

TOP DOG IN TOWN

Hal Ames



Bruno grew up on the streets of his village. His father was the top dog, and all the dogs and people of the town knew it. He was big and mean.

After his father died, Bruno became the new top dog. He was bigger and meaner than his father had ever been. None of the other dogs did anything to make him angry because they knew what would happen, and it would not be good for them. When he walked by, they would hide. If Bruno saw something he wanted, he would take it.

There were five dogs that followed Bruno everywhere he went. They were his army and made sure that Bruno had everything he needed. He was the king. They were a scary 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 friends went from place to place in the village looking for food. They would scare the people in the market and take food from the carts. They knocked over garbage cans and spread the trash on the ground. They chased other dogs and children for fun. They were just plain mean.

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 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 so much 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 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, on a farm, 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, as well as other jobs. They cared for and loved the dogs as if they were members of the family. The dogs loved them in return.

Niko was the oldest and he was the strongest.

One day, soldiers from the next province attacked the city. They tried to destroy everything they could. As the soldiers came near Niko's farm, the family tried to defend themselves, but there were too many soldiers. 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 to safety. Niko 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, Niko and his family quietly returned to the farm. When they got to the fence that surrounded the farm, they saw all the animals were dead, and the family was missing. There was nothing left but smoke.

Niko and his family went to the city. It was the same. Smoke rose from all the buildings, 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 dogs 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.

Niko saw a bucket and went to get some water. Just as he started to drink, he heard a noise behind him. When he turned around, he 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.

Niko 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 here. Get out NOW! or I’ll tear you into small pieces.”

Niko replied, while holding his ground against the big dog and showing no fear, “I’m Niko and I’m from the city.”

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

Bruno began to walk back and forth staring at Niko the whole time.

“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 us leave,” Niko responded as he also showed his teeth and snarled.

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

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

Niko did not move. He began to get upset. He wasn’t going to let this dog tell him what to do.

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

Niko looked at the five dogs. He did not act scared. He turned back to look at

Bruno and threatened him in return. Niko stood his ground and became even more fearless. Bruno was surprised that this stranger was not afraid of him and his friends.

“Okay Niko, 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 Niko.

“Not so fast old man. Take a look behind you,” Niko 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!” Niko said as he jumped directly at Bruno.

Before he knew it, Bruno was fighting for his life. Niko 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, Niko and his family were ready for them. Bruno’s friends realized they had no chance to win, 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.

Niko watched as the army of dogs ran away and then turned back to Bruno, threatening to finish him off.

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

“Ah..., you are, Niko. Please don’t kill me. I’ll do whatever you ask,” Bruno replied begging for his life.

Niko 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.” Niko 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. If you do that, we will let you live.” Niko stated.

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

family.

They let Bruno get up from the dirt. He looked terrible. He was missing fur, and he had blood all over himself. He no longer looked 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.

Niko and his family felt proud they had defeated the legend. As they walked around the town, no one was on the street. Everyone was hiding because they were afraid of Niko and his family. No one had ever stood up to Bruno in the past, much less defeated him. All of this had happened in the center of the village for all to see.

Niko 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 Niko 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 around the town and had recruited all the dogs in the village to help him to get rid of this threat to his town.

Niko's brothers and sisters also woke up. When they did, they jumped up and formed a group. The center of town was going to be a battleground again 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'll have to kill you."

Niko laughed. "Ha ha ha... What are you going to do, Bruno? You already lost one fight, what makes you think you can win now?"

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

Niko then leapt forward directly at Bruno. He set his teeth into Bruno's neck, dragging him to the ground, and holding on tightly. No one expected Niko to take on

Bruno again, especially so quickly. The others threatened to fight, but Niko's family were so big and so strong, they quickly scared the dogs away.

Once again, Bruno was on his back pleading for his life, "Don't kill me. I will give you anything you want."

Niko just ignored his request.

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

With that, Niko finished off Bruno.

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

Once the other dogs came to the center of the town, Niko began to speak to them, "I'm Niko 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 want to hurt anyone. We want to live in peace. Will you allow us to stay?"

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

Niko 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.

Niko and his family could be heard howling from the side of the hill every night as they cried for the family who had raised them.

The townspeople did not mind. The town was quiet and safe.

THE END

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

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. challenge _____ | a. repeating sound, resound, bounce |
| 2. avoid _____ | b. sound from an angry dog |
| 3. destroy _____ | c. a dog's cry, whine |
| 4. echo _____ | d. status, standing in a community |
| 5. knock over _____ | e. confront, dare |
| 6. growl _____ | f. divert, confuse |
| 7. threaten _____ | g. push something to the ground |
| 8. distract _____ | h. ruin, damage |
| 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 Niko's city. | T / F |
| 3. Niko did not have a family. | T / F |
| 4. The village was in the valley. | T / F |
| 5. Bruno defeated Niko and his family. | T / F |
| 6. Niko was a mean dog. | T / F |
| 7. Niko took a nap under a big house. | T / F |
| 8. Bruno begged to not be killed. | T / F |
| 9. Niko'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 Niko's city? ____
 - a) soldiers
 - b) dogs
 - c) farmers
 - d) townspeople

2. Who was the top dog of the village at the end? ____
 - a) Niko
 - b) Paco
 - c) Bruno
 - d) Naomi

3. How many were in Niko'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 Niko and his family go to the village?

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

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

6. Where were Bruno's friends hiding when Niko's family entered the village?

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

8. What happened to Bruno?

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

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