

Bailey's Story

A Dog's Purpose Puppy Tale

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BAILEY'S STORY: A DOG'S PURPOSE PUPPY TALE

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One day it occurred to me that the warm, squeaky, smelly things squirming around next to me were my brothers and sisters. I was very disappointed.

For a little while now, I had been pushing and shoving those wiggling objects aside so that I could get at my mother's furry warmth and her rich, delicious milk. So those things that had been getting in the way of my food were other puppies like me!

I blinked up at my mother, silently asking her to please get rid of the rest. I wanted her all to myself.

But she didn't. It seemed that my brothers and sisters were here to stay.

In that case, I decided, I was going to be the one in

charge. But my littermates didn't seem to understand. I'd try to grab one by the back of the neck, and two or three others would jump on top of *me*. By the time I'd shaken them off, the pup I'd been trying to teach a lesson to would be wrestling with someone else. If I tried a menacing growl, all my brothers and sisters just growled joyously back.

So irritating.

When I wasn't trying to make my littermates understand how the world worked, I'd explore a little. From the first, I could hear a lot of barking, and I smelled other dogs nearby. When I crawled out of a pile of siblings to see what I could see, the surface beneath my paws was rough and hard, and after a few steps my nose bumped into a wire fence. I was in a cage with a cement floor.

On the other side of the wire there were more puppies. These were not blond with dark eyes, like my siblings and my mother and me. They were tiny, energetic little guys with dark markings and hair that stuck up all over the place. They looked like they might be fun to play with, but that wire was between us.

When I turned around to look at the cage on the opposite side, I saw a female dog, white with black spots. Her belly hung down near the floor, and she moved slowly. She gave me one glance but didn't seem very interested.

On a third side of the cage there was a door. I'd noticed that door before. Every day a man would come by with a bowl of food for my mother, and he'd open the door and put the food in. She would get to her feet, shake off a puppy or two, and gulp her meal down, coming back to us as quickly as she could.

This was the first time I had taken a close look at what was beyond that door. Grass. A long strip of lawn that teased my nose with the smells of moist earth and growing things. Around the lawn was a wooden fence.

It was all a lot to take in. I stumbled back to my mother and settled down for a nap on top of two sisters.

The next day, when the man came by, I was paying attention. He had a bowl of food in one hand and a piece of paper in the other, and he was frowning at it.

"Yorkshire terriers, week or so," he said, looking in the cage next door, the one with the puppies. Then he stopped in front of our cage and peered inside it. "Golden retrievers, probably three weeks yet, and got a dalmatian ready to pop any day."

I could tell that he was not saying those words to any of the dogs. He never spoke to us. Quickly, he opened the door of our cage. I trotted over, eager to see what that green grass might feel like under my feet. But the man pushed me aside with a grunt, not very roughly, but not gently either. He put the bowl down in front of my mother.

Then he swung the door shut.

I tried to get a taste of what was in that bowl, but my mother nudged me away with her nose. It didn't smell as nice as milk, anyway. The man moved on, coming back with more bowls in his hands. He put the bowls of food down in the grass and went to the cage on our right. He opened the door, and then he did something that surprised me—he left it open! The puppies with the wiry fur—terriers, the man had called them—tumbled out onto the grass.

“No, not you,” the man said to their mother, pushing her back from the door the way he had pushed me.

I watched jealously as those little fur balls romped all over the grass. Their mother whimpered quietly behind her closed door. The man walked away, leaving the yard by a gate in the wooden fence while the puppies rolled on the grass and bit it and barked at it. One peed on it, and then everybody else of course had to sniff that spot carefully.

Then one of the puppies discovered a bowl of food by falling face-first into it. He came up with a snort, licked sticky brown glop from his nose, and fell in again. All of his brothers and sisters crowded around and did the same thing.

After the food was gone, the puppies came over to our cage door to sniff us. I licked at the leftover food on their faces while one of my brothers stood on my

head. Then they left us to run up and down the grass, barking, tripping, getting back up. I saw that there were more cages to the left and to the right. The puppies raced up and down, sniffing the noses of every dog they could reach.

I wished I could be out there with them. I had explored as much as I could inside our little cage, with its smells of mother and puppies, food and milk. I was ready for more.

When the man came back into the yard, he left the gate open behind him. I could see a tiny sliver of blue sky, green trees, and dark roadway beyond. Longing seized me. There was something out there for me—I knew it. Something important. Something that I needed. If I were ever running free in the grass, I would head right out that open gate. I couldn't understand why the terrier puppies didn't, but they were all too busy wrestling.

The man scooped up two puppies, one in each hand, and carried them out through the gate. He made two more trips for the rest. And then they were gone.

The yard was suddenly awfully quiet without all of their tiny, high-pitched barks. Their mother put her paws up on the gate and cried. Then she dropped down to pace back and forth.

The man came by her cage and looked at her, but

he didn't call out to her, didn't speak to her, didn't reach inside to touch her. Somehow I knew that he could have done those things, and that it would have helped to ease her unhappiness. But he didn't. He just turned and walked away.

The sadness of the mother in the cage next door made me sad as well. I burrowed back into the pack of my brothers and sisters, safe against my own mother's warm side.

But the thought of that gate into the outside world did not leave me. When our turn came to be let out onto the green grass, some days later, I was ready.

The man set down bowls of food for us, just as he'd done for the terriers, and he opened the gate to our cage. We rushed out onto the grass. Two sisters walked right over my head to get at the food bowls. I pushed my way between them and ate my fill. It was delicious, and it felt so satisfying to chew something solid instead of sucking milk.

When my stomach was full, I lifted my head from the bowl and looked around me.

Everything was wonderfully moist and full of smells. The grass was succulent. The earth underneath it was rich and dark. I scratched up a little and stuck my nose right into it. Then I sneezed and shook my head to get the dirt off. I trotted over to the dalmatian's cage, and her brand-new puppies staggered over to their door to



touch noses with me, just as I had touched noses with the terrier puppies not long ago.

After I greeted the younger dogs, I stepped away and lifted my nose higher. Even the air smelled full of possibilities. I smelled a lot of water, somewhere, more than I'd ever seen or smelled in a bowl. I smelled other dogs, and different animals, too: a squirrel that chattered on top of the fence, another animal—bigger, heavier, smellier—that had passed by outside the fence a few nights ago.

The man walked by me and opened the door of our cage to let my mother out. My brothers and sisters all rushed over to her, but I'd found a dead worm beneath my feet, and for the moment that was much more interesting.

The man left again, banging the gate shut behind him.

The gate . . .

My gaze focused on the doorknob.

There was a wooden table along the fence next to the gate, with a stool in front of it. I trotted over. The stool was low enough for me to claw my way up onto it. From there, it was only a quick jump-and-scramble to the top of the table.

There were empty food bowls on the table and a bag that smelled quite interesting. If my stomach had not been full, I might have been content to chew that bag

open and munch on whatever was inside. But for the moment I had another interest.

I remembered how the man had put his hand on the metal doorknob, turned it, and pushed. Then the gate had opened.

Could I do something like that?

The doorknob was not round; it was a thin strip of metal. My tiny teeth were not much use for getting a grip on the thing, but I did my best. I bit hard and tugged and twisted my neck. Nothing happened except that I lost my balance and tumbled to the ground.

I sat up and barked at the gate in frustration. That didn't help either. My brothers and sisters raced over to jump on me, but I turned away from them. I wasn't in the mood to play.

I had something important to do.

I tried again, clambering onto the table and grabbing the knob with my teeth. This time I put my front paws up on the handle to keep myself from falling down, and to my surprise, the handle fell away beneath me. I slipped, and my whole body hit the lever on my way down. I thumped to the grass and looked up in surprise.

The gate was open!

Not very wide, certainly, but when I shoved my nose into the gap and pushed, it swung wider. I was free!

Eagerly, I trotted out, my little legs tripping over

themselves. A path lay right before me, two thin, parallel tracks worn into the dirt. This must be the way I should go.

But I turned back and looked at the gate. My mother was sitting just inside the open door, watching me.

She wouldn't be coming with me, I realized. She was going to stay inside the yard. I was on my own.

I thought about running back to her, snuggling into her warm side, getting a lick from her strong tongue. But I didn't.

Somehow I knew that puppies were meant to leave their mothers. It might be sad for both of them, but it was the way things were supposed to be. If I didn't leave her now, the man would come and carry me away from her, just as he had done to the terrier puppies.

And anyway, I knew deep inside that there was something on this side of the gate that I was meant to find. Or someone. There were other people in the world, I felt sure, and they would not all be like the man who'd fed us and opened our cage.

Somewhere in the world there were kind hands and gentle voices. And it was my job to hunt them out.

I set out in the world to do what I was supposed to do.