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David for his help in writing my story and Petra for her extraordinary strength and love.*

Gypsy

For Petra

Forward

Gypsy was left with her brother/sister in a cardboard box outside a pet shop after only a few days of life. No one knows who the owner of the puppies' mother was but at least they were not killed as so many unwanted dogs are on Crete.

An Englishman, David, who had recently arrived on the island, called into the pet shop on an errand for his boss and decided to 'rescue' Gypsy.

Gypsy's world was confined to one of smell and sound for the next five weeks until her eyes caught up with the rest of her.

This is her story which begins around the third week of September, 1999

CHAPTER ONE

Amoudara

The earliest memory I have is of going to sleep as usual with my brother or sister but waking up in a completely different place. It was a shocking experience since my new place was very small – just enough room for us to lie down without being on top of each other.

Since I could not yet see I could only rely on my senses of smell and hearing to determine what was happening around me. I remember a terrible noise of what I now know to be cars, trucks and motorcycles almost all the time I was awake.

A human would come, eventually, after we had screamed long and hard enough, and shove a rubber thing in my mouth. If I sucked really hard it would produce a liquid that I somehow persuaded myself was almost like my mother's milk. Even though there was no warm fur around it I instinctively knew I had to drink from it to stay alive.

During my waking times I heard many human voices and I learned to recognise the one who brought the rubber thing. One day, when the rubber thing voice came near, there was another voice with it. A gentle voice. I had also become used to the 'rubber thing'

human picking me up. This time other hands picked me up. I was a little frightened until I realised they belonged to 'gentle voice'. Then, to my surprise, 'gentle voice' pushed the rubber thing into my mouth, but this only happened once.

Several sleep periods went by and then I heard 'gentle voice' again. I was excited this time because I liked the way he had held me before and hoped it would happen again. He did pick me up but, to my horror, he immediately put me down again into a container that smelled similar to the one I was used to but felt completely different. (Humans call them "cardboard boxes". I understand perfectly, by the way, human English, American, Greek and German!)

This new box had a sheet of plastic, very cold plastic I might add, on the bottom and I was to spend the next few days in there.

A few minutes later something even worse happened. The noise which humans call 'traffic' suddenly got louder and I realised I was passing through it, albeit in my box. David, for that is who I now know was 'gentle voice', put me down somewhere. A machine started very close to me; I felt a strange vibration and went to sleep!

The next thing I knew was being lifted again and I immediately noticed the complete absence of noise. It was odd at first but I quickly decided it was rather

pleasant. David was talking to me all the time and I somehow felt safe, although I would have much preferred the warmth and security of my mother's body. Still, my basic needs of food and sleep were in plentiful supply and I spent the next 3 or 4 weeks doing nothing more than satisfying both!

During this time the only human voice I heard was David's but I was not alone. My nose told me that there were other animals around but they did not smell nor sound like dogs. When my sight finally arrived I saw they were cats or, more accurately, kittens.

I first counted 10 but the mother left one day and one of the kittens went to live somewhere else. There were now 2 bigger, older cats and 6 kittens who seemed to be only a month or so older than me. This was wonderful since we were able to play together and completely destroy the myth about cats and dogs being born enemies!

The next 2 months were idyllic for me and my confidence grew at the same rate as my body. House training was a bit of an ordeal for a while and I received a few little punishments before I learned where I was not supposed to leave any deposits! I have always felt sorry for humans in this regard – they have so many rules and restrictions. They sleep in one place, pee and poop in another – we just do

whatever we feel like wherever we happen to be at the time!

I was just beginning to settle into this way of life when my routine started to change. Hardly noticeable to begin with but David was spending more and more time at home.

One afternoon he tied a piece of thin rope to my collar, (I'd been wearing a collar since my eyes opened) and started to walk round the garden. I did not know what he was trying to do and dug my heels in as hard as I could! When I realised he actually wanted me to follow I tried to object, but I could see I did not really have much of a choice. He only pulled me along for a few minutes and, as soon as the rope was removed, I was given many pats and "good dog's" and then.....a piece of chocolate! Well, this changed everything. If I was going to receive this kind of treatment just for walking round the garden at the end of a rope for a few minutes we could do this every day! Indeed, that is exactly what happened and I actually came to enjoy the experience.

David never did this sort of thing with the kittens, I noticed. There were a few other ways in which I was treated differently and I began to feel rather special. I was becoming quite fond of David and, for the first time, felt I could trust a human.

Until then my whole world had been one of fun and mini-adventure in a large garden with plenty of toys and playful kittens. One of my favourite games involved one kitten in particular. He was called Garfield because both his appearance and behaviour so closely resembled those of his famous namesake. Whenever I had the opportunity I would firmly grab the end of his fat fluffy tail and pull!

Garf, (that is what David called him) was so cool about this, as he was about everything. He would just sit or lie where he was and let me tug and tug. I supposed it was this activity that earned me my first real name.* I was always called just "Puppy" before that but now I was known as "Oddy"!

This dream existence was shattered one afternoon when, at the end of my lead-training session, instead of having the rope untied David walked me to the gate. I had never had the slightest urge to leave my safe playground – not even to explore the bit of waste land next door where the cats went sometimes at night. Now, here I was going out into the big human world for the first time with eyes.

** It took quite some time for David and other humans finally to determine what sex I was, and my name changed twice before ending up as Gypsy.*

I was very scared as we went down the hill towards the main road but David, using his gentlest voice, continuously reassured me that all was OK and what a good dog I was being. My fear subsided a little and I started taking in my surroundings. Everything was so big! (Even though I am now fully grown I am not a tall dog and a lot of things still seem big to me.)

When we got to the road David picked me up, carried me across and then put me down again. I noticed that here the scenery was dramatically different. When I looked in one direction there was nothing. There was a new sound, however. I guessed, correctly, that it was water from what I had heard in the garden when the humans turned a metal thing on the end of a pipe. But there was so much of it here – as far as I could see!

This was all becoming quite exciting and I forgot the rest of my fear as I noticed David was leading me down towards all this water. I felt a new sensation under my paws. The ground here was soft and I know now that it is called sand and where the sand meets water is called 'beach'. I did not know what to make of it all at first and was a little bemused, especially when David stopped suddenly and removed the rope from my collar.

A quick look round assured me there were no other animals or humans in the vicinity and I decided it was safe enough to explore – just a bit, never going

too far from David. I sniffed around a lot and found many new and interesting smells and toys. I wondered if this sand stuff was as good for digging as my garden. I have always loved digging – it's one of my specialities! To my delight I found the sand was a hundred times better. I could get down to my usual depth in half the time.

"Hey", I thought, "I think I like this beach place!"

In no time at all I was racing up and down as if I had lived on a beach all my life. (I was to go to 'the beach' many times and I never tired of the wonderful freedom to run, the smell of the water and, of course, the digging!)

I did not want to leave and was a bit naughty when David whistled for me. I pretended not to hear him but as soon as I saw him walking back towards home, I raced after him and willingly let him re-attach the rope. That was the first of many adventures I was to have but one I shall never forget.

Having experienced the world beyond my garden I was now eager for a repeat! I was more than content at the house with my own large warm kennel, big garden and my kitten playmates, but I felt different now after that day at the beach. I could not wait to go "outside" again.

At the same time, however, David's routine changed and there was another human around – a female. David was not at home at all now during the day and the female would often leave for some time. With no humans around all the cats would just sleep. They could always get inside the house through an open window. The one advantage they had over me was their jumping and climbing ability. I never once wanted to be a cat but I always wanted to jump like them!

So now I got a little bored and had to look for ways to entertain myself. At first I just dug – everywhere! Well, I did not know which flowers and vegetables were weeds or which ones the humans liked. I do now!

I soon tired of that activity and the lure of 'outside' was as strong as ever. With my newfound confidence I began to explore the fence surrounding the garden. I had never paid it any attention before but now I examined it closely, especially the section by the gate.

David had spent a long time fixing some plastic netting along this part to prevent the kittens escaping when they were younger. It did not do any good now of course since they were all big enough to jump over. I found a gap where the netting had not been nailed so well and started to bite and tug at it.

After a while I was able to pull enough away so I could squeeze under it. I was out!

I did not go far at first. Just down the steps and then sniffed around where the humans left their cars. Then I found the big rubbish container – lots of smells! And many little things to eat! The stuff humans throw away? Why do most of them give us dogs the fancy, and not always so tasty, food out of cans, or the dried stuff, when we will quite happily eat what they do?

Anyway, after 2 or 3 short exploratory forays I decided I was bold enough for bigger things. The next time the female left I was through the fence in a flash and followed her to the car. She spotted me and became quite upset, I could tell. She immediately picked me up and plonked me back inside the garden. I was undeterred, however, and waited until I heard her get into the car. I then raced through the hole and down the steps. My plan was to persuade her somehow to take me with her but I had waited a second too long. The car was already moving. “No problem”, I thought, “I’ll just follow it.”

I could run pretty fast even in those days. When she got to the main road at the bottom of the hill, the female somehow realised I was behind the car. I still do not know to this day how humans do that. They

seem to possess some kind of ESP when they drive cars – they always know what is behind them?

This time the female was angry and that was unusual for her, or David, so I knew I must be in trouble. I got a bit of a rough handling on the way back to the garden and decided maybe I should wait for another day.

That evening I could tell David and the female were talking about me and I guessed she must have said something about me running after the car. The next morning, after he had given me my breakfast, David put a big black bag down next to me. (I later heard him call it a 'day pack'.)

He picked me up and cuddled me as usual but then, to my horror, he quickly and firmly plonked me, rear end first, into *That Black Bag!* "What's going on?" I asked myself. I had not been naughty during the night so this could not be a punishment. I did not make the connection between my escapade the day before and this strange treatment.

David pulled the cord on the bag so it closed enough to stop me getting my paws out, but left enough room for my head to poke through. At least I could see what was going on around me.

David picked up the bag and slung it, and me, over his shoulder. I was higher up than I had ever been before and the view was great! This made the discomfort of being in the bag quite bearable. David then walked through the gate. It suddenly dawned on me what was actually happening: he was taking me with him! (I went almost everywhere with him for the next year.)

David walked – and walked – and walked. We went down the hill, past the beach and on. This was exciting! Everything looked completely different from up there – David is nearly 2 meters tall.

Eventually we turned off the road down a dirt track that ended at a big building behind high locked gates. There was a huge dog – I had not seen that many in my short life thus far, but instinct told me this one was bigger than most. Fortunately for me he was also behind the gates and on a chain. I could see it was a long running chain, though, which meant he had pretty much all of the yard covered. To my relief David put me down, still in *That Bag*, outside the gates and stayed with me.

After a few minutes a car arrived with some humans I had never seen before and speaking Greek. They obviously knew David well and that was good because I could tell from their body language they did not approve of me too much.

I have since learned a lot about the attitude of many Greeks to animals. As in many countries outside Western Europe and North America, animals are mostly kept by humans if they can be of some practical use or produce something of value, e.g. milk, eggs, etc. Dogs, it seems, are kept purely for security – even small ones like me. So it must have seemed quite strange to David's friends to see how he treated me and how he took me everywhere with him.

Another difference between me and most other dogs in Crete was that I did not bark. Well, I did occasionally, but only for a specific reason such as announcing the arrival of a stranger or when a cat refused to play with me. I never just yapped for hours on end like most small dogs seemed to do. Maybe it was because I did not have a problem about my size, or perhaps it was simply that David discouraged it so much from a very early age that I have grown up conditioned to thinking that it is not good to bark too much?

So – for the next 2 weeks I travelled with David and his friends, one of whom I learned was his boss, Thomas, in a variety of cars and a jeep that was very noisy and uncomfortable! We went to a different place every second or third day.

The humans did something that took me a long time to understand. Wherever we went there were

hundreds of trees, all the same, and I would be tied to one of them with a long rope. I had my towel to lie on, a toy and always enough water. The humans had a small machine which made a lot of noise, especially when they put it next to me. The one called Thomas and David took long poles with rubber spikes on one end and connected them by a black rope to the machine. They would then move the poles all over the trees causing millions of tiny black and green balls to fall to the ground. A female human and an older male, who turned out to be Thomas' father, had previously covered the area underneath the trees with huge nets and they collected all these little balls which they then put into sacks.

At the end of each day we took all the full sacks to another place where they were weighed and left. This whole activity I found to be extremely odd and beyond my comprehension until, one day, David was eating what looked like some of these same little balls. He dropped one and it landed close to where I was sitting. I immediately got it into my mouth to investigate and was pleased to discover that it tasted rather good!

(This is why we dogs always get anything we find that we do not immediately recognise into our mouths. There are just so many good things to eat and we do not know if they are edible or not until we try. Humans can be very silly sometimes, thinking

we are actually going to eat this stone or that piece of wood. If only they would wait a few seconds they would see how quickly we spit such unwanted things out!)

Anyway, after listening closely I learned that the little balls are called olives and they were being collected to be turned into the oil that Greece is famous for. Maybe it is the Greek in me but I am very partial to olive oil!

Some days we did not go anywhere and I wondered why until I noticed that most of such days were rainy ones. On the days we did not go that were not rainy there was something different about the town. No people around, for example, and all the shops were closed. I heard the word 'holiday' mentioned a lot on such occasions so I guessed that was what humans call the days when they do not work. It seemed to me that David was having a lot of 'holidays' around this time?

CHAPTER TWO

Agios Nikolaos

Although the olive-picking days were exciting and fun, my life changed dramatically in another way.

A couple of days after we had started, and I would have been about 3 or 4 months old, instead of going straight home as usual we went somewhere I had never been before. David took me to a place in the town that was an open yard with 4 doors leading off it.

He unlocked one of the doors and led me inside. It was a small room with a bed, a cupboard and not much else. I had been wondering all day why David had brought along my blanket and now I found out why. He put it on the floor next to the wall opposite the bed and I realised we would be sleeping in this room that night.

"OK", I thought, "David must trust me enough now not to make puddles inside any more!"

After a few minutes David patted me and said some reassuring words. He gave me a treat and left the

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