

Lily's Story

A Puppy Tale

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I had a mother and no sisters and too many brothers.

We all lived inside a clean, warm kennel. Our kennel had three walls that I couldn't see through and one that I could. The one I could see through was made of thin wires twisted together. I could glimpse what was on the other side, but I couldn't squeeze through the gaps in the wires.

None of us could, though we tried. We knew there were things out there to smell and taste and chew, more things than we could find inside our kennel home.

Above us was a high ceiling and, in the back of our pen, a soft dog bed. That was where I would sleep with

my mother dog, usually with one or more brothers draped across me.

What I saw through the wire, directly across from us, was another kennel just like ours, but empty. I could smell and hear other animals outside our kennels—there were dogs who barked and dogs who didn't and strange-smelling animals who were not dogs and made mewling sounds. Other not-dogs chattered or hissed. But I never saw any of these animals, and they didn't come into the kennel with us.

We had not always lived here. I faintly remembered a different place with different smells. There, I was cold. In the kennel, I was not.

When we lived in the cold place, my only meals had been milk from my mother. Soon after arriving at the kennel, though, I ate different food. The wall that I could see through had a gate that would swing open, and then a woman would come in with soft mush in a bowl.

My mother would greet this woman and lick her hands while her tail wagged happily, so I knew the lady was nice. She was safe. I could trust her. My brothers certainly trusted her; they rushed to her and jumped up toward her face and bit at her hair. I usually hung back so I wouldn't be trampled. But I liked her just the same.

If I didn't have all these brothers, I could have shown

the woman how much I liked her. Also how much I liked her food—which was very much.

But I didn't always get to eat as much of that food as I wanted.

That was because I had too many brothers. I thought about this fact a *lot*, especially when one of them was jumping on me or blocking me from where I wanted to go.

The largest brother was white with gray splotches like me. Another was black with a white tip to his tail, and the third was brown all over. They all had soft ears and big paws and busy tails. So did I. But they were all bigger than I was. A lot bigger, which seemed to lead them to believe they could push me around.

It had always been hard for me to find a place to feed on my mother's milk, because a brother or two would try to shoulder me aside. In the kennel, it was hard for me to gobble up enough meaty mush from the bowl, because my brothers wanted to get there first, and I couldn't always shove my way in.

My brothers stepped on my face when we played. They slept on top of me until I felt flat. They were louder and quicker and rougher than I was, and when we wrestled, I always ended up on the bottom of the pile.

Sometimes I thought life would just be easier without *any* brothers.

If a brother bit my tail or fell down on my head or



stuck a paw in my eye, I yipped or squealed. Then my mother would come to find me. She'd pick me up by the back of my neck. Sometimes, I could feel the gentle bite of my mother's teeth on the nape of my neck before her mouth was even there, feel her warm breath, all in my imagination.

My mother would carry me to the back of our kennel, where our bed was made of soft pillows on the floor. There she'd lie down with me. Her body usually curled into a circle with me at the center.

I loved lying with my mother. She was a girl dog, just like me. I could smell it. We were the only two girls in our kennel. I thought that was why she loved me best.

At least, I hoped she did.

Sometimes, when I was curled up with my mother, I watched people walk by our kennel. That was pretty much all there was to see unless I wanted to look at my brothers. Most of the people would stride busily past, going in one direction or another.

But one day, the woman who brought us food stopped at our kennel. I picked up my head with interest, because she had other people with her! Smaller people who moved more quickly and a bit more clumsily than she did.

Young humans. Children.

My nose twitched. I could smell two boys and a girl.

The boys were bigger; the girl was smaller. Just like *my* family!

I glanced over at my brothers. They weren't paying any attention. As usual, they were piled up in a heap by a wall of the kennel. Brown-Brother was chewing on a toy. Biggest-Brother was chewing on Brown-Brother's leg. White-Tail-Brother was getting ready to jump on Biggest-Brother's head.

"Oh!" said the girl on the other side of the wire. It was a long, drawn-out sound that had both happiness and longing in it. "Oh, puppies!"

I got up and shook myself and scampered forward to investigate.

The girl knelt down and stuck her fingers through the wire. I sniffed at them. They smelled wonderful. I could pick up the scent of salty sweat and soft skin and dirt and something sticky and sweet. She giggled when I started licking. I wagged at the giggles.

Then all my brothers barreled into me. Before I knew it, I was buried under wagging, panting, yipping puppies.

"Get out of the way, Maggie Rose!" I heard someone say.

I wiggled, backing up. When I pulled my head out of the pile of brothers, I saw that the girl was no longer on her knees by the wire. The boys had pushed her to one side so that they could kneel down and put their

own fingers into our kennel and laugh as my siblings licked and nibbled and squealed for attention.

I was pretty sure that the girl was the sister and that the bigger boys were her brothers. I could tell by their scents. The way my littermates smelled like me, she smelled like the two boys. Besides, I knew that pushing and shoving was exactly how brothers behaved.

They all had the same brown hair, but the girl's curled at her shoulders, and the boys both had hair that ended close to their heads. The taller one's hair was neatly pushed to one side, while the younger boy had hair that stuck out all over.

"Move over, Craig!" the younger boy said, poking the larger one with his elbow.

"Don't shove, Bryan!" the bigger one answered, pushing back. His breath had an odor on it that I would soon learn came from peanut butter. It was very attractive. I really wanted to know more about peanut butter.

The girl—Maggie Rose?—looked up at the woman. "Mom? Why is the girl puppy so small?" she asked.

"She's the runt of the litter," the woman, Mom, answered. "It happens, honey. One puppy's born small, and then it's hard for her to get her fair share of food or milk, so she doesn't grow as quickly as the others."

The younger boy looked up from where he was letting White-Tail-Brother chew on his fingers.

“Runt—that’s what we need to call you, Maggie Rose,” he said with a laugh.

I sat and looked at the girl and the mother, high over my brothers’ heads. I could see the girl’s shoulders and head droop a little at her brother’s words.

“Bryan, that’s enough,” Mom told him sternly. “Make some room for me.” Mom reached over to open the gate in the wire wall.

As soon as the gate swung open, my brothers rushed into the hallway, piling onto the boys, jumping up to lick their faces and bite their hands. Craig and Bryan flopped down on the floor, laughing, and my brothers climbed over them just as they did to our mother when they wanted to play.

I stayed inside the kennel. I would have liked to smell and taste these new people close up and to find out if they had any food anywhere. But I knew about this kind of play. It always ended up with me getting squashed and stepped on.

“Oh, puppy, it’s okay,” Maggie Rose called softly. She sat down and held out her hands. “You can come. Come and see me.”

I liked her voice. I wanted to lick her hands some more. Carefully, I stepped around the wrestling boys and brothers and bounded over to Maggie Rose’s lap.

She didn’t make any quick movements. She touched me gently. Her hands tasted just as good as before. I

stuck my nose into the crease under her chin, where her skin was sweaty and delicious.

She giggled. "That tickles!" she said.

"I'm going to name this one Gunner!" declared Bryan, holding up White-Tail-Brother so that his legs paddled in the air.

"This one's Butch!" said Craig, scratching Biggest-Brother's belly.

"How about Rodeo for the brown one?" Bryan said.

"No way. Zev! His name should be Zev!"

"I'm going to name this one Lily," Maggie Rose said. She put an arm around me, and I curled up into a ball in her lap. It felt as cozy as sleeping with my mother.

"No way," Craig said. "How about . . . Katie?"

"How come I don't get to name a puppy?" the girl, Maggie Rose, complained.

"Because you're a runt!" Bryan hooted.

"I'm not going to ask you again, Bryan," Mom warned. "Maggie Rose, of course you can name that puppy if you want."

"Then I'm naming her Lily," Maggie Rose said.

"Stupid name," Craig muttered.

"Why would anybody name a dog after a flower?" Bryan jeered. "She's not even completely white. Lilies are 100 percent white."

"It's my favorite flower," Maggie Rose replied. Her voice was quiet but stubborn. "I'm naming her Lily."



Mom had walked away and was standing a few yards down the hallway, talking to a tall woman I had seen before. The woman had short black hair and boots on her feet. “Okay, boys, time to go,” Mom called.

“Aw, Mom,” Craig groaned. “We just got here.”

“Soccer practice waits for no man, Craig. Or boy. Put the puppies back in the kennel.”

“Mom, can I stay?” Maggie Rose pleaded. “I don’t want to go to their soccer practice.”

“They might get confused and use you as a ball, runt!” Bryan teased her. He kept his voice low, and I didn’t think Mom could hear him.

Mom and the tall woman talked some more. “It’s fine; I’ll keep an eye on her,” the tall woman agreed.

“Okay, Maggie Rose, you can stay,” Mom called over. “Amelia’s in charge. Help out and do what she tells you.”

Maggie Rose grinned. She hugged me close to her face, which gave me a chance to push my head into her brown hair and sniff up the scents hiding in it.

The human brothers left. My dog brothers charged over to Maggie Rose, climbing into her lap, lapping at her face. Maggie Rose curled an arm around me to protect me.

She stood up, still holding me tightly. Brothers plopped off her lap and onto the floor. Maggie Rose herded them back to the kennel and shut the door on them.

They yipped and barked and put their paws up on the door. My mother, still lying at the back of the kennel, picked up her head and watched alertly, but she made no movements.

“I’m going to take you on an adventure, Lily,” Maggie Rose said to me.

I liked her smell. I liked her voice. I liked her hands. But I didn’t know where she was taking me as she carried me away from my kennel, away from my mother and brothers. Where were we going?