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A Pug Like Percy

Written by Fiona Harrison

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A Pug like PERCY

FIONA HARRISON

HQ

ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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For Chris, the only human version
of Percy I know

Chapter One

My eyelids felt heavy, and the pull of sleep prevented me from opening them, despite the early morning autumn sunshine streaming through the windows. Instead, I snuggled deeper into the blue cashmere blanket my owner Javier had bought for me. I screwed my eyes tight, happy to enjoy a few more minutes in bed with the blanket I loved, and wriggled around until I was comfortable. Yet no matter how hard I tried to return to the land of nod, something felt wrong.

Blinking my eyes open with renewed determination, I scrambled onto all four of my paws and looked around. With a start I realised the room I found myself in was completely unfamiliar. Where was the sofa I liked to nap on? The television I liked to watch *Tom and Jerry* on? The glass coffee table I always ran into, and the thick



multicoloured rug I liked to roll around on? Why was I not at home?

My heart pounded with fear as I glanced over each of my shoulders to find I was alone in a small room, containing my bed and an old basket of toys, while on the other side stood an old easy chair. My food and water bowls were near the door and an old sheepskin rug lay on the floor. Hearing the sound of feet scuffling outside the room, I turned my head and peered through a large Perspex window that looked out onto a busy corridor and saw it was teeming with excited dogs and humans in green uniforms.

All too quickly, the memories flooded back as fast as a speeding greyhound and my entire body trembled as I realised I was as far away from home as it was possible to be. I remembered only too vividly that I had been dumped in a dog shelter by Javier but had no idea why. Was it because I had been bad? Did Javier no longer love me? Was I mean to another dog? Or worse, had I committed the ultimate dog sin and bitten a human for no apparent reason?

Filled with despair, I slumped back onto my bed, flung my paws over my eyes and tried to understand why Javier had left me here to rot like so many other good dogs before me. I knew the tails of the forgotten, which was what we in the dog community called dog shelters like this one, was for hounds that were unwanted. It was the home for waifs, strays and the unlovable. Was that me now? Was I unlovable? I had

adored my owner Javier, and I thought he loved me too. We had been together for three years, since I was a small pup, and I had been incredibly happy. I thought he was too. What had happened to make him fall out of love with me? I let out a howl of despair. I would do anything to turn the clock back and undo whatever it was I had done to make Javier leave me in this place. I loved him, he was my owner, my entire world and, quite simply, I would die for him.

I felt a fresh wave of horror as I realised that now Javier had left me here I would never see him again. The thought of a life without my precious owner and best friend, as I came to think of him, was terrible. As the image of his handsome, Brazilian face appeared in my mind, I howled. I loved him, I missed him, and a life without him was unthinkable.

I thought back to my behaviour over the past few days and weeks and was unable to pinpoint anything I had done that was particularly naughty. In fact, I thought I had been good, ensuring I refrained from sitting on Javier's girlfriend, Gabriella's clothes, not making a loud noise when I chewed my kibble or bothering either one of them for too many walks to the park.

I howled again and suddenly heard the door to the room open, and footsteps pad gently towards me. I could tell from the scent of whoever it was



that a human had entered. But who they were or what they wanted held no interest for me. I wanted to remain here, with my paws flung over my eyes for ever and nothing anybody could say or do would change my mind. As the human reached my side, I became aware of them bending down, their jean-clad knees brushing against the side of my face. There was a pause, and then I felt soft fingers, which had to be a woman's, run over my head and along my back.

'How are you feeling today, Percy?' she asked gently.

'Horrible,' I yelped, paws still clamped over my eyes.

'I'm not surprised,' she said gently, 'you've had a terrible thing happen to you. It's bound to be a shock, but I'm here to help you cope with it all, I promise.'

'I don't believe you,' I woofed again. 'There's nothing you can say or do that will make any of this better. My owner doesn't love me any more and I miss him. I will never be loved ever again.'

'Oh Percy,' the woman sighed, 'I promise, you will be loved again. And we will make sure of it. My name is Kelly, you may not remember, but I checked you over when you were dropped off last night by your old owner.'

'I remember,' I whined quietly.

'Now, I'm going to make it my own personal mission to ensure I find you the very best family to take care of you. People, who will love you for ever and ever,' Kelly said gently.

It was unusual to find a human who understood

what we dogs were trying to communicate with our barks, but Kelly, unlike Javier or Gabriella, had understood straight away. There was something about this woman's voice I found soothing, and I prised my paws from my eyes to get a better look at her. She had a warm, open face, and was small, with a button nose and strands of grey hair intertwined with her blonde mane. Kelly was smiling down at me and I sensed she had an air of someone who had seen and done it all. Just being around her made me feel relaxed.

She continued to stroke my soft fur, and bent her face close to mine. 'You won't have to wait long for a home, Percy. Everyone loves pugs, you'll see.'

I licked her cheek in response. I knew she was just trying to be kind. After all, if that were true then Javier would never have abandoned me.

'I've got a secret I want to tell you, Percy,' she continued. 'I've always had a real soft spot for pugs, and I've been crazy about you ever since you arrived yesterday. I'm going to make sure someone very special adopts you, because I want you to have the happiest of lives.'

She scooped me up with her soft, warm hands, then gently covered my little face with kisses. Her lips felt like tender butterflies fluttering gently across my fur and I wrinkled my face with pleasure before Kelly put me down.



‘I know you’ve had a shock. Being abandoned by your owner isn’t nice, but I want you to understand that while I’m out there searching for a very special family to look after you, I will be the one taking good care of you, do you hear me?’ she said in her silky, smooth voice.

I barked a little more enthusiastically than I had since I arrived – I wanted to let her know I had heard her loud and clear. I liked the sound of Kelly looking out for me.

‘Now, I like to make sure my special friends have a good time while they’re here, so I encourage playtime as much as I can,’ she said with a chuckle, as she walked towards the large window and beckoned me to follow. The window overlooked a large yard at the back of the shelter, which I had seen briefly when I arrived, but I had felt so bewildered then that I had been unable to take anything in properly. I peered out and saw several other dogs playing with humans in green uniforms like Kelly, while others were sitting around chatting to each other. They did not look even a little bit sad. In fact, as I watched one particularly overexcited cockapoo run wildly from one end of the square to the other, sending the fallen crisp leaves flying in his wake, I noticed he seemed positively joyful.

‘You see how some of them are running riot?’ Kelly asked, once more reading my mind. ‘Well, that’ll be you too a bit later on. You’ll have cuddles, walks, runs in the yard and friends to make. It won’t be so bad, and I’ll look after you.’

I rubbed my head against her legs in gratitude. Just being around Kelly was making me feel stronger and although I still desperately wanted to go home, I had a feeling that with Kelly on my side, she really would look after me as if I were her own.

'Now I'm going to leave you to it as it looks as though your neighbours, Barney and Boris, are back.' Kelly grinned as she ruffled my ears once more. 'I'll see you a bit later.'

As Kelly waved me goodbye, I saw a young West Highland terrier walk into the room on my left and a fairly fed-up looking elderly beagle enter the room on my right. I padded over to the big sheets of clear plastic that divided my room from each dog's and introduced myself with a welcoming bark.

'I'm Boris,' the Westie replied.

'And I'm Barney,' the beagle explained mournfully.

I noticed Barney was still wet from the bath he'd obviously been given, with a sore-looking scratch on his belly. He flopped on the floor in front of me, looking decidedly sorry for himself.

'How did you get that scratch?' I barked curiously.

'Trying to get through a cat flap,' he replied mournfully, his long ears making his sad brown eyes look even more doleful. 'I wanted to see if I



could move into the house next door when my owner died. But when I got stuck in the flap, the neighbours brought me here.'

I shook my head in amazement. Beagles were supposed to be intelligent, and this was not one of the smartest moves I had heard a beagle make. Still, I realised this was not the best time to tick Barney off. Instead, I barked sympathetically and gave him the once-over. When his tummy had healed, no doubt he would be a handsome fellow and snapped up. I wasted no time telling him so.

'Do you think so?' Barney asked, brightening a little, his sad brown eyes looking slightly less miserable.

'Oh, yes,' I said knowledgeably, realising immediately that Barney could be a lovely-looking dog with a bit of TLC. 'They'll be beating the door down to take you in.'

'Percy's right,' Boris barked loudly through the plastic. 'You won't have to wait long for a home.'

Barney's tail thumped against the floor excitedly. 'Awww, really?' he asked. He paused for a moment, then looked at me. 'Well, I don't think it will be long before someone takes you in either. Everyone loves pugs, don't they?' Barney said, echoing Kelly's earlier sentiments.

Boris slumped to the floor. 'That's true as well. You two will be snapped up and I will be all alone for ever.'

'Of course you won't,' Barney reasoned.

'I will,' Boris barked. 'I'm a bad dog, my old owner

Sam and his wife Emma could never be bothered with me. I was always getting under their feet or in their way.'

'I'm sure you weren't,' I replied. 'So many dog owners think that all we need is a bowl of food, and a couple of walks. They don't realise we need company, affection and—'

'Love,' Boris interrupted. 'My owners never loved me. They thought they did, but when it came down to it, I was just too much trouble for them.'

I felt a pang of sympathy for the young dog. Barely out of his teens, he was just a little younger than me, and despite my own fears about the future, I wanted to make Boris feel better.

'You've seen how lovely Kelly and the rest of the carers are here. She will love you, play with you and listen to you, all while helping find you a good home.'

'She'll be lucky,' Boris barked darkly. 'My owner Sam used to tell me I was such a pain, nobody else would want me.'

I growled under my breath. This Sam appeared to be unfit to lick Boris's paws, I thought darkly.

'You're not a pain,' I barked in anger. 'You're a lovely dog, Boris.'

'Don't pay any attention to your old owners,' Barney added. 'Any family would be lucky to have you.'



Boris rolled his eyes. 'Easy for you to say, you're both a lot cuter than I am. Nobody will want me.'

'But it wasn't always like that,' I protested. 'I felt as bad as you do now when my old owner Javier dropped me off here yesterday.'

'What was he like?' asked Barney.

I sighed and flopped to the floor, unsure where to start. When I thought of Javier, I felt wretched. Even though he had dumped me here, I still worshipped him and would do anything he asked if he walked through the doors right now.

'Javier was a doctor from Argentina, who liked the finer things in life and he treated me like a king with the best food, treats and toys money could buy,' I told Boris gruffly. 'We lived in a flat in Battersea overlooking the River Thames, after he adopted me from my mum three years ago when I was a few months old.'

'Sounds like a nice life,' Boris barked appreciatively.

'It was,' I woofed. 'I would nap when he was working, then when Javier returned, he would drink a cold beer straight from the fridge, before taking me out for a walk in the park, where we would chat and I would chew tennis balls. If Javier was working long hours, then his girlfriend, Gabriella, would take me instead, but it was never the same as she couldn't wait to get our walk over with.'

'So what happened?' Boris asked, interrupting my trip down memory lane.

'I was watching television one night,' I barked

gloomily, 'when I saw they were both filling their suitcases with their belongings. Once the cases were filled, Javier picked me up, gave me a cuddle, told me he loved me, but that he and Gabriella had to go home to Buenos Aires, as their visas had run out.'

'Why didn't they take you with them?' Barney quizzed reasonably.

I shrugged my little shoulders and felt my bottom lip tremble. I had wondered the same thing as I had barked my throat out at the time, begging him to take me, but Javier ignored my pleas. Instead, he gathered my things together and then called a taxi and dropped me off here.

'That's horrible,' Boris said quietly. 'You must have been terrified.'

Sadness coursed through my fur as I remembered watching Javier walk away and how my little body had pulsed with fear as I realised he really was going to desert me in a shelter, somewhere in the far reaches of South London. My wrinkled cheeks burned with shame as I recalled how I had barked at him not to leave me, that I was sorry for whatever I had done and that I would be a good boy, if only he would come back for me and take me with him to Argentina. But my undignified and desperate barks had fallen on deaf ears as my former master climbed into the back of the taxi, without so much as a backward glance.

