Bobby’s Gift

Before a pug the size of a hippopotamus busted down my house’s front door in the middle of Winter Break, I had thought I was pretty good at taking things in stride. But the way I handled the giant pug situation proved me wrong.

Long story short: when I saw the huge, snow-covered dog standing inside my house, shards of glass from my beautiful front door littered on the floor, I ran into the kitchen, screaming my head off. In my defense, it was hard not to.

Unfortunately, though, running away shrieking didn’t do much. The pug just squeezed through the doorway and followed me.

The dog had coarse fur and bright yellow eyes. Slobber covered its snout, and its tongue was forked like a snake’s. It had a collar with the name ‘Bobby’ on it.

The pug looked… really weird.

Unique.

Which I normally don’t have a problem with. In this case, though, I would’ve liked a normal dog.

I mean, it was bad enough that the pug was five times the size of me. It was even worse that it looked like a character from a horror movie.

I wondered how Bobby had gotten here. Maybe he was lost. Or maybe he was another one of Doctor Frankenstein’s creations, and he really liked destroying fancy glass doors.

Either way, I felt a little sorry for him as he stared at me with his sad, watery yellow eyes.

And… he wasn’t attacking me.

“Come on, boy,” I said as I walked upstairs, a little shocked at my words.

I was all alone, as I had been for the past few days. My parents were on a work trip for four weeks, but I was sixteen, so I was old enough to handle myself.

I took out a hairbrush from my closet and combed the dog’s straggly fur to make him look more appealing. Then I led him into the bathroom and gave him a nice doggy bubble bath–which wasn’t easy, since he was bigger than the bathtub.

Soon, the Winter Break was over. By then, Bobby and I were good friends.

I didn’t want to leave Bobby alone while I went to school, but I had to. I just hoped he wouldn’t chew up my sofa or redestroy my front door–my aunt had paid for the repairs, and I had a feeling that calling her to spend money on door repairs *again* wouldn’t be a fun conversation.

So I left Bobby a plateful of dog food and some chew toys that he’d hopefully consider destroying instead of furniture, and set off to school.

When I returned to my house, I was met with a surprise.

Bobby… hadn’t destroyed anything!

But the absence of chewed-up things wasn’t my only shock.

As I sat down at my desk to do really hard homework, feeling overwhelmed, words sounded in my head–like thoughts, but they didn’t seem like my own. And Bobby was staring right at me as the words came into my mind.

“*Hey, Boss*,” the words said. “*You look kind of stressed about your homework.”*

I dropped my math textbook and nearly crushed my toe with three pounds of mathematical operations.

Was Bobby… talking?

“*Oh yeah, Boss*,” he said, like he’d read my mind. He craned his massive head over my shoulder. “*Binomial theorem? No need to be stressed out. By now, I’m sure that you can do anything. Giving me a bath, for example–that wasn’t easy.”*

“Um... okay then,” I said. I wasn’t really sure how I felt about this whole ‘talking dog’ thing, but I *did*  like the name ‘Boss’, and I appreciated Bobby’s moral support. And he *had* made me feel better that day.

The next day at school, I invited my friends over to see Bobby.

My friends were the popular girls, and I mostly hung out with them because they made me look cool. But they *did* love dogs, and by that time, I hardly noticed Bobby’s looks. All I saw was his inner beauty–and I was sure my friends would, too.

“Where’s your dog, Jessie?” Lamara, the leader of our friend group, asked me.

“He should be somewhere around,” I said. I found him pretty quickly. It’s hard to miss a dog who’s the size of my living room.

When they saw him, the girls shrieked.

“It’s okay,” I said. “He’s really nice.”

The girls shrieked louder, and I realized that they weren’t shrieking out of fear–they were shrieking out of laughter.

“My goodness, Jessie!” one girl said, between gasps of laughter. “You have that–overgrown refrigerator–as a pet?”

“Look at his tongue!” another girl cried. “Why does it look like a snake’s?”

“Careful, Jessie,” Lamara told me. “Better get him out of your house before he floods it with slobber.”

The girls snickered.

My cheeks flushed. Who was I, letting in this disgusting dog and keeping him as a pet?

I was officially the Grossest Person on the Planet.

“There’s no way we’re coming over if you have this–thing–in the house,” Lamara sneered. “It takes a very weird person to want to keep *this* dog–and we don’t want to hang out with anyone *weird,* do we, girls?”

“Nope,” the other girls said. They were still giggling and pointing at Bobby.

“Fine,” I said. I didn’t want to give up my friendship with them. I could practically hear the voices: *Oh, there’s Jessie, the girl who chose to hang out with a weird* dog *instead of the cool kids.* “I’ll take him to the Animal Rescue Center across the street right now.”

I walked to the center with my friends, holding Bobby on a leash. I could hear their whispers about Bobby as we trudged towards the center.

Bobby looked at me with hurt-filled eyes. “*I thought we were friends*.”

But I ignored him. Replying would be too painful.

Finally, after just a couple of minutes that felt like hours, we got to the center.

I told the lady at the reception that I’d just found the pug on the street, and that he didn’t seem to have an owner. I didn’t admit that Bobby had been with me for four days now. That, again, would be too painful.

The lady looked at Bobby with distaste, but she led him into the room where all the animals were kept.

Bobby looked again at me, this time with complete betrayal in his eyes.

Tears blurred my vision. I *did* love Bobby. But I couldn’t cry in front of my friends.

We all walked out of the center, while I tried to bury my emotions. Lamara must have seen through me, though, because she sneered:

“Who cares, Jessie? It was an ugly dog, anyways. It would’ve made you look *so* uncool.”

That night, alone at my house, guilt weighed on my heart. I tried to forget about my decision. But the memories of the fun times Bobby and I had had kept piercing my mind. Even though I didn’t want to admit it, I cared more for Bobby than I did for these so-called friends.

Way, way more.

I mean, what kind of friends would force me to give up something I love?

So the next morning, I made my decision.

I walked to the Animal Rescue Center and brought Bobby back to my house.

“I’m so sorry, Bobby,” I cried. I threw my arms around his tail, which was the one thing that my arms could actually go all the way around. “I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“*It’s okay, Boss,”* came the reply.

I don’t know how long we stayed in that moment, with my arms around his tail. All I knew was that I was glad that Bobby forgave me–and that I was *really* glad to have him back.

The next day at recess, I walked over to the girls I used to hang out with.

“Hey, Jessie,” Lamara sneered. “How are you doing without that *dog*?”

“Actually, I got him back,” I told her. These girls could either accept me for who I was, or walk away, which would be fine by me. I didn’t care. They couldn’t stop me from being who I was anymore.

They walked away.

That next little while was the happiest of my life.

I found some new friends who appreciated Bobby and I for who we were. We hung out together, and I didn’t care about the popular girls who sometimes laughed at me in the halls. They could be who they wanted to be. I could be who I wanted to be.

The gift that Bobby gave me–the courage to be myself–was the best gift I’d ever gotten.

And when my parents finally came home, they loved Bobby too.

Well, until he chewed up their slippers.