



THE KINGMAN
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The journey of an unwanted dog

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KINGMAN - It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining warmly on my back and I know my fur is gleaming. Life is great. To make this great day even better, my brothers, sisters and I are going for a ride in the truck. Nothing beats a truck ride.

Okay, so this is my first one and my experiences are limited because I am so young, but what can truly beat riding in the back of a pickup, running around the truck bed, as the world whizzes by and the wind whips through your fur?

It is a little weird that they left Mom behind though. She's missing all the fun.

Ooooooh! The truck's stopping! I wonder where we are ... all I see is a bunch of sand and bushes. I should sniff those.

They're letting us out! Is this where we get to play? I hop down excitedly from the truck, ready with my five brothers and sisters to roughhouse. We all start running around the empty field and barking loudly.

Our two-legged friends are getting back in the truck.

They must have forgotten the ball. They don't need to worry, I try to tell them, we're having enough fun just wrestling.

All of a sudden, sounds erupt from the truck and smoke is billowing out the back. Those things sure make a lot of noise!

Why did they have to do that?! It's scary when it makes those noises.

Wait a minute ... it's moving. They're LEAVING!!!

"Wait," I call out. "You forgot us!" I start whining and barking, hoping they will turn around and remember us.

But they just keep driving.

They probably just forgot something at home.

Maybe they realize that Mom is still at home. They'll be back soon. They'll miss us. I'll just sit pretty like they taught me, and they'll come back.

My brothers and sisters are still playing around behind me. They didn't notice the car leaving. I just feel like

sitting.

Hours later ...

The sun is going away, and it's starting to get cold.

We're all tired, hungry and very thirsty. They never came back, and we don't really know the way home.

We played for hours in the bright sun, but now no one has the energy to do much of anything. We can't just stay here. We need to find water and find our way home.

I rally the troops together, and we start moving in the direction the car went. Maybe there's water this way.

We walk for what seems like forever. We are going very slowly. There's a puddle of water!

Two in the ranks simply collapse, falling asleep. The rest of us drink our bellies full and follow suit.

Tomorrow is soon enough to worry about tomorrow.

The next day...

I wake up as the sun hits my closed eyes. The day is already starting to warm. All six of us huddled together during the night to stay warm, but I am the first one awake. The puddle is almost gone, the sun taking the water. I try to raise the others, so we can have one last drink before we move on.

All get up pretty easily except two. No matter how much I push, yelp and snap, they will not move a muscle. "Their loss," I think, as we leave them behind. We can't afford to spend all day trying to get them to move. We know from the hot sun yesterday that water and distance are issues too great to waste any spare moment before the sun reaches its peak.

Having drank as much as we can and relieving ourselves in nearby bushes, we trek on.

The day is long and hot. The sun beats relentlessly down on our backs. What we used to love about running and playing outside, we come to hate in just one day. While we find water occasionally, it is sparse, and we are constantly thirsty.

We don't run. We just make our way slowly across the desert. Around dusk, we begin to see signs of two-leggers. They are still far away, and I can't tell if they are our two-leggers. We are all very tired; so we lie down to rest a bit. As my eyes drift shut, I think that we will soon be around people again.

Sometime during the night, when the moon is high in the sky, we are awakened by the sound of whimpering. One of my brothers is laying on his side a short distance away, red dripping from two holes in his side. Slithering along the ground is a long, thin, green-colored animal whose tail rattles. His teeth are bared and he looks angry.

Slowly, so as to not get bitten like my brother, we all back away and leave.

It is still dark out when we made it to the two-leggers' houses. One house has a water bowl in the backyard, and we manage to wiggle under the fence. We fall asleep next to the house, cuddling for warmth.

The next morning...

There is a strange two-legger standing in front of us when we wake up. Crouching low, he reaches out gingerly to pick me up.

"Come on, little fella. This isn't your home," it says, holding me closer now.

I bark, trying to tell him that I know it isn't my home, that we are trying to find our way home, but I don't think he understands me. It places me and my brother and sister into a cage in the back of the truck. I am frightened now. I don't know where we are going or why. I cower in the back corner, no longer excited about riding in the

back of a truck.

A little while later...

When the truck stops, the two-legger comes and takes us one by one out of the cage. We are led into a small room with a metal door with bars. Closing the door, I see it write something on a piece of paper attached to the door. Then it closes and locks the door.

It is a small room for three dogs. There are metal walls all around us. It doesn't seem as bad when they bring us food and water.

Three days later...

I still don't know what to think. People come through constantly to stare. A couple of them took my brother and my sister, but I've been left behind. I still don't know when, or if, I will be going home.

The same two-legger from the first day comes back to my cage late in the afternoon. I don't really pay attention to it because someone comes back to give food and change the water every afternoon, so I just continue with my nap.

However, something is different today. It is carrying a leash. I saw my siblings get led out on leashes. I sit up and happily wag my tail. Maybe I get to go home, too.

It slips the leash over my neck and starts leading me out of my room. Now I notice we are heading in the opposite direction from that that my siblings had gone.

Something is wrong. We aren't going the right way. It is leading me to the back of the building. I have this strange sense that I don't want to go that way.

I start pulling on the leash, trying to stop us from going any further, trying to get away, but it doesn't work. The two-legger is much stronger than me. So I focus on the leash. If I can get it off, I can run away. I start biting on it and pulling it with my teeth, but it won't budge or tear. I can't get the darned thing off.

My last resort is to get the two-legger to let go of it. I leap up to try to bite its hand. As if sensing my intent, it pulls its hand out of reach just in time. My teeth gnash at air. I am getting desperate. I now see the door we are heading for. We are so close.

I continue trying to bite until we are through the door. I reverse my tactics at that point and start trying to back up again. I don't want to be here.

There isn't a lot inside the room. The most prominent thing, the only thing I keep staring at, is a large table. The two-legger, holding my mouth to keep me from biting, picks me up and puts me on the table. I quiver. I am terrified and don't move for the first time. I don't know what is going to happen.

"Sorry, little guy. We just don't have room for you anymore," the two-legger says. It has a sad look on its face before it turns to mess with items on a smaller table.

I glance nervously around the room. I can't tell anything apart because I can't stop shaking. What is it going to do? Why is it sorry? Why aren't I going home like the others? Does nobody want me?

Just give me a little more time, I think. I'll be good, really. I'll sit like a good boy, and someone will take me home. I look with pleading eyes as the two-legger turns back to me. It has something sharp in its hand. I whimper. Please don't do this, please.

What are you doing? Where am I going to go? What is that sharp thing? Please, just let me go home. I won't chew on the furniture or go potty inside, I promise. Stop moving closer... ouch, that pointy thing hurts...

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