

MORALITY

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Greece

Winner 2005 Dog Short Story

I am English and have been living in Greece for 30 years. I work for the environment, but am also a writer and a member of the Longriders Guild.

This is (partly) about my dog, Bead. She is a small mongrel. I found her in Amindeo, in Northern Greece. It was raining hard, and she was hiding under a car to keep dry. My previous dog had been stolen and I had been too heartbroken to look for a new one. But this little black dog was determined to be my dog. I saw her little bead like eyes watching me. She met my gaze with a mixture a hope and shyness.

In Greece there are such a lot of stray dogs. In Greek they are called ‘adespota’ : dogs who are bossless, not homeless. This reflects the Greek attitude to stray dogs. The pity for them is that they have no boss, not no home.

When you see those happy dogs who live with homeless people in London and elsewhere you realize the truth of this. Dogs don’t mind being homeless, they mind not having a human to love.

The greengrocer, the girls who have the kiosk and the butcher all agreed that she didn’t belong to anyone. She had been hanging round the central square for a long time. The butcher gave her scraps. The girls who had the kiosk let her go inside the kiosk in the winter to sit by the tiny stove they had in there to keep their feet warm. They also gave her bits of chocolate.

Greeks believe that ‘adespota’ dogs have one ambition only, and that is to have an owner. Everyone was glad for Bead that she had found one. Everyone helped me to catch her, the greengrocer gave me a cardboard box to put her in. The ironmongers gave me string to tie up the box and tie it to the rack on my motorbike.

Being homeless isn’t all bad for a dog in Amindeo. Bead refused to eat the dried dog food I gave her. She had been living on scraps of real meat and chocolate. She didn’t see why her eating standards had to drop so low now she was a private dog.

She took to her new shiny lead and collar. She insisted on being ON the lead when we went to the village. This seemed to her a

visible symbol that she was a beloved and valued companion animal. No other dogs in the village even had collars. She went everywhere in a basket on the back of my bike. From this vantage point she barked aggressively at large shepherd dogs, small indoor dogs, all dogs, in fact. When on her feet she was very careful to be polite to other dogs, a social skill that had obviously kept her out of trouble in her adespota days. However, protected by her human, and with the speed of the motorbike to keep her out of trouble she felt able to be as rude as she liked to all those dogs she would normally suck up to.

I ran a riding school. Bead had never seen horses or cows before. At first she ran and hid whenever she saw one. But soon she became bossy and unbearable to them. She would bark a sharp rebuke whenever my own favourite horse put in a little buck or did anything else he shouldn't when I was schooling him. Bead always came to the manege to make sure horses behaved properly there.

She also was a terrible tale bearer, and would rush and find me when any animal was doing anything it shouldn't:

If the neighbours goats got into the hay barn, if cows came into the yard, if horses came to the front door in the hope of getting tidbits...

Bead became a well travelled dog. There was no form of transport that she didn't try: bus, train, plane, boat. My job involved a lot of moving about throughout Greece, and she always came with me.

After Bead had been with me for a few years I fell in love. I thought there might be problems, but there weren't. If anyone got jealous, it was me, because she became so devoted to him even though she was supposed to be MY dog.

Years have gone by and Bead is old now and has a heart problem. In the old days she would take herself off when we two were having a quarrel. She found it very stressful. But now

sometimes she can't be bothered to leave the room when we argue. Partly because, I suppose, it doesn't worry her so much as it used to.. after all we have been shouting at each other for many years without her having to make a difficult decision about who she will live with. Also it is such a hassle to get out of her basket and go somewhere less comfortable for what might turn out to be a long time. Better to stay in her basket with her paws over her ears..

There was a terrible fight the other day. A lot of shouting and posturing and stamping about on his part.

When he finally flounced away and flung himself on the sofa and pretended to read, Bead emerged from her basket and crept over to me, her tail waving slightly.

He watched this and said:

“ She`s offering you support because she finds my behaviour unacceptable. I`ve been judged by a dog. And, you know what? She makes me feel like a creep”

Soon after this I read about Flo, a poodle. Flo`s owner had got pregnant so she didn`t need Flo anymore. She dumped Flo, who had been her `baby`, for twelve years, at Battersea Dogs` Home. Flo screamed continually from the unbearable pain of being abandoned.

Bead is obviously capable of making moral judgements. I wonder what she would think of Flo`s owner. =

Editorial Note: Do not feed your dog chocolate, the active ingredients aren't digested by dogs and continue to circulate through the body several times before eventual elimination. Some dogs have very low tolerances to chocolate before succumbing to poisoning.