

"I Need A Puppy For Christmas"

Christmas is my least favourite time of year as a dog breeder. For some reason, the stupid people come crawling out of the woodwork just before the big day and to complicate matters, someone who will live to regret it, has given out my phone number. It's December 22nd. **RING**

"Hello? I'm looking for a Schnauzer."

"Sorry, the ones here are all mine. Good luck." I hang up. That was easy. I go back to wrapping gifts. The phone rings again.

"Hello? Is this Mrs. McMillan that breeds Schnauzers?"

"No. Goodbye." I'm single. I chase down a puppy to retrieve my wrapping paper. Usually, they decide they have the wrong number after a couple of these calls. Not this time... **RING**

"Hello? Is this Cathy McMillan? The one who breeds Schnauzers?" Damn. The asshole has me. I pretend it's his first call...

"Yes. What can I do for you?" I respond brightly, absentmindedly fashioning a hangman's noose from a piece of red ribbon.

"We're need a puppy for Christmas. Female. A black one. We got your name from a girl named Lisa. She said you had puppies."

I make a mental note - Lisa walks to work. I know the route well. Dark streets. Low curbs.

"Oh. Can you hang on?" I put him on hold. I note the area code on the caller id and get out my phone book to check his long distance rates. Time to heck email... Wash a few dishes... 14 minutes... still there... I might score a personal best with this one.

"OK. Yeah... uh. Yeah. I have some puppies."

I hear a *squeal* in the background. This loser has given his wife a thumbs-up sign.

"So, how much are they?"

Oh, goody. I *really* like when they ask price first.

"What?" As though he'd just asked me my bra size. "What did you say?"

The tremor in his voice indicates he's not so sure now that this was the right approach. "ahh....I meant to say... how many are they?"

Too late. He's toast. I repeat some of the phrases I learned in Grade 7 French class with a Texas accent while jiggling the phone receiver...

There's a little panic in his voice. "Hello? You there?? Sorry I can't hear you.... You're breaking up."

Got him. Now he thinks we were accidentally disconnected. He'll call back. **RING**

"Yes?" I answer.

"We seem to have been cut off. Sorry."

"Apology accepted. Please be more careful, my time is very valuable. So, how may I help you? Were you looking for a puppy for Christmas, then?" Time to cut to the chase here. I finish wrapping up the chunk of frozen fish to send anonymously to my bank manager.

His spirit brightens. He feels a ray of hope. "You have some?"

"No. Sorry. But I know someone who does. Hang on while I get their number."

I put him on hold again while I make a pot of tea. The button blinking shows he's still there. I reach for the *black* file that I keep in my desk drawer for just such special occasions. I consider cutting him off again ...nah...

"You still there? Sure. I found someone who has puppies." (Actually, this one always has puppies) Time to throw him a little bait. "They're a little cheaper than mine."

They bite, too. But he didn't ask if they bite.

He thanks me profusely. I can hear his wife jumping up and down in delight in the background. Oh dear...

"Oh I nearly forgot to tell you, be sure she doesn't sell you one from one of her wysteria affected dogs. Most of hers are pretty good, but don't buy one of those wysteria dogs." The key to creating confusion in the mind of a loser puppy buyer is to never pronounce the name of a fictitious disease the same way, twice.

"What's wysteria?" Ha. Worked.

"Wystereenia ". I put the emphasis on the 'e' this time. "Nothing really. They seldom infect humans."

"They?"

"Witeresias." I reply, like he should know without being told. "You know, the witeria parasite. A microscopic crab thing with teeth."

"A parasite....?"

Time for a flanking manoeuvre. "I didn't mean to concern you. Really, they are nearly harmless anyway. Forget I mentioned it."

There's a moment of silence. Time to move in for the kill.

"Still there?" I ask.

"Uh yeah. You're sure this wytereria thing isn't a problem?"

"Wyserteria." I correct him, patiently. "Absolutely. In fact, she'll likely even have dropped her prices a little because of it."

I hold my breath. At this point they either step into my headlights or run back to the forest....

"Can you give me her number, please?"

"Certainly!" I recite the phone number carefully. "Oh, and by the way...."

"Yes?"

"She works shift. Best time to call her is about 3:30 am. She's a little hard of hearing, so let the phone ring."

"Thanks."

"No problem. Merry Christmas." I pick up one of the puppies and rescue what remains of a Santa Claus ornament. "No problem at all."

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