

Must Love Dogs

Usually, when couples tell the story of how they met, it's something along the lines of they were set up on a blind date, introduced by friends, or met at school or work. When people ask my husband, Lamar and me how we met, we answer, "Venus". We usually get a chuckle, as if we are referring to the mystical, mythological goddess of love who brings soul mates together. In actuality, we are referring to Venus, our female German Shepherd who is closer to the Great Houdini when it comes to escaping than any mythological love goddess.

I was working at Belk in the summer of '02. I worked for Clinique and my now mother in law, Gladys, worked for Estee Lauder. Despite being competitors on the sales floor, we were close friends. One morning, as headed to the floor, Joni, another salesperson who worked in Ladies, came in, eyes wide and a terrified look on her face. When asked what was wrong, she replied, "I just had a German Shepherd chase me all the way out of our subdivision." Joni lived 2 streets over from Gladys. "A German Shepherd? Was he okay?" Joni nodded. "He seemed okay, he seemed like he was trying to get in my car. I hope he isn't rabid and terrorizing the neighborhood." Gladys nodded, adding, "Well, hopefully his owner will come home and get his dog soon." When Joni walked off, Gladys grabbed my arm in what I have come to call her Death Grip and said in a whisper, "That's my son's dog." "Your son's dog?" I asked. "Yes, he's out of town doing some work for his sister and he left that fool dog with me and he's been out running wild since he left." She shook her head, her blonde curls bouncing. "I hope that dog doesn't bite anyone, I don't want to be sued."

The day went on and Gladys would make a few phone calls, inquiring to the status of Venus's flight. Around 7 pm that evening, she frowned and said, "I really hope nothing happens to that dog. Lamar will kill me." "Why did your son leave him with you, anyway?" I asked. "He left the dog for his brother, Shonn, to watch and when Shonn let the dog out to feed him, the dog escaped and he has been loose ever since." "How long has that been?" I asked. Gladys thought for a second. "It was the first day Lamar left, so...five days?" "Gladys!" I exclaimed. "Okay, I will come over to your house when we get off and get that dog up," I offered. Gladys looked at me from head to toe, all decked out in my Clinique lab coat and heels and frowned. "You? What do you know about dogs?" she asked. I laughed. "I am an old country girl and come from a long line of dog charmers. I'll have that dog up in no time."

That evening, I followed Gladys home to execute Operation Dog Rescue. When I got out of my car, I saw the dog, a smaller sized German Shepherd sitting at the corner of Gladys' front yards. "What's the dog's name?" I asked. "His name is Venus," Gladys told me. "Gladys, he is a SHE if the name is Venus. That may be part of the reason she doesn't like you." "Either way, I don't think you are going to be able to get her up," she said. "I am going in the house to get a leftover hamburger, maybe you can lure her with that." I asked Gladys where the kennel was and she directed me to the back yard. "Be careful," Gladys warned, "she may bite you, she has tried to bite Shonn." I just shook my head. "Venus!" I said sternly. "Come!" By some grace of a miracle, or maybe Venus knew she was in the presence of a dog charmer,

she got up and walked along side me, straight to her kennel. There was no barking, no biting, no signs of some vicious street ferocious German Shepherd. Just a few courtesy licks and nudges of my hand to scratch behind her ears. Gladys emerged from her back deck, hamburger pattie in one hand, flashlight in the other, which she used to beam the ray light right in my face. "Careful, Sudie, she's gonna eat you up," she warned. "Gladys, put that thing away. I am more worried about stepping on a snake than this dog biting me." I scratched her some more as she stretched against the kennel door, wanting to be loved. "She's a gentle little thing," I said. Gladys was still not sold on that. I told her I fixed the lock the best I could with a face full of flashlight blinding me and we went into the house for a few minutes. "I have to call Lamar," she said, picking up the phone. After she spoke briefly to her daughter, Karla, Lamar finally got on the phone. "Son, it's your mother," she announced. "I wanted to tell you, your dog is fine. My friend, Sudie, came over tonight and finally got him back up. Her. Whatever it is. Here-tell her thank you." She thrust the phone to me. The first words my husband ever said to me were: Thank you for getting my dog up. Now, please put my mother back on the phone. I handed the phone back to Gladys. She was silent for a second, then she said, "Lamar, darlin', I never lied to you, I knew she was ok, I could see her chasing cars from kitchen window every evening..."

The next morning, Gladys informed me Venus had escaped. Again. On my lunch break, I went back over to her house, to find her youngest son, Shonn and nephew Phillip in the backyard, trying in vain to corral the dog back into the kennel. Shonn looked at me and said "I don't think you will be able to trick her again. She knows what you are up to now. She's crazy-but smart." I looked at Shonn from over my sunglasses and said, "I didn't trick her last night. You hide and watch." "Venus!" I said firmly, and using a method my momma employed on me as a child, I snapped my fingers and pointed to the kennel. Venus signed, a sigh I have grown to love and went straight to her kennel. Phillip burst into laughter as Shonn said "unbelievable." I reached thru the kennel and scratched her soft ears, ears that I have learned are a good indicator of Venus' mood, and looked at her soulful brown eyes. "Next time your person goes away," I whispered, "you just come stay with me. These folks know nothing about dogs."

The next day, Gladys and I were back at work at the store. I was on the phone with a friend of mine, telling her about some new products I had just gotten in, when I saw a man walk up the Estee Lauder counter. "Gotta go, good looking guy at Lauder," I said, hanging up the phone. "Can I help you?" I asked. He shook his head and pointed at Gladys. "I'm here to see her," he said. Man, I thought, Gladys gets all the handsome men at her counter. I went back to unpacking lipstick and moisturizer when Gladys said, "Sudie, come here, I want you to meet someone." I walked out from behind my counter and Gladys motioned Handsome Dude closer. "Sudie, this is my son, Lamar. Lamar, this is my friend, Sudie, who got your fool dog up." Lamar, tall, blonde, tanned and I found out later, really shy, took a long look at me all decked out in my white Clinique lab coat, hair piled high in a topknot and hosed feet-the same ensemble I had worn on my Venus Rescue Missions, minus the 4 inch heels and said, "You? You are the one who got my dog up?" He seemed shocked. I nodded. He still seemed perplexed. "How did you manage that?" he asked, probably concerned about what method I used. "I just used an authoritative tone with her," I said. "She's a sweet dog, really, and I think most importantly Gladys realized she was a girl and not a

he.” Lamar left to get his dog and later that day, Gladys called to let me know I may have a secret admirer. “Remember my son, Lamar, the one with the dog?” “You can give him my number,” I said quickly. Gladys laughed. “Oh, but Sudie, he’s got two more of those big old dogs.” “That’s fine, Gladys, being an animal lover is one of my requirements.”

Maybe Venus the Houdini German Shepherd is the goddess of love after all.