

Telling example:

I came home from a trip, and my dog was nowhere to be found. I asked my brother if he had seen him, and he said the dog was in jail, again. I knew he must have done something bad. My brother told me he chased the mule and donkeys around the pasture, dragged a rotten deer carcass to the house, stole and buried the puppy's ball, refused to allow him to eat, and ate all the cats' food. Momma insisted he be locked up. Then, my brother lectured me why I shouldn't have saved that dog and how I should train him even if it's with a two-by-four. Momma said she lured Speck into the pen with a mayonnaise sandwich.

again and scalded him, so he was ill tempered and short, which is his most natural state. I don't know if he was working on it, or just getting even.

"You seen my dog?" I asked.

"He's in jail . . . ," he said.

BAM!

". . . again."

In the dog's first month here, he was incarcerated twenty-nine times. Telling him to behave, even after almost two years now, is like telling him it is Tuesday.

"What," I asked, "did he do now?"

"Run the mule," he said.

I told him that was not so bad, a dog running one solitary mule.

"Run the mule. Run the donkeys. Run 'em half to death. Run 'em round 'n' round the pasture, bitin' at their legs . . . run 'em till they went to blowin' 'n' buckin' 'n' screamin' 'n' tried to kick him to death. Don't know where he wanted 'em to go. Don't think he did."

BAM!

"What else?" I asked, because there was always something else.

"Dragged part of an old, dead deer up to the house . . . stunk worse than anything I ever

Showing example:

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Recently, I came home from a week-long trip to find the driveway peaceful and empty, the terrible dog nowhere around. It always made me a little nervous when he didn't rush down to meet me; as much as any creature I have ever known, he has lived a blink away from destruction. My brother Sam was in the barn beating on an old Yanmar tractor with a hammer. It had run hot

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smelt . . . Laid there chewing on a leg bone by the kitchen window . . . You can still smell it.”

He paused to let his contempt gather, like an old, creaky train cresting a hill.

“Picked a fight with Momma’s puppy. Stole the puppy’s ball ’n’ took it off and buried it . . . When I fed ’em he wouldn’t let the puppy eat. Went ’n’ laid in the puppy’s bowl, ’n’ growled.”

BAM!

BAM!

BAM!

He pointed to a puddle in the middle of the garage floor. “Peed on the tractor. Peed on my truck. Peed on Momma’s flowers . . .” The zinnias looked like they had been poisoned.

“. . . so Momma told me to lock him up.”

He set down the hammer and picked up a wrench. He twisted it, grimly, on a rusted bolt, like he was tightening a noose, and realized he had left something out.

“Eat all the cat food Momma put out . . . cats flyin’ ever’where.”

I laughed and he shot me a dirty look. He does not even like the cats, which are too well fed to catch mice and have no practical use; how he must loathe my dog, to take the side of a cat.

He went back to abusing the tractor, mumbling

around a big dip of snuff. I could only make out about every third word, but the gist, I believe, was that I never should have let the dog take root here in the first place, should have run him off immediately and permanently with a handful of rocks. A pitiful stray is one thing; you can save a gentle stray. But a dog like this, wild for so long, would bring only woe. He didn’t say “woe,” but that was what he meant. Sometimes, when my dog walked too close to him, he spit on his head.

Sam owned only obedient, serious dogs, and there is no room in his mind for a dog that cannot work for a living, or do what it is told. He grew up in a time when even the best dogs lived at the end of a logging chain and ate from an upside-down hubcap; he dosed their mange with burnt motor oil, and dressed their wounds in kerosene. They were throwaway dogs, too, earless, toothless, chewed on, stitched up, and gun-shy, but they loaded themselves into the truck’s dog box without being told, trailed a scent across miles and mountains, and stayed on a tree till he kicked them off it. His dogs would swim a river for him; all he had to do was whistle.

“You got to train a dog, got to make ’em mind,” he said, making it plain that everything wrong with my dog was my fault. I had tried to train

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the dog, for months, for years, but had miserably failed. Giving him a command of any kind was fruitless, bordering on stupid. I might as well read him *The Song of Hiawatha*, or sing "On Wisconsin." I had to heave him into the truck like a sack of fertilizer every time I took him to the veterinarian, that or lure him in with cold cuts.

Fancy dog people, the ones who play fetch with their pets in German and feed them only healthy, joyless food, said I should speak to him in a deep, strong voice, to show him I was the alpha male. If this failed, they said, I should smack him smartly on the nose with a rolled-up newspaper. But they have not met my dog. He has the attention span of a tick on a hot rock, and by the time I found a newspaper and rolled it up, he would not remember what he was being punished for. I would just be a big, mean man beating a befuddled dog with a Walmart circular.

"You could beat him with a stick of firewood," my brother said, but he was kidding, I am almost sure.

"Or," he said, "a short length of two-by-four."

The pen was, I guess, more humane.

"How did y'all lure him in?" I asked.

My mother's disembodied voice came from the other side of the screen door.

"I made him a mayonnaise sandwich," she said, "and he walked right in."

"I guess there was nothing else to do, then," I said.

"He wet on my sweet Williams," my mother's voice said.

"I know," I said. "I'm sorry."

There was no answer; she had moved on. The dog even had me apologizing to a screen door.

It was the grave robbing, my brother said, that sealed it. They could forgive the rest of it, even a certain amount of careless urination; he was a boy dog, after all. But if there was a corpse of any kind close by, one left lying by a careless deer hunter or hastily covered over by some poacher, he would find it, dig it up, drag it here, and gnaw on it, till I took it away, gagging. The closest human cemetery was, blessedly, several miles away, so it was always a four-legged cadaver of some kind that he brought us. Still, I sometimes wondered if I would come home one evening to find him tugging, by the dress hem, someone's dear, departed Aunt Lurleen.

Anyway, I'd had about all the lecture I could stand. Once, when we were boys, he would have understood why I wanted this dog, but I guess the grouchy old man couldn't see it anymore.

"I will say one thing for him," said my brother,

a good man despite that stiff back and hard head. "He ain't got no fear in him . . ." The dog would not back down from a rattlesnake.

He whacked the old tractor one last, good lick, so it would know better next time.

". . . n'r brains, neither."