



In the Arms of the Angel

I know they are coming for me soon — I can feel it in my bones. It's cold enough in this gloomy prison but its colder still in my heart. I can't stop the shivering that comes upon me unexpectedly and I just hope the other inmates don't notice. Because if they notice they will think I'm weak.

I was strong once; my life was ordered and peaceful, but then something happened to change all of that. She died and I was left alone. And then they, in their stiff and shiny uniforms, put me in a caged prison van. It was then that I knew my freedom would be taken away from me, perhaps forever.

I'd known prison in the past, but that was before she rescued me and took me away from my life of misery. Being chained up and beaten almost every day was a hell on earth and the only peace I got was at night when they'd all gone to bed. I feared the coming of daylight because I knew it would all begin again and how I wished I was dead. The young boy was the worst, he would taunt me and kick me. He even spat upon me and told me I was ugly. Perhaps I was, I don't know, because there were never any mirrors around so that I could see myself. They never fed me much, either. I could feel my ribs when I groomed myself, but even grooming was difficult because of the chains. Maria changed all of that — she rescued me and took me into her home. Oh, she was so lovely, so beautiful, even though she was old and could barely walk. We used to go out on her electric wheely thing and I would sit on the front — in a carrier basket that a friend of hers had fastened to that purring machine of hers. We had wonderful times together, but then she died and they were there with a rope, their eyes wide and staring at me. I tried to run, but they caught me and now I'm here in this solitary cage, waiting... just waiting.

A boy came by yesterday and looked at me. I cowered into the corner of my cage as far back as I could. He had the same colour eyes and the same colour hair as the one who beat me. He just stood there, staring at me. He didn't smile at me — perhaps he was that type who couldn't, or wouldn't. But then a man touched him on the shoulder and said: "Come away James, not that one. He's too small and skinny."

The fat tabby cat in the cage next to me, preened herself and then leered at me. I knew what she was thinking. *Stupid, ugly little brown dog. They'll pick me before they pick you.* More people came by, but hardly anyone gave me a look. If they didn't want me, then I didn't want them, so I curled up and faced away from the humans. When I awoke it was dark again and the shivers came back to me. The cat was gone, perhaps she had found someone to love her, or perhaps she had been taken to the other bright room that smelled of disinfectant. Whatever, I knew I'd never see her again. Anyway, it wasn't a great loss. At least being here in this cold, stark place it was better than being beaten and kicked, but I longed for my Maria. Why did she have to die on me?

I wasn't all that enamoured with the food — dry crunchy stuff. But at least it gave my teeth a bit of a clean. When I first came in here all those people in their white coats grabbed at me and prodded me with icy cold instruments. "Keep still," said one of them, but I couldn't stop the shivering. You'd shiver too if you were being pushed and shoved around while lying on a freezing stainless steel bench. I was wondering when the beatings and the torture would begin again? But this time, strange to say, there were none, and they put me into this cage where I have been now for two months.

I was thinking that this is some kind of a zoo, because all those people who come by just look. Some of the children poke their fingers at me. I'm not the biting type, but the temptation may become too much for me if this goes on much longer. Some of them are noisy, especially the boys. I don't like boys, they are so unpredictable, though perhaps I could learn to like one of them if they were kind to me. I know where all of this is heading. One day soon the people in the white coats will come for me and take me away to that clinical disinfectant room. I suppose the pain will be sharp and short. I sincerely hope so, because I'm not sure I could stand any more torture. Oh, I do wish my sweet beloved Maria had not died and left me all alone. She was so kind.

They put another dog in the cat's cage today — a small Pomeranian type, really cute. It's a girl and wow, is she pretty! I perked myself up and moved to the side of the cage next to her. She stared at me for a moment.... Oh those luscious eyes, and she's so white and clean, and healthy too. She couldn't have been beaten or tortured. No, they wouldn't have done that to her. She's a gas. She's just so beautiful and I think she winked at me. Now, that's a turn up.

Oh here come the mob again, shuffling along on their daily visit. A young couple — she has an engagement ring on her finger — stopped by, looked at me and shook their heads, then turned to the gal next door and nodded. Yes, they took her away to some place where they would be kind to her. I sighed, closed my eyes and went to sleep. I'm lost. Nobody wants an ugly dog like me.

>>> *continued p16.*



I knew the sun was beginning to set because the light from the skylight was dimming. It brought to an end another day of utter loneliness and despair, so I turned my back to it and crept to the rear of the prison cage. What's that! Someone was rattling the door of my confinement. What's going on? Perhaps the white coats have come for me, well, at least I'd had my last supper. Oh lordy, there was this curly-haired moppet standing there, actually smiling at me. Don't get your hopes up, I thought.... just don't get your hopes up. But she really was like an angel. Oh, could she be the angel who would take me away from this dark, cold prison?

There was a man behind her. "That one, Maria, are you sure? Are you really sure?" She nodded and beamed at me. Oh she was so beautiful, so sweet. They unlocked the cage and she took me into her arms. I smothered her face with my kisses. I was free at last in the warm and loving arms of my angel! •

Re-printed from CEW110 September 2015. This story is dedicated to Sally Jacobs, who sang *In the Arms of the Angel* and who moved my heart to write this. The song was originally written and sung by Sarah McLaughlin in 1997. It is a bittersweet song and was not meant for some purposes it was put to, but the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals adopted it for their use in advertisements. The song brought in over \$30 million in donations for the ASPCA. Have a listen at: <http://www.songfacts.com/detail.php?id=2771>



Marching into hell. The fearful havoc produced by war and the unknown future.

*Idiot Corner, Menim Road, 5th November 1917. Westhoek, Belgium. By an unknown Australian war photographer.
Courtesy of The Australian War Memorial*