

All Dogs Are Needy

by Jennifer Donnell

Kaleb liked my dog behavior.

It was the kind of skit you come up with at the age of twenty. He'd scratch my arm and I'd shake a leg. I probably should have just joined an acting class, but who had time for that when I was making all his babies. Sometimes I'd add in a bark for effect or, when he was lucky, give him a rare lick upside his cheek after the kids went to bed.

He was a one dog owner from the moment I met him at Denny's, through mutual friends. Problem was, when you're twenty, you sometimes want to hang out with other strays, of various pedigree. You can only chase tail for so long before you wonder if you're happy.

I knew this, because everyone would ask, "Are you happy?"

And I'd answer,

"I'm happy, because I'm a happy person."

They'd look disappointed and press on.

"But *how are you happy* when your owner, er, husband is traveling all the time?"

As if I had taken acting classes after-all, I'd confidently reply,

"I'm grateful for my relationship, but I don't use it to define my worth or happiness. I'm an independent woman."

That really through them for a loop.

The secret they knew, that I didn't, was that if I'd really been happy I would have plainly answered, "yes".

What they were actually asking was whether I happy with *him*.

How he never seemed happy. How he didn't change. How storm clouds have better days.

What neither they or I knew, was that all happiness is really first with one's self.

I assumed Goose felt the same way about my canine ways. I've always peed on his leg, metaphorically speaking, as I get so excited to see him. I never thought I'd fall in love with anyone 5 years after I met them, but when he holds me I realize that it's more surprising that I might not have.

That's right, *I'm fucking romantic*.

Yet, sometimes love feels like capitalism.

To be a good lover I must produce good results! I must be a company of love! I must compete with other puppy mills and not let needs be outsourced! I must ask myself the important questions, like, *will I sit upon command or roll over when asked? Will I play dead and catch balls?*

So, I suppose I'm still "playing dog" after so many years, but now it's just part of my personality.

I take an online quiz that claims I'm most like a poodle.

“You, a poodle?” Goose shakes his head and scratches his furry eyebrows. Clearly he doesn't like poodles.

“A Golden Retriever?” I venture, thinking they're loyal and, like me, have blonde hair.

“Hell no! They're boring. I got Golden Retriever on that silly quiz you sent me and it wasn't accurate at all.” He furrows his brow and looks me over, then adds, “You're hyper. What's that dog that's always jumping?”

“A Jack Russell Terrier?” I stumble over the words, horrified, but he doesn't know that *I hate Jack Russell Terriers*.

“Yeah! That's it.” he seems pleased to make my canine acquaintance but it hurts my feelings and so I tell him he's being a little Doberman Pinscher. He laughs, so I yip at him, but it just solidifies my terrier-likeness and so I give up and growl on the inside.

I ask Mandy about it later. Her finance is asleep at 9:00 p.m. on a Friday night and she texts me to complain, in perfect timing.

She takes the quiz and is thrilled to be considered a Pit Bull. She says she's strong, with attitude, stands up for herself but has a big heart. Then, she tells me I'm beautiful and definitely a pretty little poodle.

I want to lick her across her face, in thanks, dog style.

I tell her I'm worried Goose doesn't understand that my real self is much calmer than the one he sees. I think I'm just worried he'll leave all the time and it's turned me into an annoying kind of dog. When I taught yoga, people were always talking about how calm I

am. Or, worse, what if I've just failed at flirting? Mostly I'm flirting with him when I'm hyper.

“What is a relaxing dog though?” Mandy answers and puts my mind at ease, “A fat dog? A pug?”

Then she sends me screenshots of a dog doing yoga while I laugh and remember why I'm so glad we're friends.

I know she's a dog person, as she owns one.

“No, my asshole ex-boyfriend wanted one and then he left me with it.” she admits, then adds,

“I don't even like dogs. All dogs are needy.”

