



Balls to the Wall Harvey Gets the Chop

By Andrea Cooper

Since Dave and I found true love and brought home our German Shorthaired Pointer, Harvey, our lives have settled into a nice routine. And our Saturdays have become quite a ritual with a trip to a favourite café for breakfast and a read of the papers. Dave and Harvey then drop me off home where I can zoom around the house dealing with pesky domestic chores. Dave and Harvey normally end up at Centennial Park for some good old male bonding and are out of the house and from under my feet for at least two hours.

As much as I grumble about being a domestic goddess, I secretly enjoy the time alone to put on trashy pop music to wipe, wash and wax the surfaces of our little house in Surry Hills. I dread the day I'm sprung singing loudly into the handle of my feather duster as I gyrate along to a Christina Aguilera tune. That almost happened one early autumn afternoon when Dave and Harvey arrived back home sooner than I expected.

There was a loud crashing noise as both my boys came tumbling through the door. First came Harvey, all flapping ears, swinging jowls and furiously wagging stumpy tail. Dave followed and I could tell from his body language that something was wrong.

'That bloody dog,' he said in a raised voice. Thoughts of what naughty or embarrassing things Harvey had now done went racing through my mind. Perhaps he'd run in front of another horse, chased after a rabbit, or peed on the Ranger's leg again.

'What did he do this time?' I asked.

'Not Harvey, he didn't do anything. It's that darn cattle dog. He fully went Harvey. He came out of nowhere and God knows where his idiot owner was. But he just latched on to Harvey and went him.'

I instinctively ran my hands over Harvey's entire body, checking for bites, cuts or scrapes. I know I checked his lovely soft ears at least twice. 'He looks fine. Was he a bit shaken?'

'Bloody oath! You should have heard him. He screamed and it took all my strength to get that darn dog off him. It's that grey speckled dog he's played with before. Only this time, the dog came out of nowhere and wanted a fight.'

Dave was understandably furious. I knew the dog that he was referring to and remembered how absent his owner was in the way he let the dog off leash into areas of the park where dogs aren't allowed. And then, before I could think properly, the words that had become doom to Dave's ears poured forth.

'I think it's because Harvey still has balls. I think that's why that dog went him. That cattle dog is an older male and he's still got his.'

Dave's face clouded over and his eyes took on a determined glare. 'We're not getting Harvey fixed. It'll change him. He's got every right to keep his manhood and we're not taking them from him. It's un-natural and cruel and I don't care what you or the vet say.'

'Dave, be reasonable,' I pleaded. 'The vet says that it won't affect his personality and statistics prove that he's less likely to get all sorts of nasties like testicular cancer.'

Dave shook his head, 'No. None of my family's dogs ever had their male parts removed and Harvey's not having his taken away.'

'Oh yeah right', I started with an imperious tone. 'Your parents' last dog... wasn't that the one that was run over because he was out wandering the streets.'

Dave's face tightened as he stroked Harvey's ears and I knew I'd overstepped the mark.

After a few frosty hours, our Saturday returned to normal. It was Harvey who broke the ice by an appearance in the kitchen with a sticky cockroach trap stuck to his right front paw. In the rare arguments we have, it's always been Harvey who has somehow snapped us both out of our moods and returned everything back to normal.

Neutered; getting the chop; fixed; altered; castration; lopping the fruit—however you say it, most men cringe at the idea of having their dogs tackle messed with and I had to realise that my sensitive, intelligent and progressive thinking boyfriend was just a normal Alpha male.

My friend and work college, Veronica, always has a spin on everything and sometimes within her psychobabble, there is some measure of sense and truth.

'This is typical male behaviour. Men tend to live vicariously through their pets. Dave's view on letting Harvey remain whole is really, really common,' she said.

'No, Dave just thinks that getting Harvey neutered will change his whole personality,' I said. 'I think he believes that somehow Harvey will become a paler shade of Harvey.'

Veronica's voice started to get very animated as she said, 'Yes but there's also that thing of men viewing their own male pets as personifications of their own egos and libidos. Dave's in a relationship now and he can't go tom catting around Sydney. But I bet he wouldn't mind if Harvey chased a little tail around the corner.'

I dropped my forehead into my hands and shook my head. Everything the vet had told me made so much sense and somehow Veronica even more so. Davo was fine with fronting up to the vet for Harvey's vaccinations and health care. He even rushed the dog off to the vet when he discovered Harvey had consumed a frozen heat-and-eat Vindaloo—complete with packaging. If Dave's focus wasn't health issues, then how could I convince him otherwise.

As it turned out, fate, or rather a large intact Shepherd X intervened. I was out at Victoria Park taking a lunchtime stroll with Harvey, when he went bowling over to meet this other dog. Hardly a 'hello, nice to meet you' butt sniff had occurred when 35+kilos of mixed Shepherd turned and latched onto 20 kilos of skinny Harvey. I was helpless watching Harvey try to back away and release himself from this dog. The owner managed to grip onto his dog and yank him away from poor Harvey but not before considerable damage had been done.

Harvey was a quaking mess, crying as he lay cowering on the grass. It was such a horrible shock that I felt my knees go weak. I crouched down to check on Harv. He had blood coming from his right shoulder and even more blood coming from his inside thigh.

I helped him hobble slowly back to my office in Chippendale and Veronica drove us both to the vet. The other dog had latched onto Harvey with such force that his teeth had managed to get down into the muscle. After the vet cleaned the wounds and gave Harvey a shot for pain, I tearfully rang Dave.

Dave left work immediately and arrived at the vets to take us home. I sat in the car with Harvey as Dave paid the bill with his credit card. I could see him nod his head in a sombre fashion as he spoke with the vet.

I'm not sure what the vet said that changed Dave's mind or if the day's events snapped Davo back from the clutches of macho madness, but the next morning he announced—like it was his idea—that Harvey was going to get fixed. With an early Easter just a few weeks away, we decided to book the little tacker in to have his tackle removed. He would be scheduled in on the Thursday before Good Friday. That way, we rationalised, Harvey would have a long weekend with us around to supervise his healing.

The afternoon before snip day, Davo arrived home a little earlier than usual and was carrying a very fragrant plastic takeaway bag. In it was a stuffed, roast chicken, chips and gravy. I was very surprised by Dave's choice of takeaway dinner, only to discover that it wasn't for human consumption. Nope, Dave had brought home a roast chicken so that Harvey could have a special early meal before the pre-op fasting.

That evening, both of my boys had very content grins on their faces. I remember smiling to myself, thankful that only one of them was about to get the chop.

Myth-Conceptions about Spaying and Neutering

Many people believe if their dog has only one litter of puppies, it won't contribute to overpopulation. The reality is that if your dog has one litter of puppies and you place them into homes where they have the same attitude to allow breeding, then your dog could be responsible for a staggering 200 puppies in one year.

According to the Humane Society of United States, these are some common myths concerning spaying and neutering.

MYTH: My pet will get fat and lazy.

FACT: The truth is that most pets get fat and lazy because their owners feed them too much and don't give them enough exercise.

MYTH: It's better to have one litter first.

FACT: Medical evidence indicates just the opposite. In fact, the evidence shows that females spayed before their first heat are typically healthier. Many veterinarians now sterilise dogs and cats as young as eight weeks of age. Check with your veterinarian about the appropriate time for these procedures.

MYTH: My children should experience the miracle of birth.

FACT: Even if children are able to see a pet give birth—which is unlikely, since it usually occurs at night and in seclusion—the lesson they will really learn is that animals can be created and discarded as it suits adults. Instead, it should be explained to children that the real miracle is life and that preventing the birth of some pets can save the lives of others.

MYTH: But my pet is a purebred.

FACT: So is at least one out of every four pets brought to animal shelters around the country. There are just too many dogs and cats—mixed breed and purebred.

MYTH: I want my dog to be protective.

FACT: Spaying or neutering does not affect a dog's natural instinct to protect home and family. A dog's personality is formed more by genetics and environment than by sex hormones.

MYTH: I don't want my male dog or cat to feel like less of a male.

FACT: Pets don't have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering will not change a pet's basic personality. He doesn't suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when neutered.

MYTH: But my dog (or cat) is so special, I want a puppy (or kitten) just like her.

FACT: A dog or cat may be a great pet, but that doesn't mean her offspring will be a carbon copy. Professional animal breeders who follow generations of bloodlines can't guarantee they will get just what they want out of a particular litter. A pet owner's chances are even slimmer. In fact, an entire litter of puppies or kittens might receive all of a pet's (and her mate's) worst characteristics.

MYTH: It's too expensive to have my pet spayed or neutered.

FACT: The cost of spaying or neutering depends on the sex, size, and age of the pet, your veterinarian's fees, and a number of other variables. But whatever the actual price, spay or neuter surgery is a one-time cost—a relatively small cost when compared to all the benefits. It's a bargain compared to the cost of having a litter and ensuring the health of the mother and litter; two months of pregnancy and another two months until the litter is weaned can add up to significant veterinary bills and food costs if complications develop. Most importantly, it's a very small price to pay for the health of your pet and the prevention of the births of more unwanted pets.

MYTH: I'll find good homes for all the puppies and kittens.

FACT: You may find homes for all of your pet's litter. But each home you find means one less home for the dogs and cats in shelters who need good homes. Also, in less than one year's time, each of your pet's offspring may have his or her own litter, adding even more animals to the population. The problem of pet overpopulation is created and perpetuated one litter at a time.

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