

A Journey Home by Karen B.

I guess I never noticed it. The big red pole right beside the school. I walked by it every day when I walked home. My name is Caleb Brunowski and tomorrow is the end of my life. High school. I'm not exactly cool. I love reading, but I wouldn't be caught DEAD with a book. It's just like asking for a black eye. So sometimes when no one sees me I sneak off to the library just to listen to an audiobook. Like I said – I'm not walking out of there with a book.

But then I hear a small whimper. I look back and there it is – small black dog tied to the red pole. A sheet of paper was taped above it, saying "free black dog" in sloppy handwriting. I look down at the dog. He has gunk in his eyes and a cut on his right paw. I untie him and start walking home. He follows me. So, I figured I'd just take him home.

My mom is allergic to dogs and my dad, well, he just hates them. So I decide that I'll just hide him in my room. But how am I going to get him in the house without anyone seeing him? But it's too late. I'm already at the door. I put him in my backpack and motion for him to be quiet.



I zip up the bag, and put it on my back. Just then, my mom opens up the door. I try to act cool. But the sweat gleaming on my forehead caused my mom to ask, "Did you run home from school today? There's sweat all over you."

"Yes, mom. I've gotta go do my homework," as I rushed past her. I got nervous when the dog started to moan. Rushing up the stairs, I sprinted to my room. Then I opened the bag. Slowly, the little dog crawled out. His paw was bleeding even more now. Rushing to the bathroom, I grabbed all the toilet paper I could find, and wrapped his paw in it.

It was then that I realized that he needed a name. I thought for a moment – and then said to him, "Cooper." He started barking and wagging his tail which, I'm guessing, meant that he liked his new name. I quickly shooshed him and shoved him under the bed while pulling out my homework. The bedroom door opened, and my dad was there.

“I thought I heard something” he said. “Hmmm, anyway it’s time for dinner. Heading down the stairs, I tried to think of an excuse to eat in my room. When I entered the dining room, my mom told me that it was very strange to get homework before the new school year even began. I had to think quickly.

“Yeah, it’s crazy. I think they just want us to be ready for high school. By the way, can I eat in my room? I really do have a lot of homework to do.” My mind was racing. I had my fingers crossed under the table.

“Sure, if you have that much homework.”

“Thank you.”

I rushed up to my room with the plate of food. Cooper started jumping and yelping when he saw me. I quieted him down as my mom called up to me.

“Something wrong?” she asked.

“No, mom, I was just coughing. COUGH!”

I started to eat my sandwich. Cooper sniffed it and then backed away. I threw him a piece of it and he gobbled it up so so fast. I think he swallowed it whole! I kept giving him more and more until he had eaten my whole sandwich. I was just so mesmerized, watching him eat. I realized that it was nearly time to get ready for bed, so I made Cooper a bed out of old blankets and pillows. The dog went right to sleep, though I had some trouble falling asleep myself. Maybe it was the thought of going to high school. Before I knew it, the alarm went off. Slapping my hand on the snooze button silenced it, but just then Cooper started barking. I jumped out of bed to try and quiet him, but it was too late. Mom and dad were already at the door. Mom was coughing and sneezing angrily. Dad was just red in the face, and he grabbed the pup and immediately took him to the animal shelter. Mom just yelled at me while I ate my breakfast. Just like high school, I thought. Going to be bad before it even begins.

Hopping on the bus, I saw that all the seats were full. I had to smoosh myself between two jocks who looked like they wanted to punch me in the gut. Finally, we arrived, and, as I got off the bus, I noticed a weird smell. I figured it out once I entered the building...the school lunch. Man, I wished I packed a sandwich. But I have two classes before lunch, so maybe I want to be hungry. I was wrong. I was starving. One of my teachers actually asked if I felt sick because of how loud my stomach was.

At lunch, they were serving what looked like rotten fruit, spoiled milk and bad looking tuna sandwiches. Grabbing the sandwich, I went to sit. All of the tables were full. I mean EVERY table. So I ate my lunch in a bathroom stall. The sandwich tasted like barf.

I headed for my next class – algebra. It’s supposed to be taught by a mean old lady. They were right. She was mean and definitely old.

Time to head home. I got on the bus, and, not paying attention, I missed my stop. The driver slammed on the brakes and let me off, and I walked back home. Tonight was steak and mashed potatoes night for dinner. I ate more steak and potatoes than ever, and mom asked me if I ate my lunch at school. Heading back upstairs to do my homework, I heard a familiar sound outside. Opening the window, I saw Cooper! I got my parents, but dad just grabbed him and took him back to the shelter. I argued with my mom about keeping Cooper the whole way there. But at least my dad gave me a choice about going or not going with him.

It was late when we got home. I had to stay up for over two hours just to finish the homework that was due tomorrow. It was past midnight when I fell asleep.

The alarm. I slapped my hand on the snooze button again. Again, alarm. I turned it off and rolled out of bed, and got dressed for school. And then there he was again. Cooper. Out my window. Like he's waiting for me to open the window for him. I thought about getting my parents again but I know they'd take him back to the shelter. But at least being at the shelter would be better than nothing. Hiding him in my room would be like everything happening all over again. My parents would be dumbstruck. Running to let my dad know, I was surprised when he said, "We will keep him here for the night and we will figure out what to do with him tomorrow."

"His name is Cooper, dad. Am I still going to school today?"

"Don't get your hopes up, kid, and yes."

The next thing I knew, I was back in my usual spot on the bus, squished between the two jocks. Thankfully, I brought chicken noodle soup for lunch today.

I headed home on the same bus, and, getting to the front door, I didn't see my mom like usual. Strange. I opened the door and there she was, playing with Cooper. Granted, she WAS sneezing, but it didn't seem to bother her much. Dad was filling a water bowl. It was time to ask the big question. I was nervous.

"Can we keep Cooper?" I asked. They looked at each other, then at me, and said,

"Yes."

I never thought this day would come. Cooper had finally taken his last journey home.