



Spot the Shelter Dog

So, you've fallen in love with Spot, a shelter dog and have decided to give him a good home. Spot is like hundreds of dogs in shelters and here is the story of how he got there.

He has a history of abuse, three previous homes, is very thin and dirty but he has big brown, sad, lonely eyes. You bury your head in his neck and softly promise him that no-one is ever going to hurt him again as long as you draw breath on this earth.

You take him home; shower him with toys, food and most of all, love. You let him do whatever makes him happy and give him time to settle in.

You have so much fun and he's so very good. **But then you start to notice some little traits that start ringing warning bells in your head.** You don't know that these warning bells are very shortly going to be ear-splitting gongs.

He starts to growl at you if you go near his food bowl, softly at first but after a while he gets snappy as well. You teach him to take food gently from your hand and he's so gentle he will even take it from your mouth.

He has decided that he wants to sleep on your bed – it's cold, so you let him. You want him to know you're his pal. You remember your promise to him that you are never going to let him be unhappy ever again. It's also got a bit to do with the fact that, if you don't let him, he scratches and scratches on the kitchen door and barks and howls in the middle of the night until you give in so that you can get some sleep.

When you come home excited to see him, you find he's scratched a hole in the kitchen door, dug up the floor, eaten the walls, urinated everywhere and left you some sloppy surprises. You shout your horror and show him what he's done – **AND HE KNOWS HE'S BEEN NAUGHTY BECAUSE HE CRINGES AT YOUR VOICE.** You immediately become guilt-ridden – he's cringing from you, you who promised that he's never have to be afraid ever again. So you stop shouting, put your arms around him, give him his favourite treat and just love him to bits, apologising all the while. When all is said and done, what's a bit of mess between friends such as you two?

To make up, you let him up on your lap whilst watching TV. Everything is fine for an hour or so, then he starts asking to go outside to toilet. You get up, open the door and he changes his mind. He does this fifteen times in the next hour. You remember the mess you came home to, so you go to the door each time he asks – yet he does nothing.

After a while Spot wants to play ball instead of watch TV. He drops the ball into your lap and you throw it for him a few times. Then you start to ignore him because you want to concentrate on your TV programme. He keeps putting the ball in your lap. Then he starts to bark at you until you play again. Pretty soon, he's driving you crazy and you put him in the kitchen and shut the door. That starts him scratching and howling. To keep the peace, you let him in and play ball again. **You have no option because it's the only thing that keeps him quiet.**

You listen to the "inner person" who tells you that your dog is ruining your life. You start to wonder where you went wrong.

Then, the worst happens. He starts to turn on you, his best friend in the whole world. He starts to growl at you for absolutely no reason. And it's not just you – he seems to be angry with everybody.

You're unhappy and don't know where to turn to. **He's getting to be an embarrassment. You find that you're walking him at midnight** because that's the only time you can be sure there's no other dogs around. **He starts to growl if you turn over in bed** during the night. You wonder where this dog from hell came from.

You start asking yourself other questions – what happened? Why do I hate him when I love him? Doesn't he know I love him? If he does, why does he behave like this? Would he be better in a home where someone was with him all day?

Tragically and unwittingly you have gone full circle. You end up giving him back to the shelter, making sure they understand what a lovely dog he is. You will give one of the usual excuses, heard hundreds of times before. But the truth is that you loved him and loved him until he became a hoodlum.

Love sent him back to the shelter. Love created the monster. Love is responsible for most of the dogs in shelters. We are loving our dogs to death. But it doesn't have to be this way.

IF YOU TREAT YOUR DOG LIKE A HUMAN, IT WON'T BE LONG BEFORE YOUR DOG STARTS TO TREAT YOU LIKE A DOG.

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All he did was act like a very, very good leader – but by the rules of the dog world, not our world. He had no idea that by enforcing his dog rules in our world, he would end up back in the shelter, or worse, dead.

Below are a list of do's and don'ts. They will ensure that your dog is a pleasure to live with and more importantly for the dog, will never be returned to a shelter.

- Entering a new home will be a stressful time for the dog. Let him settle in for 2 weeks and just ignore a lot of his overtures. Love him with your voice but try not to over-handle him in the first couple of weeks.
- Don't let children hug the dog tightly around the neck.
- As a family, make your rules for the dog and stick to them.
- Introduce a simple sound that indicates to the dog that what he's doing is wrong, such a BAD (said in a growl). Always follow up with soft voiced praise when he responds correctly.
- Don't use aggressive body language such as pointing, raising your hand, tapping the dog on the nose, scuffing it, holding it down or grabbing it by the collar.
- Don't hand food to the dog. Throw it to him and let him catch it.
- Don't growl commands in the same tone that you use for "BAD". Use only this one word to let the dog know he's doing something wrong. Keep the rest of your vocal communication with him very soft and gentle. Use body language to let him know what you want him to do.
- Don't tell your dog off by using his name.
- Don't let the dog assume a resting position above the human members of the pack.
- Give your dog an area of safety, such as a sleeping crate.
- Don't let children disturb him if he's sleeping.
- Teach him to separate. Don't have him with you all the time.
- If you have to leave him for long periods of time, make sure that he has plenty of fruit and vegetables to munch on whilst you're out.
- If you're unsure of his behaviour with other dogs and he's a big dog, temporarily muzzle him until you are sure he won't damage another animal.
- Keep him on a long lunging lead in the park until you're sure he knows who his new pack is and will come back to you each time you call him.
- Feed him outside as well as inside to encourage him to use the garden for toileting purposes.
- Ensure you have a safe garden so that he can spend some time in the fresh air.
- Don't let him answer the doorbell. You are his minder; don't let him become yours.
- Love him and look after him but make sure he understands the rules and boundaries of the pack. Learn to speak 'dog' and communicate with him in his own language rather than expecting him to understand your language.
- Have him micro-chipped so that if he does become lost, you can find him again.

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