

## Secret Love

I had to spend more than \$19.95. In my opinion that's a terribly large sum of money to waste on a dog. Other than for vet bills, of course. But I knew Murphy would enjoy the DVD. Every time the commercial came on television for "the complete anthology of Lassie TV Programs," Murphy's eyes lit up, her floppy ears shivered and she issued forth a low growl from the back of her throat.

I wondered if such a response indicated a high level romantic passion and it didn't seem to me an appropriate response.

"Lassie is a girl dog," I explained to her. "You can't be in love with a girl dog. *You* are a girl dog."

But Murphy was incessant. She would growl, then get up and run around the room at top speed, grab a dog toy and start throwing it in the air and then return to where I was sitting on the floor and attack my feet. That's her favorite thing to do when she wants something from me. If I'm wearing shoes, she will flatten her head down on the floor and try to bite my rubber soles. If I'm wearing only socks she'll nip at my toes. Murphy seldom takes No for an answer.

I called the number on the screen and spoke to a nice young woman I could barely understand. She was probably brought up in America, but she spoke very fast, and with little regard for enunciation. She treated words as if they were obstacles to be brushed aside while getting her points across. I wondered if she had ever considered using words as they had been intended, to express ideas.

"Is this sale for your own viewing?" she asked.

"No, it's for my dog."

"Uh huh," she said. "Is your dog over three years of age?"

"Why should that matter?" I asked.

"Three dog years is the same as 21 people years," she said. "Your dog has to be over twenty one to buy the DVD."

"She's not buying it. I am, and I'm way over 21 years."

"But if she's the main viewer, she has to be over 21."

"Wait a minute," I said. "The dog can't even turn on the TV herself, so she can't be the main viewer."

"Sir, there are scenes in these Lassie shows that have been judged by an animal psychologist to be explicit and objectionable."

"How do you mean, 'objectionable'?"

"Lurid and obscene."

"That's ridiculous," I said.

"Not from a dog's point of view."

"I've never heard of a dog psychologist," I said.

"They're very popular out here on the West Coast."

"I can imagine," I said. "And do they see things the rest of us don't?"

"I'm told," she said, "it's mostly in the way Lassie pants with her tongue hanging out."

"I know what you mean," I said. "I dated a girl in college who did that. But never around me."

"Yes, sir. Before I take your credit card number, let's add up your purchases today."

"Sweetheart, I just want the DVD for the atrocious price of \$19.95."

"Yes, sir. I've given you the 50% discount since you're signing up to buy a new DVD every month. They'll arrive weekly. Your club subscription charge is also discounted because you live in a state populated mostly by senior citizens. The Summer Surcharge still applies, but I can take ten percent off that when you pay your subscription price ahead for five years."

“Lassie didn’t make that many shows, young lady.”

“And that’s the beauty of this bargain-basement deal, sir. You’ll be getting a wide variety of television shows, including 150 episodes of *The Best of Dale Evans*.”

“Roy’s horse?”

“No, sir. That was Trigger. Dale Evans was Roy Roger’s wife. In the 1980s she filmed 150 hours of televised Christian music and homespun advice about absolutely everything on earth and also in heaven. You’ll be receiving all of it.”

“I never liked her hair-do,” I said. “And she never changed it. She must have finally lain in her casket with the hair-do of a 1930’s teenage girl from Oklahoma.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Her hair looked like a football helmet,” I said.

“So-o-o,” said the young woman, “the grand total of your purchases today is \$914.37.”

“What?”

Murphy was now tear-ass-ing around the living room, dragging the pillows off the couch and arranging them on the floor like sand bags against the coming flood. When she heard me tell the young woman on the phone I didn’t want the Lassie DVD, Murphy came to a screeching halt and ran over to me as I sat on the floor speaking into the phone. She put both paws up on my forearm and stuck her face in mine.

“I don’t want the DVD,” I said to the girl, “if that’s your only deal.”

Murphy growled at me, and it wasn’t a low growl of pleasure. It was menacing. I put a hand on her chest and pushed her away from me. She immediately came back, put her paws back up on my arm and began to lick the side of my face with kisses.

“If you can sell me just the single DVD you advertise on TV,” I said, “I’ll buy only that.”

“Certainly, sir, I can provide that to you today for only \$139.95.”

“But that’s the DVD you’re advertising for \$19.95,” I said.

“I can’t sell it to you for that price, sir.”

“But you’re not being honest with —“

“—and you’re not reading the small print on your TV screen, sir.”

Murphy was now quite agitated. She fell back down on the floor, rolled over and put a paw on her forehead.

“Look,” said the young woman. “I’m going to give you my personal family discount of \$100 cash off the price. We were going to use it to buy a toboggan, but I’ll give it to you because you’ve been so understanding and helpful to me on my first day on the job. That will bring the price of the DVD ... just for you—“

“--for my dog.”

“—down to \$39.95, plus postage and handling.”

I had never given any thought to my dog being of a romantic orientation that is more inclusive, so to speak.. Perhaps dogs use a different relationship rubric and orientation doesn’t matter to them. Or perhaps Murphy somehow knew that some of the nine dogs playing Lassie in the movies and TV series were in fact male. Turns out males have the better coat for photographic purposes.

The special handling and shipping upgrade got the DVD here in eight weeks. That was eight weeks of Murphy never leaving the front door as she waited each day for the mailman to bring her the filmed stories of her long dead secret love. Him or her.

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