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THE LONELIEST VICTIM

By Linda Backer

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Many wonderful people open their homes to the victimized pets made famous by media reports, but close their hearts to the other animals in the shelter

Buddy is ugly. Really. He's a good dog, a Shar Pei mix (OK, I admit, I'm no fan of Shar-Peis) with a bristly coat. He's already neutered, walks well on a leash, four years old, a little overweight (read fat), and he loves people. He also has entropion, a slight case that will cost extra to fix for a potential new owner. His owner leans down to him, rests his forehead on Buddy's, and when he lifts his head, he's crying. He signs the paper and turns away, without looking back. Buddy follows me willingly, as he has done everything in his life.

"Why'd he sign him over?" I ask the staffer at the front desk.

"His wife is pregnant, and won't let Buddy in the house anymore. She says Buddy belongs in a house with his people."

I nod. Whew. That's a tough one. I silently send up a prayer for that marriage, and a hope that the wife will see her husband's broken heart and send him back for Buddy.

Two days later and that hasn't happened. Buddy is still here, on the decision list. Along with eight other dogs, including a Doberman pup who had his throat slashed in a domestic argument. That one will find a home. He's been on the news, and there are five people, at least, willing to adopt him and love him and save him. The pup is poorly socialized, still has some hefty vet bills and training problems to work through, and he has to recover enough from the initial assault to be anesthetized for his neuter surgery. Meanwhile, we screen the list of candidates to decide who gets him.

It happens every time a dog or cat makes the news with a pitiful story of abuse or neglect. Many wonderful people call in or show up, wanting to adopt the animal who has been treated so horribly. They open their homes to dogs or cats who have long lists of problems, but close their hearts to the others in our kennels—dogs like Buddy, who has probably never been mistreated in his life, who deserves and misses, probably more than any other, a loving home, and would be willing to give his heart and soul to a new family. Buddy's not a victim, though; no one lines up to save him. The kennels are full, and he has this eye problem.

So I hang Buddy's tag down, and mark him on the list.

Tomorrow morning, after we feed the dogs and before we open for business, Buddy will be euthanized humanely.

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Because he's not a victim.

Someone oughta tell Buddy.

Linda Backer, an animal care technician at the Capital Humane Society in Lincoln, Nebraska, has also worked as an animal control officer.

**Animal
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