

TOP DOG IN TOWN

by
Hal Ames



Bruno grew up on the streets of the village. His father had been the top dog. He was big and mean and now so was Bruno. After his father died, Bruno became the new top dog. None of the other dogs did anything to make him mad because they knew what would happen to them. When he walked by, the other dogs hid. If Bruno saw something that he wanted, he would take it.

There were five dogs that followed Bruno everywhere he went. They made sure that Bruno had everything that he needed. He was the king, and these five other dogs were his army. They were a formidable gang. Even the people in the village avoided Bruno. He would growl and snarl at anyone or anything that got in his way.

During the day, Bruno and his buddies went from place to place in the village looking for food. They would scare the people at the market and take food from the carts. They knocked over garbage cans and spread all of the trash on the ground. They chased dogs and children for fun.

Bruno ruled this village, and he was very proud of how everything and everyone ran from him. He was the king and he made sure that they all knew it.

The village where he lived was high in the hills above the city. At night, Bruno and his friends would sit on a hill overlooking the lights of the city and howl. It made such a noise that the townspeople talked about sending out a group of men to kill the dogs, but

they were too afraid. So night after night, the howling of the dogs echoed over the hills.

The story of Bruno spread to the city down in the valley. Dogs that had escaped from the village went to the city and told stories about how evil Bruno was and how he made all of the dogs afraid of him. The stories about Bruno grew and grew until the dogs in the city thought that Bruno was as big as a horse and as mean as the devil.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

Down in the valley, and on the far side of the city, there lived a family that owned five dogs. The dogs were big and strong. The family used the dogs for different types of work. They pulled wagons, carried grain on their backs, and they did other jobs for the family. They cared for and loved the dogs as if they were members of the family. Nikko was the oldest and he was the strongest.

One day, soldiers from the next province attacked the city. They tried to destroy everything that they could. As the soldiers approached Nikko's farm, the family tried to defend themselves, but the soldiers were too strong. They burned the farm to the ground.

Before the soldiers finished destroying the house and the barn, the youngest son released the dogs and told them to run. Nikko and his four siblings ran as fast as they could away from the farm. They ran and ran until they could run no more. When they looked back at the city, all they could see was smoke rising from where the city used to be.

When it became dark, they quietly returned to the farm. When they got to the fence that surrounded the farm, they saw all of the other animals were dead, and the family was missing. There was nothing left but smoke.

Nikko and his family went to the city. It was the same. All of the buildings were smoking, and they could not find anything alive.

They decided to follow the road out of the town to see if they could find some food. It took two days to climb the road up to the top of the mountain.

When they got to the top, they found themselves in a strange place. It was a small village. As they walked into the town, the people stared at them. No one moved or said

anything.

Nikko saw a bucket of water and went to get a drink. Just as he started to drink, he heard a noise behind him. He looked behind him and saw a huge dog with his ears pinned back and the hair on his neck was standing up. He was growling and had white foam dripping from his mouth.

Nikko spun around and faced the big dog.

Bruno growled, “Who are you and what are you doing in my town? This is MY town and you don’t belong. Get out NOW! or I’ll tear you into small pieces.”

“I’m Nikko and I’m from the city. Who are you?” Nikko replied while holding his ground against the big dog and showing no fear.

“Nikko? What a strange name. Who gave you that name? Ha ha ha!” he laughed at Nikko.

“I’m Bruno; I’m the king of the dogs in this town. Get Out!” Bruno demanded.

“I don’t think so. You’re going to have to make me leave,” Nikko responded as he also showed his teeth and snarled.

Bruno did not know what to think. No one had ever talked to him like this before. He growled even louder and showed his teeth.

“If you don’t leave, my friends and I will eat you for dinner,” Bruno threatened.

Nikko held his ground in front of Bruno and began to get upset.

Just then, Bruno’s friends crawled out from under a nearby house. They slowly made a circle around Nikko. All of the dogs were showing their teeth and making deep noises. They were threatening him and trying to scare him.

Nikko turned around and looked at the five dogs. He did not act scared. He turned back to look at Bruno and threatened him in return. He stood his ground and became even more fearless. Bruno was surprised that this stranger was not afraid of him and his friends.

“Okay Nikko, I gave you a chance to run, but now you’ll get a fight. You’ve given me no other choice but to tell my friends to destroy you,” Bruno warned Nikko.

“Not so fast old man. Take a look behind you,” Nikko said laughing. “I’ve got some help of my own.”

“It’s a trick, you just want to distract me,” Bruno replied.

“Okay, but don’t say I didn’t warn you first!” Nikko said as he jumped directly at Bruno.

Before he knew it, Bruno was fighting for his life. Nikko and his family were all over him. Bruno’s friends were so surprised by the attack, they were slow to help. By the time they got into the fight, Nikko and his family were ready for them. Bruno’s friends realized that they were beaten so they turned and ran away. Bruno was all alone, on the ground and bleeding. He was completely surprised. No one had ever stood up to him before. Now he was on his back hoping that he was not going to die.

Nikko turned back to Bruno and threatened to finish him off.

“Okay, who’s the king of this town now?” Nikko asked Bruno.

“Ah..., you are Nikko. Will you please let me live? I’ll do whatever you ask,” Bruno replied begging for his life.

Nikko and his family looked at each other. Was this the Bruno they had heard so much about? Was this whimpering dog the one who had the reputation of being the meanest animal to ever live?

“We’ll let you live on one condition.” Nikko replied.

“What’s that?” Bruno asked.

“You’ll let us live here in your town, and you won’t bother us or anyone else anymore.” Nikko stated.

“Whatever you say, just let me live, PLEASE!” Bruno begged Nikko and his family.

They let Bruno up. He looked terrible. He was missing hair, and he had blood all over himself. He did not look like the evil dog that had been so cruel to the animals and people of the town.

Bruno walked away with his tail between his legs. He had been beaten, and he

knew it.

Nikko and his family felt proud that they had defeated the legend. As they walked around the town, no one was on the street. They were all hiding because they were afraid of Nikko and his family. No one had ever stood up to Bruno in the past, much less defeated him.

Nikko and his family found a big tree in the middle of the town. It provided some shade from the sun. They curled up and fell asleep under the cool of the tree.

A while later Nikko awoke to a sound he had heard before. When he looked up, he saw Bruno and the other dogs from the town looking down at him. Bruno had gone all over the town and recruited all of the dogs in the village to help him get rid of this threat to their village.

Nikko's brothers and sisters also woke up. They jumped up and formed a group. The center of town was going to be a battleground and everyone knew it.

Bruno showed his teeth, and then said, "You think you can come into my town and take over? Well, you'll see what we do to strangers in this town. Get out or we will have to kill you."

Nikko laughed. "What are you going to do Bruno? You already lost one battle, what makes you think you can win now?"

Bruno warned Nikko and his family, "I've got some help this time. You're outnumbered, and you can't win. Prepare to die!"

Nikko then leapt forward directly at Bruno. He set his teeth into Bruno's neck, dragged him to the ground, and held on tightly. No one expected Nikko to take on Bruno again. The others began to fight, but Nikko's family was so big and so strong that they quickly scared the other dogs away.

Once again, Bruno was on his back pleading for his life.

Nikko just ignored him.

"Why should I let you go again? You have tried to kill us. You're just a troublemaker who can't be trusted. You're better off dead." And with that, Nikko

finished off Bruno.

Bruno just lay there in his blood. The other dogs looked on from a distance. Nikko motioned for them to come to see Bruno. The dogs slowly came out of their hiding places and obeyed Nikko.

“I’m Nikko and this is my family. We’ve come from the city. Our home was destroyed and we’re just looking for a new place to live. We don’t mean to hurt anyone. We want to live in peace. Will you allow us to stay?” Nikko spoke to the gang of dogs.

The dogs looked at each other and then agreed. Nikko was to be the new leader of the pack; he was now the top dog in the village.

Nikko was kind, and he made the other dogs respect the people of the town. Instead of being mean and evil, the dogs of the town became kind and friendly.

The only thing that continued was every night Nikko and his family were heard howling from the side of the hill as they cried for the family who had raised them.



"Short Stories for ESL Students" by **Harold I. Ames** is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License.

VOCABULARY: (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. challenge _____ | a. resound, bounce |
| 2. avoid _____ | b. angry dog's sound |
| 3. destroyed _____ | c. cry, whine |
| 4. echo _____ | d. status, standing |
| 5. knock over _____ | e. confront, dare |
| 6. growl _____ | f. divert, confuse |
| 7. threaten _____ | g. push to the ground |
| 8. distract _____ | h. ruined, damaged |
| 9. whimper _____ | i. intimidate, warn |
| 10. reputation _____ | j. evade, sidestep |

TRUE / FALSE:

- | | |
|---|-------|
| 1. Bruno was the top dog in his village. | T / F |
| 2. Soldiers burned Nikko's city. | T / F |
| 3. Nikko did not have a family. | T / F |
| 4. The village was in the valley. | T / F |
| 5. Bruno defeated Nikko and his family. | T / F |
| 6. Nikko was a mean dog. | T / F |
| 7. Nikko took a nap under a big house. | T / F |
| 8. Bruno begged to not be killed. | T / F |
| 9. Nikko's father was a top dog in the village. | T / F |
| 10. The dogs howled at the sun. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. Who destroyed Nikko's city? ____
 - a) soldiers
 - b) dogs
 - c) farmers
 - d) townspeople

2. Who was the king of the village? ____
 - a) Nikko
 - b) Paco
 - c) Bruno
 - d) Noami

3. How many were in Nikko's family? ____
 - a) seven
 - b) ten
 - c) five
 - d) he was the only one

4. What did the dogs do at night? ____
 - a) sleep
 - b) kill chickens
 - c) travel to other cities
 - d) howled at the moon

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. How many dogs were in Bruno's army?

2. Who was afraid of Bruno?

3. Why did Nikko and his family go to the village?

4. How long did it take Nikko and his family to get to the village?

5. What kind of work did Nikko and his family do on the farm?

6. Where were Bruno's friends hiding when Nikko entered to the village?

7. What did Bruno do after he was beaten the first time by Nikko?

8. What happened to Bruno?

9. How did the village change after Nikko became the Top Dog?

10. What did Nikko's family do every night?
