

Molly'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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At first, everything was dark.

I felt warmth all around me, and I could smell other puppies cuddled up close. I could smell my mother, too. Her scent was safety, and comfort, and milk.

When I was hungry, I would squirm toward that smell, and find milk to drink. When I was cold, I would press close to her fur, or burrow under a brother or a sister. And then I'd sleep until I was hungry again.

When I opened my eyes after a few days, things began to get more interesting.

I could see now that my mother's fur was short and curly and dark. Most of my brothers and sisters looked like that, too. Only one had fur like mine, as dark as my mother's, but straight and soft, with no curl to it at all.

One day, after my stomach was full, I didn't fall asleep right away. Instead, I stood up and braced myself on wobbly legs. I took a few steps, and my nose bumped into something smooth, with a funny, dry smell. I licked it. It tasted dry, too, and not nearly as interesting as licking my mother or the other puppies nearby.

I was pretty worn out by all this excitement, so I pushed my way underneath the sleeping body of a sister and took a nap. Later on, I ventured a little farther. On every side was more of that cardboard. It was under my feet, too. We were in a box.

Sometimes a woman came to lean over the box and talk to us. I'd blink up at her sleepily. Her voice was kind, and her hands, when they came down to pet us, were gentle. My mother would thump her tail, letting me know that this woman was a friend.

One day she slid her hands right under my belly and hoisted me up into the air.

"You need a name," she told me, holding me close to her nose. I tasted it with my tongue, and she giggled. "You're sweet, that's for sure. How about Molly? You look like a Molly to me. Want to explore? Those legs are getting strong." She plopped me down on a new surface, wrinkly and soft. I put my nose down to it eagerly. I could smell soap, and soft cotton fuzz, and other dogs. I nibbled it. The woman laughed.

"It's not to eat, silly girl. Here, maybe you need some

company. I think I'll call this one Rocky." Another puppy, one of my brothers, landed on the blanket next to me. He was the only one who looked like me, with short hair. He tilted his head to one side, studied me, sneezed, and chewed on my ear.

I shook him off and headed off to find out more about this new space.

It was shockingly huge. I could take many, many steps at a time. I was astounded at how much room there was in the world! By the time my nose bumped into a new pair of shoes, I was worn out. I barely had energy to get my teeth around a shoelace and tug.

The owner of the shoes bent down to pull the shoelace out of my mouth. I growled, to show her it was mine.

"So adorable!" the person with the shoelace said. "Is she a poodle, Jennifer?"

"Half," said the woman who'd taken me out of the box. Jennifer, I guessed, must be her name. "Mom's a standard poodle, definitely. But the dad—who knows? Spaniel, maybe? Terrier?"

"How many did she have?"

"Seven," said Jennifer. "She was pregnant when I found her. After the pups are weaned, I'll see about taking her in to get her spayed. Then I'll find her a home."

"And homes for all of these puppies, too?" asked the owner of the shoelace. "We'll take that one over there, but we can't have more than that." She scooped me up in

soft hands and returned me to the box, where I nestled close to my mother and had a little snack.

“Of course. I understand,” Jennifer said. “Not to worry. I’ve been fostering dogs a long time. The right home usually comes along at the right time.”

She stroked my head as I curled up for a nap, right next to my mother where I belonged.

After that, Jennifer came to take us out of the box more and more often. I got a chance to explore the living room, pounce on a couch cushion to teach it who was boss, and even peek out into a hallway where the floor was so slippery and slick that my feet went out from under me. A sister tried to climb on me when I was down, but she couldn’t get any traction with her back feet on the slick floor, so that didn’t work. All I had to do was roll over and shake her off.

That’s when I caught the scent of another dog in the air.

My head went up. My ears went up, too. I got to my feet, staring and sniffing hard. At the far end of the hallway, a big dog was standing, watching me.

“Barney? Be nice to the new pups,” Jennifer said.

Barney was very tall, much taller than my mother, and I could smell that he was male. He had astonishingly long ears that hung down beside his face and swung back and forth when he put his head down closer to the ground.

I was fascinated. I didn’t have ears like that, and my

mother didn't, either. Neither did my brothers and sisters. I set off to investigate. My sister stayed behind me and whimpered a little for our mother to come and save her. But I was ready to find out more.

With each step, my feet tried to skid away from me. My claws were no help at all; they couldn't get any kind of grip on the polished wood. But I pressed on, and soon I was right up close to the new dog.

Barney put his giant muzzle down to the ground. It was as big as my whole body! He sniffed at my face. Then he sniffed along my whole body, nudging me so hard with his nose that I lost my balance and sat down. But I held still. He was bigger and older, and I knew that it was my job to stay quiet and let him do what he liked.

"Good dog, Barney," Jennifer said.

His nose came back to my head. He let out a snuffly sigh and turned to walk away.

His long, droopy, silky ears swung back and forth, back and forth. And I just couldn't resist.

I jumped forward and snatched at one of those ears with my teeth.

Barney snorted and pulled his head away. I held on. It was tug-of-war! I couldn't bite very hard yet, with my weak jaws, but already I loved playing this game. I'd do it with my brothers and sisters in the box whenever we found anything we could chew. I'd never played it with anything as wonderful as a long, soft, dangling ear.

“Molly, no!” called Jennifer, trying to sound stern. But she was laughing. Barney backed away, looking confused. He towed me with him, my teeth still in his ear. Then he shook his big head, and I tumbled over in a somersault, ending up flat on the floor with all four of my legs splayed out in different directions.

Barney snorted again and began to walk away. I charged up, ready to chase him and get that ear again. But Jennifer scooped me up before I could manage it and settled me back in the box with my littermates.

It wasn't fair because I knew that if I set my feet I could really give that ear a good tug, but a big meal and some sleep took my mind off the injustice.

As my siblings and I grew bigger, our box seemed to become smaller and smaller, and our mother wanted more time away from us. Jennifer started taking us outside more and more often to play.

I *loved* outside. It was wonderful.

There was grass to chew, with a fascinating juicy taste that was not like anything inside the house. There were sticks that tasted even better. Birds flitted overhead. Once I scratched in the dirt and found a worm twisting and coiling between my claws. I nosed it with delight until a brother knocked me away and the worm squirmed back into the earth again while I dealt with my littermate.

Barney did not come outside much. He liked to spend most of his days asleep on a soft bed in a corner of one

of the inside rooms. But there was another dog, named Che, who barely came inside at all, except to eat. Che was big and gray, and he loved to run. And it was even better if he were being chased.

The very first time I went outside, he dashed over to where I was sitting next to Rocky. Che bowed down low on his front paws, his back legs high in the air, his tail beating back and forth. Then he jumped up again and ran away, looking at us to see if we'd figured it out.

Rocky and I sat staring at him. What did he want?

Che seemed to decide that we didn't understand. He came back and bowed again. Then he dashed off once more.

Rocky seemed fascinated by Che's plummy tail. He set off after it, and I set off after Rocky. It would not be right if he had fun without me.

Che raced in a big circle around the yard so fast he came up behind us. I jumped around to stare at him. Rocky yipped.

Che bowed again and tore off. We followed, running as fast as we could on our short, clumsy legs. It seemed the right thing to do. Every time we came outside after that, Che was there, begging us to chase him. We always obliged.

But Che did not stay long at Jennifer's. One day a woman came to visit, and she took Che home with her. "It's wonderful, what you do," she said to Jennifer as she



stood by the gate to the yard, with Che on a leash beside her. “I think if I tried to foster dogs I’d wind up keeping all of them.”

Jennifer laughed. “That’s called ‘foster failure,’ Mrs. Kutner. It’s how I ended up with Barney. He was my first foster. I realized, though, that if I didn’t get control of myself I’d adopt a few dogs and then that’d be it, and I wouldn’t be able to help any others.”

“Come, Che!” the new woman said, and she tugged at the leash. Tail wagging, Che bounded after her. They went through the gate, and it shut behind them.

Che was gone.