

Extract: *Duggie is a bad bad Dog*:

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“Are you sure? Duggie?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Why would he bite you? Duggie? Why?” she asked again. “Why would he do a thing like that to you?” Then for the third time Maggie asked, “Duggie?”

“Yes. I don’t know why. He just did,” said Benny. He put each hand to each eye and used his knuckles to try and rub his salty tears away.

“You must have done something. Did you tease him?” she asked. “You know he hates that.”

“No, I didn’t. I didn’t do nothing. Nothing at all.” Benny looked at her as she was looking hard at him and added between a few more sobs, “No, honest, Mum.”

“Are you sure?” asked Maggie. “Duggie wouldn’t bite anyone for no reason, especially you. Would he?” She looked hard at him, as hard as a bingo caller who caught an elderly woman cheating about her winning numbers.

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“No. I didn’t do nothing. Honest, Mum.” While his face became redder he became more upset so his crying became even louder.

“It’s alright. Don’t worry about it,” said Maggie. “You’re a good boy.” She frowned. She still looked a bit puzzled. Something about the situation and the explanation quietly gnawed at her heart. She could not point a finger at what it was, but something about the event still fazed her. Where she should have been sure about her son and what he said, it did not quite satisfy her. So though she did not want to doubt her son, doubt was what lurked within her.

Dave lit a Lark and sucked the nicotine deep into his scarred lungs. “Where’s Duggie now?” Dave asked Benny. “Where is he? Where is that dog?” He looked in the lounge and looked out of the window and saw Duggie’s blue bouncy ball, but no dog. He blew a smoke ring.

Benny mumbled something and sniffed quietly through his tears. His sobs somehow instantly became less as if his nose and eyes was a tap he had just turned off.

Maggie looked at Benny’s leg. Dave looked at his leg. When she wiped the drips and smears of blood away with her handkerchief there were four small teeth marks on his shin. She wet the corner of her hanky and with her index finger in it stroked his leg clean. Although she didn’t say a word she thought there was such a lot of blood for such tiny cuts.

Dave looked too. He didn’t say a word either but had the same thought as Maggie.

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Maggie and Dave went into the kitchen. They saw the small dog there. Duggie was a 'rescued' dog from the local animal sanctuary in Swindon. He was a chocolate brown Jack Russell terrier cross with a big white heart-shaped raggedy patch on his shaggy chest. He had unusual eyes that were both beautiful and rare, a gift from his Mum.

Benny and Dave and Maggie knew he was rescued from being abused by his first owner, Kyran 'Spud' Kelly.

Kelly was a big man with a huge bum, a big belly, a big head, two chins and a bull neck and shrivelled elastic braces that held up his baggy stained trousers. Although he was a lapsed Catholic he believed animals were provided for his sport. Edith Gasson, the care worker at the Citizen Canine Home, explained to the family when they visited the animal sanctuary on Benny's birthday, "Kelly's favourite trick when he was drunk was to lift Duggie up by his ears and swing him against the garden shed in time to a song, 'Danny Boy', that he murdered with his terrible tuneless karaoke-oozy voice."

The staff at the Dogs Home told them about Duggie's history when they adopted him. That was so they would understand him. Edith, the young volunteer wearing old denim dungarees, told them, "You'll have to be patient. Try to understand why he fears men. All he's known up until now from Kelly is cruelty in every form. Every day being hit for no reason, kicked for no reason. Shut out in all winds and weather. Look at his eyes. You can see his fear. His eyes

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tell you his history. They are old eyes in a young dog. So you'll have to try and regain his trust. If you do, he'll repay you. He'll be your friend and a loyal dog to the end."

And so Duggie was, to everyone, especially Benny, at least until now. He helped Benny settle in and down at his new school so he could forget about the bullies who had targeted him and forced that move from his old school. Indeed to Benny everyday in every way Duggie proved he was a friend in need. Together they roamed the streets and fields behind his home. Together they took on the world. He had been Benny's lifeline more than once since then. Whenever Benny was low he could always count on Duggie to raise his spirits. When he was up he lifted him even higher.

Edith told them, "All rescued dogs have problems. Duggie is no different. It is as if they know they are edging towards death, yet always hoping that the next visitor will save them. Their problems start and end with people like Kelly. So always treat Duggie with care and kindness. He'll repay you in diamonds."

To the family her advice sounded similar to a plea from a lawyer. For one so young to them Edith sounded so wise.

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