Bumper’s Story

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DEDICATION

To Bumper.

Over the fourteen years we spent together, you carved out a piece of my heart and took it with you.

Thank you for sharing my life. I miss you, my dear friend.
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By
Thomas Bukowski

Part 1: In search of Home
CAN you help me? I’m searching for a new home. The one I have isn’t working out, just ask my stepdad.

I’m napping on the passenger seat when he lowers the window. I stand up, stretch, and yawn. All dogs, even puppies like me, love to stick their heads out windows, so that’s what I do.

Stepdad grins, starts laughing, and pushes me out.

“Wee! I’m flying!” I yell at the top of my lungs. I love this game! My ears flap like wings, and the wind grabs my fur, but something’s not right. I’m tumbling. Uh-oh.

I hit the ditch.
That hurts.
A lot.

Who knew dirt could be so hard? Takes my breath away, but weeds cushion.

I flip over and over, my fur collecting leaves and twigs and rubbing in the dew, coating me with wet.

I hate wet.
It reminds me of taking a bath.
I hate baths.
Bet you do, too. All puppies old enough to know hate taking baths.

I lay still for a moment, wondering when the pain will go away, then stand on four wobbly legs and shake myself off.

The red pickup, the one with the gun rack stuck to the back window, speeds away, carrying my stepdad. He’s still laughing. I can hear it.

Is he just going to leave me here? Maybe it’s no big deal. Maybe I can find a new home by myself. I’m
an explorer. I like to investigate new things anyway. I look around.

Weeds. As far as the eye can see. Short ones. Tall ones. Lots taller than me. Green and brown ones.

I climb out of the ditch and limp toward the road for a better view.

Beep!

My head jerks to the left. I scoot back.
A car whizzes by, missing my snout by inches.
That was close! Who knew searching for a new home could be so dangerous?

The wind blows me over and it takes a moment to climb back on my feet. I feel dizzy and my stomach is queasy. I blink lots to clear my eyes. I hate it when something sticks in my eye. It hurts like crazy, and it’s murder getting the thing out.
I plop my butt down on the road and wonder what to do next. Which way is my new home? Which way should I go? Maybe I should follow my stepdad.

The pickup, now far away, disappears in the heat waves rising off the road.

And that’s when it hits me.

I’m alone.
All alone.
And I’m hungry. Thirsty, too. I need to find a new home.

Another horn, this one deeper, louder, sounding like my stepdad the time he caught me chewing on the bottom of the kitchen cabinets. A raw, angry voice. The sound of God’s thunder.

I look to the left. The wall of cold blue steel grows in size, rolling closer and closer. I sit on the road watching it approach, amazed at how big it is getting.
I start shaking. Goosebumps move over my body and make me feel as if I overdosed on caffeine. Don’t really know what that means, but I think you understand that I am terrified. I am so scared I can’t move. I just sit on the road, a quivering ball of black fur.

And the sound. As loud as thunder. Louder. I hate loud noises and this thing is making an awful racket when it blows its horn.

I piddle on the road, soaking my foot.

The ground starts shaking. I swear it does. And the thing rolls closer and closer.

If I don’t move, I’ll be road kill. I know that now. So I skedaddle.

I race across the road, but pause halfway because that’s what I saw squirrels do.

Brakes lock.

Skids.

The 18-wheeler’s trailer swings across the road, covering both lanes.

I’m dead meat. I just stand there, watching it skid toward me, the trailer’s back wheels hit the far shoulder and kick up dust.

Darkness sets in. A shadow maybe.

The trailer flies overhead.

Sunshine returns. Just like that.

Maybe standing in the middle of the road isn’t such a good idea. Maybe it’s why so many squirrels become round patches of splat surrounded by fur. Saw two on the drive here.

Maybe home is across the road.

I jog to the shoulder and keep going, plowing into another set of weeds.

My legs are shaky, like every time stepdad pulled
the rug out from under me. But I can’t stay here. It’s too loud, too dangerous. And this is no place to make a home.

Which way should I go?
I’m confused and scared. You would be scared, too, if you were barely three months old.
I keep going, moving away from the road.
Up I climb.
I don’t know how far up I go, but I touch the sky. And I’m wet.
Getting wet makes me want to pee, so I do, and then shake myself off.
I’m huffing and puffing, struggling to breathe. Higher and higher and higher I climb.

When I reached the top of what must be Mt. Everest, I park my butt and look around. The breeze ruffles my fur and chills my body. I could use more fat on my bones to keep me warm. That’s because stepdad didn’t feed me much. He hated me, said so himself, but stepmom loved all dogs. All dogs except me. Home wasn’t much of a home, so maybe it’s best I’m out here in the middle of wherever I am, looking for a new home.

Patches of brown and green cover the hills. Dotting them are farmhouses and plowed fields. Roads cross the fields. Trees with autumn leaves, colored red and yellow and green, stand like a family searching for a home, too.

Overhead, hawks prowl and turkey vultures glide on air currents. I’ll have to watch them. A puppy my size makes for a tasty meal. Maybe they can see I don’t have much meat on my bones, so they’ll leave me alone.

My stepparents tried to give me away to friends,
claimed I was part Schnauzer and part Spaniel. They said I was the last of a litter of eight.

Never met Dad.

Stepdad tried to sell me, but that didn’t work. I bit one of the guys when he stuck his finger into my mouth to check my teeth. Served him right for trying such a daft thing.

Then they tried to give me away. My brothers and sisters went quick. Don’t know why. Maybe it’s because I chewed someone’s slipper. Didn’t much care for the taste of feet, but the cork did soothe my gums. And the leather straps were chew toys. Those were fun! Stepmom was furious. She beat the grin off my face.

Maybe they couldn’t get rid of me because I fought with my brothers and sisters. Even cuddling up to Mom for warmth or a snack was a nightmare. All that pushing and shoving and barking and
nipping. All of my brothers and sisters were bigger than me, too. Someone said I was the runt of the litter. Made me proud.

But here I am now, sitting on this hill, shaking off flies and crawly things inching up my back. One time, I sat on an anthill. Wow, did that hurt! Ants are small, but they sure can bite. They bite better than me. I tried to bite them back, but that didn’t work. So I flipped over and wagged back and forth in the dirt, trying to rub them off.

Anyway, I don’t see home.

A cloud passes over the sun, but then it shines again, like real quick.

I look up.

Yelp.

I duck and the hawk’s claws miss me by inches.
Run!
My heart races. My tongue hangs out the side of my mouth.
I paddle away like crazy and head for cover, a mound of grass burying the bottom of some shrubs.
I squeeze into the mound and disappear under the bush, but I can still see the hawks and vultures hovering, waiting for me to come out and play.
I’m too scared to play. I catch my breath. Didn’t know I was panting.
If I stay here long enough, will they fly away and leave me alone? How long should I wait?
Another yawn. Are you yawning, too?
I can’t stop yawning. It’s hard to keep my eyes open. It’s so warm in this grass mound, so snuggly warm. Reminds me of curling up to Mom. One last yawn before my eyes close.