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The black-and-white border collie pup dozed in a dirt patch, his feet twitching. He dreamed of running. Fast, with no collar. He dreamed of chasing butterflies. He dreamed of eating until his belly felt full. Then, all of a sudden, he was jolted awake. In the dim light he saw the short leash and the stake holding him hostage in the dusty yard. He heard an awful grumbling noise, and it wasn't his empty stomach. It was deeper and darker and coming from everywhere at once. No. Not everywhere. It was coming from the sky far away. He raised his nose and sniffed the air. He smelled something like metal. Or electricity. He heard the distant rumble again.

The pup sat up, alarmed. He had never heard this noise before. It wasn't a car or an animal. The sky was darker than usual. And the air felt heavier and wetter with each passing moment. The air felt like he could lick it.

A flash of light startled the dog, and he began to pace as a large wet drop landed on his black-furred head. He shook it off and walked one way and the other and then one way again. He barked, afraid. Whatever this was, it was scary. No, it was terrifying!

The drops started to fall faster, and soon the dog could feel them seeping through his fur to his skin underneath. He trembled and whined. He chewed at the tether holding him to the exposed spot in the yard, even though he knew it was useless.

A few minutes later the back door to the house swung open and a boy appeared. His shoulders were hunched against the water coming from the sky, and he ran the few steps to the center of the yard and squatted down.

"It's okay, Mutt." The boy unclipped the tether from the pup's collar. The sky boomed again and

the pup shook. The boy scooped him into his arms. “Shhhh,” he whispered, wrapping him in an old towel that smelled like mice and stagnant water. “You’re coming with me.”

As the boy carried him toward the back steps, the dog looked around nervously. He’d never been in the house. He wasn’t *allowed* in the house. He huffed, blowing out air to get the bad smell of the towel out of his nose.

Awkwardly the boy grasped the door handle, tugged open the door, and stepped inside. The dog squinted in the harsh brightness coming from the light bulb that dangled from the ceiling. His white-furred nose sniffed the air. He’d spent days longing to be unclipped from the leash that held him captive in the yard, but now that he was inside he thought outside might be better . . . at least when the sky was not growling and spitting. The house was dark. It smelled like something that made the pup squirm. Something scarier than a storm. This was where the mom lived. And the mom yelled. A lot. The hair on the pup’s back stood at attention.

“What do you think you’re doing with that in here?” The dark shadow of the boy’s mother suddenly loomed in the kitchen, yelling. The puppy felt a shiver go through the boy as the sky boomed again and the boy pulled the puppy closer, squeezing the air out of the small dog’s lungs.

“I wanted to get him out of the rain,” the boy answered quietly.

The mom threw back her head, howling. “He’s a mangy dog! Probably has fleas and who knows what else! I never should have let you talk me into bringing him home in the first place. Take him back outside and tie him up. He’ll get a bath out of it.”

The boy knew better than to argue. Arguing only made his mom angrier, and that never ended well. So he took the puppy back outside, thumping down the three steps into the now muddy yard. He stopped at the bottom of the stairs and looked around.

“I’m not going to tie you up again,” he said secretly as a jagged light flashed in the sky.

The pup tried not to shake but couldn’t help it.

He trembled all over as the boy set him down beside the wall of the house.

“You can curl up under here,” the boy said. He put the smelly towel underneath a table missing two legs, which was propped up against the wall. The little pup’s black ears flopped forward. He didn’t know exactly what the boy was saying, but he was speaking softly. The dog liked that. And the area where he’d placed the towel was protected from the wet drips.

“It’s like a fort!” the boy whispered, sounding excited. He got down on all fours and started to crawl in with the dog. “Move over, Mutt,” he said. “I’m coming in, too!”

Then a voice, louder than the thunder, roared through the screen door. The mom had been watching. “I said tie him up and get back in here!” The dog heard a foot stomp and angry mumbling. “Last thing I need is you catching your death in a storm and slapping us with doctor bills on top of everything else.”

The dog heard the boy sigh and saw the air go

out of him. The boy backed out of the den he'd made.

"Well? Go on. Tie him up and get in here!" the mom shouted again.

The boy wiped his nose on his sleeve. "Come on, Mutt." He pulled the small dog out of the fort and carried him back to where he'd been in the first place, fastening him to the stake in the ground. "You probably don't care about the stupid storm, anyway," he whispered. His face was wet, a mix of tears and raindrops.

The pup lay down, shaking. He put his head on his paws and felt the drops fall harder and faster. He felt something else, too. Something that tugged on his insides. It wasn't just fear. It was something lonely. It was knowing that he was not a part of this pack—the human pack that lived in the house and kept him out. They'd brought him home, but the person in charge didn't want him. And she never would.