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What Kind of Dog is that?

Buddy, the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, helps New York Woman mend her Broken Heart

BY DORRI OLDS



I reached for my iPhone with my right-hand while holding Buddy's leash in my left. It was my best friend, Maddy on the phone. I launched into my tirade.

"If one more person asks me what kind of dog Buddy is I'm going to scream."

"What're you talking about?"

"I've walked one block and four people..."

"It's because he's so cute."

I imitated passersby in falsetto, "Oooh, what's his name? How old is he? Where did you get him?" When they ask what breed he is I have to say, "Cavalier King Charles Spaniel." It's a mouthful and they never get it. "What kind?" After three or four times I get so sick of chewing my cabbage twice I start barking, "He's a MUTT!"

"I think they're just being friendly."

"I don't want friendly. I want to be left alone when I'm walking Bud. For Pete's sake, I work 12-hour days. When I take a break I need peace and quiet."

"Peace and quiet? You live in New York City! Maybe you need to work less so you won't be so cranky."

"Cranky? CRANKY?"

How dare she say that? I'm not cranky. Just because I think people should mind their own damned business?

Buddy came into my life five years ago, right after a devastating split. I'd found

out the guy was married and the breakup nearly broke me. Depression yanked me down and that's where I stayed, wallowing.

One day, still telling everyone who'd listen how doomed I was, I ran into a neighbour who offered me advice. "You need to get a puppy. It'll change everything," I looked down at her dog. "He's a Blenheim," she said proudly. "One of the four types of Cavalier King Charles Spaniels."

He had soft white fur with cow-like patches of auburn brown. His ears flopped like a beagle. He was the size of a Cocker Spaniel. His soulful brown eyes with long lashes reminded me of Bambi. Every time I ran into them in the elevator that dog's eyes would sparkle and his tail would wag frantically and rhythmically like a windshield wiper.

I mulled over my neighbour's suggestion. I called Maddy to discuss. "Puppies are such a huge responsibility. You have to be home all the time," I said.

"You're home all the time anyway!"

Hmm, she had a point. I work in my living room, at my Mac, continuously. My only periodic commute is a trek to the kitchen for snacks. I began to weigh the pros and cons of getting a dog. I thought about my ex and how much I'd wanted a baby with him. I ruminated. Pets are expensive — con. The cost of a dog pales in comparison to raising a kid. There'd be no braces — pro. No

college tuition — pro! He'd never wreck a car — pro! pro!

The next time I ran into my neighbour I asked her where she'd gotten her dog. She said she got it from Le Petite Puppy in Greenwich Village and raved about their high quality breeders.

"Our little prince came from Europe!" She bragged.

I walked to the pet store and ordered a Blenheim. The shop said it would take two weeks to import him from Germany. I signed my name to the paper and began to fall in love with this idea.

I spent the next two weeks as if I were about to hatch a kid. Instead of books like *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, I bought the canine equivalents: *How to Raise Your Cavalier* and *The Owner's Guide to the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel*. I read both books in two days and decided to name the dog after my Uncle Buddy. I was nervous and excited and hopeful, like I felt before my first date with my no-good ex.

Preparing for this new pup made life joyful. Sort of. I mean, I still acutely felt the be-



trayal and lonely despair from the breakup. Everybody that had a mate made me seethe with envy. I hated being single.

My big day finally arrived. I went to pick up my doggie. At 10:55 a.m., the gates were down. I peered in the window and saw a teeny-tiny Cavalier the size of a Beanie Baby. The second our eyes met I knew he was mine. He looked scared and vulnerable and all I wanted to do was keep him safe. The owner pulled up the gate and I bee-lined to the crate. Buddy was placed in my arms. I held him to my chest the way I had with my nieces, protectively cradling his itty-bitty head.

I didn't want to be apart from him ever again! I carted him around in my purse and smuggled him into movies he slept through. This warm bundle helped take the edge off of seeing happy couples everywhere I went. Saturday nights, when loneliness descended like a shroud over my living room, I played with my pup, happily reconciled to being one of those single old ladies who "married" their pet.

After the betrayal by my ex, Buddy became the balm that soothed and healed the ache. He slept pressed against me and I'd lie awake to listen to his puppy snores. Sharing him with someone even for an instant, especially a stranger in the street, felt like a band-aid yanked off a burn. I was accosted when I walked him, like stars and their paparazzi.

"Oh, he's so cute."

"Can I pet him?"

"Where did you get him?"

"What kind of dog is that?"

I couldn't stand all the questions. Sometimes I spoke Russian-sounding gibberish, pretending I "no g'shpeak Eenglish." Other times I pointed to my mouth like I couldn't talk because I was eating. Then it really started getting to me. I began snapping at people for ogling and blocking my path. "Can't you see I'm walking here? Move."

Then one day, for the millionth time, somebody tried to pet my dog. I didn't even look up. Just yanked Buddy closer to me and grumbled, "Leave us alone, we're busy."

As I was walking away I heard the guy mutter, "Geez, I'm busy too. I just wanted to say hello."

I stopped. Suddenly I saw myself clearly for who I had become and felt ashamed. I turned to apologize to the man but he was already crossing at the light on the corner. I watched this handsome man walk away in his tasteful suit and could've kicked myself. Only the day before I'd whined to Maddy that I was never going to meet a new guy. Maddy's response now echoed in my head. "It would be much easier to meet a guy if you weren't walking around pissed off and in a hurry."

Buddy and I strolled to Madison Square Park. I needed to air out my head. I didn't want to be a curmudgeon and end up bitter, unlikable and irascible. Buddy shot me a doe-eyed look.

As we walked by the dog-run Buddy tugged excitedly toward a cute guy walking a small black and white dog. My anger and disappointment with the world lifted for a moment. I smiled and found myself saying, "Excuse me, what kind of dog is that?"

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