and examined it closely as she plucked off the damaged parts of the plant and carefully "replanted" it within the pot. A little push and a little nudge here and there and her little flowerpot looked pretty good - considering what the Doggie had gnawed off.

"I don't want to see that dumb mutt near my garden again," she exclaimed.

"This garden is totally off limits to that stupid dog. Do you hear me?" she continued as she picked up her shears and hand shovel. "This garden is only for my things.....for those things that belong only to me, and I never want that animal near it again," she concluded as she turned and left toward the house. Neither Doggie nor I made a sound as she disappeared into the house slamming the door behind.

I turned to look at Doggie and he had a look of regret and sorrow combined. He did not want to move from his spot beside me but I patted him on his head and reassured him that Mom was just venting.

"Don't worry about my mom, Doggie, she's just having a bad day. She'll get over it soon enough, you'll see."

The next few days Doggie made sure he came nowhere near Mom whenever she came out of the house to do whatever chores she had to do. The days turned into weeks, and the weeks turned into months and soon it became apparent that Doggie had become our family dog. And all during this time Doggie made sure to steer clear away from Mom and he also made sure never to get anywhere near her garden as well. This was good because Mom's garden had grown into one of the most beautiful flower gardens I had ever seen or have ever seen since then. It looked like a rainbow of flowers and no color on earth seemed to be missing. It was her pride and joy, and she wouldn't let any one of us near it for fear we would wreck her creation.

One day while Mom was kneeling in her flower garden and working the soil Doggie began barking at Mom for no apparent reason. His barking soon got to her and she called out to me to come and get my dumb dog or else. I went outside and Doggie continued barking at Mom and she gave me an agitated look before ordering me to get the dog away from her and telling me to tie it up in the front part of the house. I moved to pick up my dog when he suddenly ran around me and toward Mom and pulled very hard at her apron causing it to tear.

This made my mom very angry, and she soon got up to hit the dog.

"Perro menso, vas a ver....." she uttered as she raised her hand shovel to hit the dog but the dog avoided her slow swing and continued barking at the area where Mom had been kneeling just a short moment before. When Mom and I turned to look at whatever he was barking, we saw a large black snake just a foot away from where Mom's feet would have been had she still been kneeling down and doing her weeding. Like many other people I know my mom was terrified of snakes and she panicked and ran to stand behind me. Almost as if on cue Doggie charged at the snake and barked at it until it made a hasty retreat away from the garden. I called out to my brother, and he came out of the house and caught the snake and put it in a bag and took it away. He

said it was a harmless garden snake but that didn't ease Mom's nerves for quite a while. As a result of this sighting, I was now required to go check the garden for snakes before Mom would get to work in her beloved garden. This went on for the next ten or so weeks.

The snake warning ordeal must have softened my mom's heart because her attitude toward Doggie slowly began to change. Mom had never cared to see to it that Doggie ate a meal or two every once in a while. As a matter of fact, Mom never cared to know whether or not Doggie ate at all. That changed when she called me to the kitchen to give the dog some leftover food we had kept in the refrigerator for a few days. The "leftover meal" was actually quite a feast. It was a whole half chicken with gravy that we had eaten just a few days before and it had been delicious. Now Doggie was going to be the lucky beneficiary of our sated appetite. With none of us wanting to eat anymore chicken there was nothing left to do but either throw it away or give it to the dog and the dog won out.

Doggie must have thought it had died and gone to dog heaven because it ate voraciously and seemed to savor every bite of the big meal. When it finished its meal, it went to the back yard and lay down under one of the trees and slept for a good two or three hours. Yes, it seemed that life had finally taken a turn for the better for Doggie.

It was around that time when I asked my mom why she always wanted everything clean around the house, especially around the kitchen area. I asked because neither my brother nor I were allowed to loiter around the kitchen for long before my mother would yell out at us from wherever she was in the house to make sure we cleaned up any mess we made. Of course, this prevented us from enjoying the kitchen as much as we might have liked.

Mom told me that a clean house is a sign of a clean person. I then noticed that our kitchen counter and cabinets looked old and worn and so I asked why she just didn't replace the old counter with a nice marble top. She laughed a light-hearted laugh and told me that she would have to be crazy to spend any money on such a silly luxury item.

Only rich or crazy people would buy such material as marble or granite to decorate a kitchen counter or anything else for that matter. And, she reminded me, "I am neither rich nor crazy."

"But its marble, Mom," I argued. "It makes everything look great."

She looked at me and repeated, "I'm not rich and neither am I crazy." That was the end of that conversation. But I still think a marble counter would have made her kitchen look nice.

With the chasm between Doggie and my mom now a thing of the past life around the house took a turn for the better. Everyone seemed to get along

better and Doggie had a free rein of the yard. He no longer ran whenever he saw my mom enter the back yard but instead he followed closely and sat close to her as she weeded her garden tugging and pulling every weed out to make sure her garden remained immaculate. He always remained close to her as if to make sure no snakes came around to bother her. I think she began to expect him to be there as well because they soon became a tag team of sorts as they always ended up in the garden together. I guess the friendship was cemented when I saw my mom reach for the little dog and patted him on the head. He sat there close to her as she patted and scratched his head for a little while. His tail wagged nonstop as she teased and cooed him calling him “mi perrito tontito”. His faithful vigilance and companionship had finally won Mom over.

The weeks turned to months, and the months turned to years. It was not long before my brother and I left for college and by this time Doggie had become Mom’s best friend. This was quite evident when I returned home my first year of college to find Mom and Doggie “watching” a telenovela together as they sat side by side on the living room sofa. Mom would have never ever thought of allowing a dog inside the house when we were growing up much less let one get near her furniture and yet here, she was sitting side by side on her favorite sofa with a dog by her side. I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen it with my own two eyes.

When my brother arrived from college a day after I arrived, he too, couldn’t believe his eyes when he saw the dog inside the house. But it soon became apparent that Doggie was a perfect companion for Mom. He followed her relentlessly and was ready to do whatever she told him to do. He learned Spanish quite well because my mom would only speak to him in Spanish and he followed her every instruction as if it were an order.

When she wanted him to move, she would simply say, “Muevete, Doggie” and he would move. If she wanted him to go outside the house she would command him to go outside and he would go outside. “Vete pa’ fuera,” and the little beagle would go out the door. Whenever it was feeding time she would fill his dish with his meal and call out to him, “Doggie, ven a comer!” and he would appear out of nowhere to enjoy his meal. Yes, she had trained him well and he loved being near her.

When I graduated from college Doggie was about ten years old (in human years) and he began to show his age. He no longer had the spring in his stride as he had had just a year or two before but he, nevertheless, followed my mom wherever she would go. Mom said that Doggie was developing arthritis, and she made sure not to stress him out too much. She went so far as to prepare special meals for him so as not to strain his system and he always wagged his

tail whenever she called out to him and hugged him very lovingly, “Perrito tontito de mommy. Quien lo quiere al perrito tontito?” Doggie would bark and whine and bark and whine due to sheer happiness he felt for my mom, and she egged him on with her shower of loving compliments. They were so incredibly happy together but as the years went by I knew the end was near.

My brother and I both found jobs about 50 miles from home and so we decided to share an apartment to save on travel as well as the bills. This meant Mom would be alone with Doggie as her only companion. In what would have been his 13th year Doggie stopped walking and just lay around the house while Mom catered lovingly to his every whim. His little body had begun to betray him and as the days passed he grew weaker and weaker. The end came a few days before Mother’s Day when my brother Henry and I went to visit her with every intention of treating her to a nice bouquet of flowers and a meal at her favorite restaurant.

Doggie had apparently died in Mom’s arms earlier in the week and the ordeal had left her emotionally drained. Mom asked Henry and me to just bring her a meal from Whataburger and she would be fine. We did as she asked and left as we both felt she wanted some time alone to mourn her faithful pet. We did not bother to ask what she had done with the body but we assumed she had called the city’s animal control to come pick up the body for disposal just as she had always done whenever we had found a dead animal near the house. It was her way of handling these matters.

“Don’t ever touch a dead animal,” she would advise us. “Just call animal control and they know what to do with their bodies.”

The months passed and Mom would eventually get over her pet – or at least that’s what I believed would happen. It wasn’t until the following spring that I would find out what Mom had done with the body of her little dog.

I was visiting her during Spring break when I decided to help her clean her garden for her annual springtime planting. I picked up a shovel and a hoe to clean the weeds from her garden when I saw where she had buried Doggie. Right in the middle of the garden where her most beautiful flowers had always been planted was the most beautiful marble marker I had ever seen or have seen since then. It was a bright white marker with black letters that simply spelled out “Doggie”. There is little doubt that the marble marker had set her back quite a few bucks, but its beauty was beyond compare and its delicate carvings of a few dogs frolicking amongst the angels added a touching tribute to her beloved pet. The little homeless dog had not only found a home with mom but an eternal resting place in her most beautiful garden as well as a place deep within her heart.

— the end —