

Ellie's Story

**A Dog's Purpose
Puppy Tale**

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed
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The first thing I knew was my mother's smell and the taste of her milk.

I had to fight my way to her, struggling over and around the soft, fuzzy bodies of my brothers and sisters, to reach that milk and fill my empty stomach. I squirmed and pushed with my feeble legs, inching forward, until I could taste the warm sweetness spilling over my tongue.

In a few days my eyes were open and I could see my mother's dark brown face and the pale blue blanket that she lay on, though at first everything was very blurry.

Sometimes, when I felt lonely or cold or lost, I'd whimper, pressing closer to her. My brother and sisters always got confused and took my whimpers for signs of weakness. Then they'd jump on me. There were seven

of them, all brown with black markings, and I couldn't understand why it was so hard for them to figure out who was going to be in charge around here.

When it wasn't Mother, it was going to be me. I was, in my opinion, the smartest puppy.

A woman with soft hands and a softer voice often came down a set of stairs to see us. On the first day my mother growled at her, just a little, and the woman was careful to stay back. But later my mother seemed to change her mind and decided that it was all right for the woman to pick us up, cuddle us, and hold us close.

She had an interesting smell, this woman. Something clean (a kind of soap), something delicious (that was food), and something that was just her. I didn't mind her picking me up—or not much. But I was relieved each time she laid me gently back down on the blanket beside my mother.

A man sometimes came down the stairs to look at us, too, and to bring a dish of food and a bowl of water for my mother. That water! The first time I went near the bowl to sniff at it, one of my brothers knocked into me from behind and I fell face-first into the bowl.

Cold! Water went up my nose and stung my eyes, and when I tried to whimper and let my mother know that I needed help water rushed into my mouth, too. It took all my strength to heave myself up out of that slippery bowl and shake my fur clean and dry. After that I stayed

away from the water bowl as much as I could. My brother acted as if nothing happened, though it was clearly all his fault.

After a few weeks, when my legs were stronger, the man came down the stairs holding something big and brown. He set the brown thing down on the floor and gently picked up one of my brothers, popping him inside.

“In the box, buddy,” the man said. “Don’t worry. It won’t be for long.”

My brother yelped. I could hear him, but I couldn’t see him! All of us started yipping and barking as the man picked us up, one by one, and put us where he had put my brother—in the box.

It was like being in a tiny room, with a floor and walls of something smooth and slippery. My tiny claws slipped and slid. They slipped and slid even worse when the man lifted the box into the air.

My brothers and sisters scrambled all over each other, trying to figure out what was happening. I stood on two sisters and hooked my paws over the edge of the box and peeked out. The man was climbing up the stairs, and my mother was trotting behind him. That made me feel better. We could not be going anywhere dangerous if Mother was coming.

“Whoops, back inside, girl,” said the man. “Don’t fall out.”



He gently pushed my paws off the box's edge, and I landed on the same idiot brother who had knocked me into the water bowl. He chewed on my foot before I yanked it away.

The man carried us for a little while longer and then set the box down. One by one he and the woman lifted us out.

We were somewhere incredible. It was called Outside.

The light was the first thing. It was so bright I could barely see for several minutes. Then there was something strange under my paws—something springy and soft, like the blanket, but prickly. Grass! I bit it, to show it who was boss. It didn't bite back, so I figured that was settled. I was in charge of the grass.

And the smells! I had learned the smells of my mother and my littermates and the blanket where we had lived and of the woman and the man who came to visit us. But now the air was moving, blowing past me and tickling my nose with a million smells that I couldn't sort out. My brothers and sisters rushed past me, yelping, stumbling, falling on their faces, and rolling onto their sides. I stood still, with my nose in the air, trying to understand where I was.

The grass underfoot smelled sharp and fresh. There was another smell underneath that, dark and dense and rich. It smelled like something that would be good to

dig. The moving air brought more smells from farther away—something smoky and tasty from inside the house, something sweet from the bushes alongside it, something harsh and sour and stinking that roared by, too fast, on the other side of a tall wooden fence.

And something mysterious and furry and alive, like me.

That smell was a grown-up dog in a pen. My mother trotted over to him, and they touched noses through a wire fence. I knew this other dog was male, like my brothers, and I sensed that he was important to Mother. Without knowing how, I knew this dog was my father.

“He seems like he’ll be fine with the puppies,” the man said to the woman.

“You going to be okay, Bernie? You want to come out?” Our father’s name was Bernie. The woman opened his cage. He bounded out, sniffed at us, and then went over to pee on the fence.

We all galloped after him, falling over every minute but getting up again. Bernie put his face down and one of my brothers jumped up and bit at Bernie’s ears. Very disrespectful! But he didn’t seem to mind. He just shook his head, sending my brother rolling over.

Some of the other pups took that for an invitation and pounced on Bernie. He knocked a few of them gently aside, sniffed at the rest, and came over to me.

I didn’t bite at him or jump on him, so I got to stay

on my feet. But he put his nose down and sniffed me all over, then put a paw on top of me, just because.

I knew I should not fight back. I might have been in charge of my littermates, even if some of them had strange ideas about that. But this father dog, like Mother, was in charge of me. I let him squash me down into the soft, springy grass and hold me there for a few seconds before Bernie wandered off to let the man pet him and scratch behind his ears.

After that we did Outside every day. I learned that the dark, fascinating stuff under the grass was dirt. And I also learned how to make sure my brothers and sisters didn't get the wrong idea about me. They would creep up behind me and pounce or race across the yard to barrel into me, so I would have to snarl and show my teeth or roll over and over until I was on top. Then I'd walk away and later take the chance to sneak up on them.

It was funny how they didn't just accept that I was the boss. They'd wrestle and wriggle and try to squash me down with their tiny paws, the way Bernie had done with his big one. They were not Father or Mother, though, so I never let them get away with it. But they kept trying.

Bernie sometimes played with us a little, too, and the woman came out with funny-smelling things for us to chew on. "Here are your toys, pups," she'd say.

Then one day a new man came into the yard. He had different ideas about playing. First he clapped his hands loudly. One of my brothers yelped and ran to Mother. Several more of the puppies jumped back a few steps, and one whimpered. I was startled, too, but something told me there was no danger. The man picked up the ones who hadn't seemed scared and put us in a box, carrying us away to a different section of the yard.

One by one, he lifted us out. When it was my turn, he put me down on the grass and then he turned and walked away from me, as if he'd forgotten I was even there. I followed him, curious to see what he'd do next.

"Good dog!" he told me. A good dog, just for following him? This guy was a pushover.

Then the man took something out of his pocket. He opened it up and put the soft folds over me. "Hey, girl, can you find your way out of the T-shirt?" he asked.

I had no idea what was going on, but I didn't like it. The white cotton was all over the place, as if I were wrapped up in a blanket. I tried to fight it, showing it who was boss, just as I did with my littermates. That didn't work. I could scratch it or bite it, but it didn't go away. It just clung to me, all over my face, all over my body.

I tried to walk, figuring maybe I would get away from it. The T-shirt walked with me. I growled and shook my

head hard. That helped a little. The cloth fell away from my face, and I got a glimpse of green grass near my tail.

My tail! That was it! The way to get out of this thing was to back up. I did that, shaking my head again to shuffle the shirt off me. In a few seconds I was out on the grass. The man was nearby, so I ran over to him for more praise.

The woman had come out into the yard to watch.

“Most of them take a minute or two to puzzle it out, but this one’s pretty bright,” the man remarked. He knelt down and took hold of me, flipping me over onto my back in the grass. I squirmed. It wasn’t fair. He was so much bigger than I was!

“She doesn’t like that, Jakob,” the woman said.

“None of them like it. The question is, will she stop struggling and let me be the boss or will she keep fighting? I got to have a dog that knows I’m the boss,” the man answered the woman.

I heard the word “dog,” and it didn’t sound angry. I wasn’t being punished. But I *was* being pinned down. It was kind of like the way Bernie had pushed me down into the grass, the first day I had met him. And this man *was* bigger than me, the way Bernie was bigger. Maybe that meant this man was supposed to be in charge, the way Father was.

Anyway, I figured I didn’t know what kind of game

we were playing now, so I just relaxed. No more struggling.

“Good dog!” the man said again. I guessed his name was Jakob. He sure had some strange ideas on how to play with a puppy.

Next he took something flat and white from his pocket and crumpled it up. It made the most fascinating noise while he was doing that! I wished I could get a better look—and more than that, I wished I could get a taste. What *was* this new thing?

“Want it, girl? Want the paper?” Jakob said.

I wanted it! He moved it around in front of my face, and I chased it, snapping, trying to get a hold on it. I couldn’t do it! My mouth was too small, and my head moved too slowly. Then the man flipped the thing into the air and I raced after it. Pounce! I landed on it with both my front paws and settled down to chewing it. *Ha! Try to get it now!*

It tasted interesting but not as good as I thought it would. It had been more fun when it was moving anyway. I picked it up and brought it back to the man, dropping it at his feet. Then I plopped my rear end into the grass and wagged my tail, hoping he’d get the hint and throw it again.

“This one,” Jakob said. “I’ll take this one.”