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FOUR PUPPIES

It's 4:30 on a dark Puerto Rican morning. The first light is just starting to break through and Jane and I are outside, waiting for Edi Vasquez to pick us up. She has four puppies for us to bring into Boston.

We have spent six amazing days travelling around this little island, driving on highways, city streets, and small roads. We walked the beaches and searched for escape from the hot August sun. We saw dogs walking with owners, proud and tall, and we saw other dogs, our dogs, skinny, scrappy, hiding in the shadows, begging for food, hungry for, yet terrified, of human contact.

This was why we came.

Jane and I have two wonderful dogs, animals that were scooped up from the streets of Puerto Rico. Jane, especially, has been a traveler all her life, seeing and weeping for street dogs the world over. When we took in two of these abandoned animals, we fully believed it was one way to give thanks for all we have been granted.

But now, this morning, as the sun peeks through the Puerto Rican night, we are taking another step. We are conduits, passengers bringing dogs across the border. We are conductors on an underground railroad, legitimate coyotes for puppies, travelers on American Airlines carrying four 8 week old, 4-pound puppies into a new life.

Yes, they stop us at the airport. Yes, they tell us that one of the soft carrying cases we have is too big. Yes, Roberto, Edi's amazing assistant, has to go back to the house and get a better case. I am tense with worry, but Edi seems calm. She nods and talks and wends her way through logistics and stewardesses and paperwork and dogs. I don't know how she does it, but she makes it work. We walk through the gates, puppies in hand, and yes, even they have to be searched for hidden explosives. Damn, they're adorable. They lick the cheeks of the Security officer and she coos right back at them, squeezing their armpits, rubbing their bellies.

And then we are on a plane. The puppies are at our feet. Two puppies in a case. Two cases. They squeak a little, but as we hurtle through space, as the engines hum, as the skies turn blue with another day, they curl up and fall asleep. Jane's puppies find her feet tucked in under their case, and they put their chins on this warm, comforting pillow. We can almost hear them snore.

And then like magic, the women from Caribbean Connections are there at Logan Airport to sweep away with these young puppies. We say good byes to our new best friends and turn to get our luggage.

This is why we came. Over the last ten years, we have adopted dogs, donated money, and attended reunions. We have photographed and written stories and poems of their antics. But this moment, this brief time, suspended in the air with dogs, bringing them back for someone else – this was why we came. This act closes a circle that began 45 years ago when Jane started to travel, started to ache for these homeless dogs.