

Part 3: A Crash Course in Puppy Manners

“Ditzzy?” Sue asked incredulously as she pawed at the bone-shaped, metal tag hanging from her collar. “Who the hell thought that was a good name?”

“It’s just the name that was on the tag. Maybe it was your boss. I don’t know!” Donna shrugged. “Now before your partner comes to pick you up I’m going to give you a quick obedience lesson so that you’ll know how to act. It takes more than high-quality gear and expert grooming to make a proper puppy girl you know!”

Forgetting for a moment that she was made up like a dog and kneeling on the floor, Sue gave Donna a haughty look. “Uh, I’ve been around service animals for a year, I think I have a pretty good idea how they act!”

“Look who’s a know-it-all now! You may have been around puppy girls, but trust me, there’s a huge difference between checking one and being one! There are lots of things that you probably missed. Trust me. It takes months of obedience training to get it down well, and we’ve got maybe thirty minutes! So, let’s start. Show me your walk!” Donna tugged lightly on the leash and started across the room.

Sue did her best to follow, but she wasn’t particularly athletic and she wasn’t used to crawling, so the tight collar would routinely choke her.

“Hey! Slow down!” Sue gasped.

“No, Ditzzy!” Donna snapped in an uncharacteristically commanding voice that really got Sue’s attention. Then she asked, “do puppies talk, Ditzzy?”

“No, but...”

Donna gave her a look. “Seriously?”

Sue blushed and closed her mouth.

“Get used to answering to your new name and to not talking. When the Petsitter is on you’ll get a really nasty shock if you forget and try to speak like a person! Understand?”

“Ye—” Sue paused and then nodded.

“Good girl, Ditzzy! But nodding is for people too. Bark once for ‘yes’ and twice for ‘no.’ Let’s try it again. Does Ditzzy understand?”

Like Hell am I going to bark!

"Aw, maybe you're too...*ditzy* to get it? Are we a slow little puppy?" Donna asked in a voice that was somehow more patronizing than it had ever been.

Sue gritted her teeth. She opened her mouth and let out a half-hearted, almost sarcastic, "Woof."

"Good girl! Good girl!" Donna patted her head. "Try to make it a bit more enthusiastic next time. Remember, puppy girls should always be happy and peppy!"

Happy and peppy, yeah, right...

Donna led Sue around the room in a small circle. Sue stumbled and struggled to keep up as Donna urged her to "look cheerful" and to "show some spirit." On the fifth pass Donna reminded Sue to keep her legs apart as she crawled and when she sat.

"The petsitter will shock you if you try to keep your legs together. Puppies aren't just happy and peppy, they're *available*! Get it?"

"Woof." Sue replied.

"Good girl, Ditzzy!" Donna praised. "We're learning!"

Sue panted and sweated as she continued to circle the room while trying to remember to keep her legs separated. Even though the leggings covering her "hind legs" gave her knees a little bit of padding and protection, they still hurt.

Donna reminded Sue again and again to keep her knees off the ground as she crawled. "You're going to wreck your little knees otherwise!" She warned.

Sue tried, but she didn't feel at all like herself. It wasn't just that she didn't recognize her visage in the mirror; her normal expectations of what her body could do were no longer there. Walking on four legs instead of two was only the beginning. Even something as simple as wanting to brush her hair back was awkward and strange with the blunt, inarticulate paws covering her normally nimble fingers.

"Good girl, Ditzzy!" Donna praised, "Good, uh, effort! Now, show me you're happy by giving me a big smile and wagging that tail!"

Sue tried to smile. It was difficult for her to pretend to be happy when she wasn't.

"Bigger! Open mouthed! Let that tongue out too! Pant!"

Sue blushed as she widened her smile, opened her mouth and let her pink tongue slide out past her lips. She felt so stupid as she began to pant loudly.

“Now wag! Wag, Ditzzy! Show me you’re happy!” Donna urged.

Sue shook her rear end slowly at first. Her tail, in turn, gently swished from side to side. Trying to keep the happy, brainless expression on her face while wagging her tail was more-challenging than she thought it would be.

Donna crossed her arms. “That’s the saddest wag ever!”

Sue stopped wagging, stopped smiling, and stopped panting. “I’m doing my best! What the hell do you want?” She really was trying her best, but the fact that she was failing at it wasn’t what was really bothering her. What was really bothering her was that she was *trying* to act like a “proper pup” at all!

Donna knelt down and took one of Sue’s paws in her hands. “Look, I’m trying to help you, Ditzzy...I’m going to tell you what I tell every puppy girl I groom. Don’t think of yourself as human while you’re wearing the gear. It helps just to think of yourself as an animal the whole time. It sort of—numbs the shame you’d feel otherwise.”

The idea wasn’t appealing—to think of herself as animal—but then again, Donna had made it through the service period more-or-less intact, which was more than anyone could say for many young women.

Whatever gets me through...it’s only for a little while anyway.

Sue contorted her frown into the happiest smile she could muster, let out a “woof” and wagged her tail back and forth as fast as she could.

Donna patted her head. “Good girl, Ditzzy! You’re learning!” There was a knock at the door. Sue was grateful for the interruption. It meant she wouldn’t have to think about how genuinely happy being praised made her. “I guess the Petsitter will have to help you with the rest. It sounds like puppy’s date is here!”

I think I’m going to be sick...

Donna opened the door to a gum-chewing, Detective Robert Jericho leaning casually against the frame.

“Why you must be Detective Jericho!” Donna practically gushed.

“The one and only,” he replied with a smile and a nod.

“Please come in, Ditzzy is all ready for you.”

Robert strode into the room looking around casually. It seemed like he looked everywhere else but on the floor in front of him as if to show that Sue was the last thing on his mind. Or was she reading too much into his actions? When his deep blue eyes finally settled

on her small, cringing form, Sue felt blood rush to her cheeks again. In that moment she wished that she could melt right through the floor.

“Wow, you ComPet groomers really know your stuff! I bet she wouldn’t look half as good if she’d gone to the best beauty parlor in town!”

Donna blushed at the compliment and giggled awkwardly. “Well, it’s just what I do! It’s not really that hard, unlike, you know, being a detective!”

Sue cleared her throat and looked up at both of them. “Could we?” Why did she suddenly feel so jealous?

“She’s got to work on that bark though...” Robert smirked.

“That’s just what I was telling her!” Donna patted him on the shoulder in agreement. Sue bristled.

“Donna, I thought you said you had other cases after me,” Sue reminded, trying to keep her growing irritation out of her voice.

“Oh, yes, that’s right...” Donna said as she presented the leash and the remote to Robert. “You’ll need these, Detective. The controls are all standard. Oh, but if you do have questions or need anything, anything at all, here’s my card!” As she handed him the card she smiled warmly and made eye contact for just a bit too long.

He glanced down at the card, “Of course, Miss—”

“Donna. Donna is fine. Call me day or night!” She chirped then knelt down and took Sue’s paw in her hands again. “Be a good puppy girl now, Ditzzy. Good luck on your case!”

“Yeah...thanks...” Sue mumbled in response.

The door closed and she felt a short tug on her leash, bringing her attention to Robert. Alone with him, she suddenly became acutely aware of herself—how she was “dressed” and made up—again. She sat back, squeezing her legs together while taking care not to bump her tail on the floor. Then she clumsily crossed her paws over her nearly bare chest. It wasn’t at all how she’d envisioned herself being nearly naked in front of a man for the first time.

“Look, Miss Sharp, or I guess I should call you Ditzzy?” Robert took a knee in front of her. “We got off on the wrong foot I think. You don’t have to like me and I don’t have to like you for us to work with each other. We’ve both got a job to do. You do yours. I’ll do mine. I’ll have your back if any trouble comes. Understand?”

Sue was taken aback by his sudden earnestness. His face was close to hers and she could smell the peppermint from his gum.

“Miss Sharp—Ditzzy?”

Sue blinked. “Yes—I mean, yes, you’re right. We both have a job to do.”

Mine is just about a million times worse than yours...

“Good.” Robert stood up, but the smell of mint lingered in the air. “Donna probably already told you that the petsitter you’re wearing is a little different than the base model.”

Sue nodded. She knew she should be practicing responding like a puppy girl, but she just couldn’t bring herself to do it in front of him yet.

Robert pulled out his phone glanced between her and the screen as he spoke, “Unlike the regular Mark I Petsitter, it’s pre-programmed to give you a little more ‘guidance’ but without restricting you like the Mark II would. Your R&D people modified the program to give you more-practical advice for an agent in your position. This way it’ll be easier for you to pose as a full-time puppy girl.”

“Wonderful...” Sue replied, unable to keep the sarcasm out of her voice.

Robert gave her a stern look. “Since you won’t be much good if you’re shocked senseless every time you make a mistake, the strength of each jolt is now a fraction of what it normally is.”

“Does it have to be on at all? Can’t it just, I dunno, just verbally warn me or something?”

“You won’t be able to blend in if you’re not visibly corrected for bad behavior. That’s what they told me anyway.”

Sue frowned.

“Now, uh, the next part is interesting...Even though you’re tagged with a tracker already, if F.E.R.A.L makes a move and you need me, they’ve included a way for you to call me for help.”

“Like a wire?”

“No, not really...They wanted something less-obvious—less-typical. It’s in your tail.”

“In my tail? How am I supposed to call for help with my tail?” Sue asked incredulously.

Robert shrugged and rubbed the back of his head. “It’s kind of ingenious really when you think about it. Basically, it’s like old Morse code. It’s just that rather than taping out the code you, uh, squeeze out the code...”

Sue's mouth dropped open, "You mean when I--" She pointed back at the tail with her paw. "No, absolutely not!"

Undeterred by her protest, Robert continued. "The signal is just like you'd do an SOS, three dots, three dashes, and three dots. They wanted it to be complicated enough so that you wouldn't accidentally set it off, but easy enough so that you wouldn't forget."

"No." Sue crossed her arms.

"Look, I didn't build the damn thing!" Robert snapped. "I really don't blame you for not wanting to do it, but this is just another part of the job."

"No." Sue repeated more firmly.

Robert sighed and pulled out the remote that he'd gotten from Donna.

Sue eyed him warily. "What are you getting that out for?"

Robert looked down at her, "I wasn't going to turn the sitter on until we got to the kennel, but I'll just do it now if you're not going to do your part."

Sue sighed. "Don't bother...just...turn your back."

"What?"

"Turn around." She made a circular motion in the air with her paw. "I'm not going to do this in front of you."

"Sure, whatever, if it'll get you to co-operate!" Robert smirked and turned around.

Sue cringed, took a deep breath, and began.

Three dots...

She tightened around the hard plastic three times in quick succession. Each time the tail dipped down between her legs, making her appear like a frightened, submissive, dog.

Three dashes...

She flexed for slightly longer three times making the tail dip down longer.

Three dots...

She felt disgusting as she finished the sequence.

“Uh, it’s not registering,” Robert said looking over his shoulder her. “The notes say that you really have to ‘clench’ to make it work.”

You clench, damn it!

It took several more tries before Sue could “squeeze out” the sequence correctly. Her muscles, not accustomed to being used in that way, felt wobbly and weak.

“It worked! Uh, good, girl, I guess?” Robert chuckled. “Now remember, only use the signal if F.E.R.A.L agents show up, no other time.”

“Don’t worry. I won’t.” Sue replied wearily. There was no way in hell she would even try if she didn’t have to.

“So, that pretty much covers it.” Robert checked his watch. “We’d better get going or we’ll miss check-in time.”

“Oh, and we certainly wouldn’t want that!”

Robert gave her another stern look as he reached down to attach the leash to her collar. He fumbled with the collar’s d-ring and the leash clip several times.

After several awkward long seconds Sue finally asked, “Detective, have you never done this before?”

Finally, the clip and the ring connected. “Sure, I’ve done it countless times, just not on a puppy girl. It’s a little different.”

Sue smiled to herself as he led her out into the hall and toward the building’s garage. *He’s kind of cute when he’s flustered.*

Part 4: The Check-in

Sue had always gotten a little motion sick if she didn’t sit in the front seat during a car ride. Crammed into a dog carrier in the backseat of Robert’s car, with the plastic walls pushing against her bare flanks and the low ceiling ensuring that she would bump her head every time Robert hit a pothole, had made her more than a little nauseous. She pressed her face to the wire door and sucked in fresh air. Out of all the humiliation she’d suffered she didn’t need to throw up on top of everything else!

As she rode, Sue thought of the encounter she’d had on the walk to Robert’s car. They’d passed a couple of her former co-workers. She didn’t know them well, but she knew their names and they knew hers. Panic gripped her. What would they think? What would they say? They passed right on by her without giving her a second look. It was like she was an

entirely different person—or a different species. It only reinforced her feeling that she wasn't Sue anymore. Though she wondered if that was any great loss.

Sue bounced in the carrier, striking her head for the fifth time against the ceiling. *He's aiming for those potholes on purpose!*

Several bumps later, the unpleasant car ride blessedly came to an end.

"Alright, Ditzzy, before I come back there and get you out are there any questions?"

"Hey, how about we switch jobs? You can go undercover and I'll sit out here in the car, eat cheeseburgers, and watch porn on my phone all day! How about it?"

"So, that's would be a 'no.'" He started to get out of the car. "You sure? Once the sitter is on you won't be able to ask anything."

"Act like a good little doggy, watch out for Cheesecake, and call in the cavalry if the F.E.R.A.L crazies show up. Yeah, I got it."

There was a pause. "Hey, so what kind of porn do you watch?"

Sue banged on the wire door. "Get. Me. Out of here!"

Even though she was going onto the sidewalk where strangers would be able to see her, Sue was relieved to be out of the cramped carrier. Fortunately, the sidewalk was deserted for the time being. With her leash in one hand and the remote in the other, Robert pointed the device at her head.

"Let's see..." he mumbled as he punched buttons with his thumb.

The measured, mechanical voice returned inside her head, "Petsitter Mark I – SP online...Standby mode...Running equipment diagnostic...Reward..." Sue's eyes shot open and her body went rigid as she felt the nipple covers, the c-string, and the tail vibrate all at once for several long seconds. She was just recovering from that when the voice said, "Correction..." Sue squeaked as she felt a shock in all the same places and in her collar and ears as well.

Her paws went up to her collar as she contorted and her tail went between her legs. *That's a "fraction" of the normal shock? How does anyone survive this?*

As the pain subsided Sue looked up at Robert and opened her mouth to speak, before remembering that the sitter was active. It was going to be very hard to break a lifetime of saying what she wanted when she wanted.

"You okay?" He asked while looking a bit concerned.

Sue stopped herself again from automatically trying to answer, blinked away the tears, and replied with a half-hearted, “woof...”

With a slight, almost apologetic tug on her leash Robert led her toward the kennel. With each step Sue’s dread grew just a little bit more. Above the glass double doors there was a large, sign shaped like a pair of dog paws with “The Happy Paws Boarding Kennel” emblazoned across it in brightly painted letters. In her previous job, all of her service animal checks had been for individuals. She’d never actually seen the inside of a boarding kennel. Those bigger inspections were usually reserved for more-senior employees and she was perfectly happy to let them have the so-called privilege.

The bell on the door jingled as they passed through. Sue kept close to Robert as they approached the front counter. It was intensely frustrating to not be able to see much at her diminished height.

“Hi, I’m Elias Schneider,” Robert said across the counter in a passable German accent. “I believe we spoke on the phone earlier.”

Sue choked back laughter. *Is he really doing an accent? Is our Detective Jericho a frustrated actor perhaps?* She mused to herself.

A perky, friendly woman’s voice replied, “Yes, of course, Mr. Schneider. We spoke about boarding your puppy girl.” A head of an average looking blonde woman peeked over the counter at Sue. “And this must be Ditzyl!” She said in a syrupy voice. “Well, she’s just about the cutest little pup I’ve ever seen. Why, I bet she’d get lost in a teacup!”

The air-headed blondes are multiplying today.

Robert laughed and looked down at her. “Yes, she fits just about anywhere!” He ruffled her hair with his fingers and then left his hand on top of her head.

Sue’s first reaction was to pull away, but she knew that she needed to keep up the appearance of a sweet little puppy girl. Besides, Robert’s hand resting atop her head was surprisingly calming.

“So, how long will she be staying with us?”

“At least a week, but the time may have to be extended if that’s possible.”

Sue had been taking things minute by minute. The idea of having to spend a day, let alone a week or more in the gear made her want to scream. She closed her eyes and focused on Robert’s fingertips lightly massaging her scalp.

Mmm...maybe dogs are actually onto something...

"Of course, Mr. Schneider, just call us before her time is up and we can extend her stay!" Sue could hear clicking on a keyboard above her. "Now, let's talk about her accommodations. The standard package has two generous dry kibble meals a day, two play sessions with staff, access to the yard, and a standard crate for nighttime. Upgrades are available in every category and include..."

Robert cut her off. "The standard package will be fine."

Wow, what a cheapskate!

"Standard package it is! Oh, and since you're enrolling her a bit late in the day, she's missed supper and won't be fed until tomorrow, will that be alright, sir?"

Robert nodded. "Yes, she can afford to miss a meal."

What the hell does that mean? Is he trying to call me fat?

There was more typing. "Staff contact and access...that means how much the staff is allowed to touch your pet. Standard means that they will handle her the way they would handle a dog, petting, belly rubs, swats if she misbehaves, etc. There are options for more or less..."

Less! Less!

"Standard will be fine."

I don't want some pervert touching me! Sue felt her tail going down between her legs as she tightened in response to the thought of a stranger rubbing her bare belly.

"Does she have any dietary restrictions, special needs, or is there anything about her that we should know in order to give her the best possible care?"

"Ditzy is straight out of obedience school, and she isn't what you'd call a 'star pupil' I'm afraid." Robert explained. "In fact, she was quite slow in every aspect of the training, that's why I named her 'Ditzy,' she's just not very bright!" He chuckled.

The receptionist looked down at her and smiled understandingly. "Aw congratulations on graduating from obedience school, Ditzy!" She offered her hand. "Shake!"

Sue stared up at her for a moment. *God I hate this!* She clenched her jaw and slowly set her paw on top of the woman's hand.

"I see what you mean. You are a bit slow aren't you?" She said in a patronizing tone. "Don't worry about that, Mr. Schneider. Our handlers are very well-trained. They're used to working with all kinds of pets. Who knows, after a week under their care and after being around so many well-trained and well-behaved puppies, Ditzy may surprise you!"

"I doubt it."

Oh, ye of little faith!

"Well, you *do* know her better, Sir!" The receptionist released Sue's paw and went back behind the counter, only to return a moment later with an adjustable rubber stamp in hand. "Hold her still please so I can stamp her with your selections. This way all the handlers will know her status."

"Yes, of course." Robert kept a hand on her head and placed another on her bare shoulder. His fingertips were rough and warm against her cool skin. Sue closed her eyes again and focused on his hands. Then she felt the rubber stamp make contact on her butt. A moment later she had "SSR" in big black letters across her skin, which stood for "standard accommodations," "standard physical contact" and "remedial-level training."

"All right, she's all set!" The receptionist clapped her hands together.

Robert knelt down in front of Sue and said sternly, "I want you to be a good little puppy while I'm gone." He wagged his finger at her. "I don't want to get any bad reports about you!" His tone was harsh, but he petted her gently while he spoke. Then he leaned in as if to kiss her on the cheek. She could smell the mint from his gum and his aftershave. His lips were millimeters away from her ear, his hot breath made her tingle as he whispered in his normal voice, "Good luck. Remember, three dots, three dashes, three dots!"