

Alice:

How my human family found me and how (ha, ha) I found them, and how they trained me and I trained them, and, in general, what a lucky dog I am*

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* And oh how one of my masters wishes that authors would come up with more succinct, clever, original book titles rather than resort to silly lengthy subtitles like this one.

1. The Garage

I'm a dog. More precisely, I'm a puppy.

My eyes just opened today. Still, all what I know is just feelings and smells. I feel my mom and my siblings. I have several siblings. I wriggle, and they wriggle against me. I smell them, too. I smell and feel the blanket we rest on. My mom feeds me and licks me and warms me. I think this is what love is. Mmm: touch and togetherness.

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I can see things now. I see my mom. She looks into my eyes, and I see into hers, and quickly she turns her head to lick my face and ears and belly and just about everywhere. I look at her again. She must think I'm cute. I think she's beautiful. I latch onto her belly for a meal of her milk. She drops her head to the blanket and lets out a sigh. I think this is love.

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Sometimes I can't get the milk I need to stop my hunger. My siblings push me away. I push back a little, but it's not enough. I have to wait. Still, I think I'm a lucky puppy. My mommy licks me all over and looks into my eyes. That's love. And she feeds me, eventually: Mmm.

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My siblings are bigger than me and stronger, too. They can stand up, but they wobble and flop down. They flop down on me. I'm not sure I like it. Their ears are perky, too. They are bent up in the middle, sometimes one, sometimes the other, and sometimes both. My mom loves on them, but she loves on me, too: she licks me and nudges me

with her snout. Her whiskers brush my eyes and I startle. She and I look at each other. Then she licks me some more.

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There are humans beyond our blanket. My mom seems OK with them. They feed her. They feed her rice and crunchy things and other objects in a bowl. These things don't appeal to me. I like my mom's milk.

These humans are strange. Some are tall and speak in low tones. Some are small and squeak. The small ones have grasped me. "Cute!" One lifts me high in the air in her cool, squishy hand. I lie still and look down on her. I think she likes me, and I like her, too. She puts me back, but on top of one of my littermates. "Grrrr," says my brother, as I accidentally step on him. "Grrr," I say: it wasn't my fault.

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My siblings are bigger than me and stronger, too. They can stand up and walk around a bit, but then they wobble and flop down. I can stand up, too: look at me, mom! But then I, too, wobble and flop down.

My mom licks me all over. She looks into my eyes and I look back into hers. I feel love, much love. I sleep next to her, tucked into her neck, below her snout, with one of her front paws draped across my chest. I sleep much this way, with dreams of these humans hovering over me. We all sleep much.

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My siblings are very active. They paw me and look at me. They nip at my legs, neck, and ears. Their bites are gentle, but their teeth are sharp, and sometimes I can feel those sharp puppy teeth. “Grrrr,” I say. I’m not sure I like that. My teeth aren’t all quite “in” yet. I’ve appreciated the warmth and presence of my littermates when we all sleep together on cold nights. Now, in the daytime they run circles around me. I can only stand, wobbly, and turn my head to respond to their insults. I wish I could do more, but I feel small.

These humans are very active, too. They argue. They, especially the tall ones, argue with each other, and they point at me. I’m not sure I like the sound of that.

I think I like one of my small littermates. I look at her, my sister, and lick her snout. “Grrrr!” she says, and bites my ear. I cannot make sense of this.

My ears are halfway perky now! Look mom! My mom still loves me: she feeds me and licks me all over and looks into my eyes. I can walk a bit, too.

My littermates are running all around and are seemingly everywhere. The humans have widened our domain. There is now a big pen around us, and the little blanket where we sleep and my mom rests occupies just a small portion.

My littermates pounce on me. “Grrrr,” I say. They are bigger and stronger, and I simply can’t keep up. “Grrrr,” I say again. Still they pounce. They think they are playing with me. But they come at me all at once or one by one in rapid succession, their sharp puppy teeth nipping at my neck and tail. I think I’m always losing these games. I can never win. Can they not see I’m the smallest, and can they not be gentle with me?

I hobble to my mom. I nuzzle underneath her head. I sense that she has tired of the games, too. I hope she has not tired of me. No: she licks me all over. She loves me. We sleep. We sleep much together. Ah, touch.

Many days like this go by. Dogs haven't much sense of time. But I do see our domain (in this garage) brighten with the sun and then gradually go dark. The humans switch on their lights. The humans argue, especially the tall ones. The small humans rush in at times and drop to their knees and hold us. One small human cuddles me; I like her scent. The next day she picks me out and cuddles me again, and again I like her scent. I lick her. I wish she could take me away with her forever.

She replaces me with my littermates, and I am sad. My siblings pounce on me and the cycle begins anew: "Grrr," I say. I'm not interested in your games, which I cannot win.

Much time like this goes by in a day. Several days go by like this. "Grrr!" I always say to my siblings, who hold my neck in their jaws or bite my ears. "I'm much smaller than you. Please be nice or leave me alone." I cannot compete. I can't bear it for long.

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The rumblings from my throat, "grrrr," become "grrrr ... ruff!" I bare my teeth at my siblings. I know I am sweet, but I sense that my bared teeth look fearsome.

The humans enter the garage long after the light from the windows goes dark. They switch on their lights. They watch us. The tall ones argue and point at me.

This goes on for much time. For many days. I do not hurt my siblings, but they tend to stay away, sometimes. I wish they would stay away for a long time and just tumble and do their roughhousing among themselves: they are so big and strong and confident. Still they come at me, perhaps because they know they can win in any play-battle with me. I cannot make sense of this situation.

The humans enter the garage long after the light from the windows goes dark. They switch on their lights. They watch us.

My siblings pounce on me. I do my best to fend them off, with my little “grrr ... ruff!” and fearsome bared teeth and perhaps a feigned nip in their direction. The tall humans chatter and point at me. “She’s vicious,” says one. I don’t think I like the sound of that.

My mom licks me all over. I know that she loves me. I lick her. We gaze at each other. I flop alongside her: ah, yes: touch, warmth, togetherness.

A small human, the one who sometimes cuddles me and whose scent I like, sobs. She cuddles me now, and I lick the salty tears from her face. So much I do not understand of these humans.

2. The Car Ride

As usual, the next morning the morning light gradually streams into the window to brighten the garage. The cars outside start their growling. A tall human scoops me up and carries me out of the garage and to a car. On the way I limply hang in her hand and gaze around. I like the feel of being held in a human's hand: it is squishy and warm, a little like my mom's belly (but not as warm: human body temperatures are noticeably cooler than that of dogs). I wonder if, maybe, I will be cuddled again like I was by my favorite small human. I see grass and flowers and feel a cool breeze across all my body. The scents are marvelous. The tall human opens a car door and drops me inside. I sit obediently on the passenger seat.

We ride together for a bit. The tall human presses a button to open the window next to her. She scoops me up, raises me up through the open window, and gently flings me onto the dirt beside the car, which is easy for her, because I only weigh about 1 pound. My little 12-week-old legs cannot hold me upright, and I do a neat shoulder roll. Gaining my feet and shaking off the dirt, I see the tall human drive away and her car window roll up.

My, oh, my: this is interesting. The scents around me are completely different from anything I've experienced. I walk around in small circles for a bit, sniffing the ground. I don't miss my siblings. I wonder where I could find my mom and my favorite cuddly small human. I suppose I could find them if I smell my way back.

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I don't know much. Dogs, especially at my age, may lack a sense of time and remember little, but absolutely nothing I'm familiar with has passed my nose out here. Instead, many unusual scents and sights pass

before me. In particular, I haven't a clue where to find my mom, my blanket, or my familiar garage domain. I do a pee on some grass. I'm tired after much walking. This situation is too weird. I'm cold.

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The light from the sky is gone. The walls and window of the garage are nowhere. My mommy is nowhere. I settle into a nook sheltered from the wind beside a house. There I dig a depression in the dirt and try to cover myself with the brown, crispy leaves that have fallen from the nearby trees. There I spend a restless night — or two; you know, dogs don't understand time well.

3. The Pick Up

“Mom, I found this puppy. It was covered in dirt and leaves. Can we keep it?” Joseph, my mid-size human finder says this to his other human family members after carrying me into a house. I cannot make out what is being said, but it sounds alright to me. He holds me aloft in his gentle, warm, squishy hands. I hang limply and politely, as I always do with humans. This seems way better than sleeping in dirt and leaves. I also shiver.

“We can’t have a dog,” says a large human in a low register, barely awake, resting in bed. “We have cats, and the cats won’t be happy with a dog around. It wouldn’t be fair to them. The cats were here first.”

“But it’s so tiny,” says Joseph. “Look.” Despite my tiny size, I jump from the floor up to the bed by myself in one hop. There I find two large humans snoozing under the covers.

“Yeah, well, puppies grow up to be big dogs,” says the one large human, without rousing. He seems grumpy and hard to wake.

“Aw, but it’s so cute,” says the other large human. I think this other one is a female. She sits up in bed and picks me up. I don’t know what comes over me — maybe I sense the estrogen in the female large human or the warmth of the surroundings or all the attention placed on me — but I switch to cute, I-love-you-so-much, I-think-I’ve-found-a-home puppy mode. I wag my tail in circles and flick out my tiny pink tongue and waggle my rear for, well, humans would say *hours*.

“Look, it’s a boy,” says Rachel, another relatively small person. We dogs don’t know much, but we do quickly learn names as we hear them. “Sorry, *Rachel*. It’s a girl,” says the big grumpy one after flipping me onto my back and examining me closely. I hang limply, and my

tiny brown eyes with no whites scan around at the various humans in the room. “Oh,” says Rachel. Not that this boy-girl thing matters to me: I’m just me. My tail does circles just the same.

“Well, we can foster it for a few days and then turn it over to the shelter,” says the grumpy male large human. I’m not sure I like the sound of that.



I have one white paw, and here it is.

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He takes me out to the front of the house. The smells there are wonderful: there are flowers, and grass, and concrete. There is a long path of concrete that seems to go forever, except it turns.

My new master, the grumpy male, puts papers on trees and lampposts around the neighborhood. When we cross a street, he picks me up. I love being picked up and carried: I look around and sniff the air a bit.

Other times, I walk beside him. “Good dog,” he says. “You’re the best.” He seems pleased when I walk beside him. “Kebang!” goes a machine as he sticks a paper to a tree. Then he looks at me, a little like my mommy did. I think the paper may have something to do with me. Dogs cannot read, but we certainly can tell when humans are thinking about us.

When I walk with my master, sometimes I run ahead. Sometimes I fall behind. Sometimes I’m next to his heels. Always do we walk along the concrete path, and frequently I look behind or ahead or up to see where my master is. Mmm: exploring together. He trusts me and I trust him. He needs to say little to me. “Kebang!” goes the machine on another paper on another tree. These humans are so strange. Now, no more papers are in my master’s hand.

4. This New Place

Days go by in my pen in Joseph's room. I climb up the steel mesh walls whenever one of my new masters comes home and enters, and my tail does circles and my rear wiggles and my tongue flits in and out. When they let me out of my pen, I get along with the cats, my new roommates. Also, when I'm out, I play endlessly: I chase down ropes and toys that barely fit in my mouth. I only amount to 2 pounds, but I retrieve tennis balls in my tiny jaws as best I can for hours on end or as long as my humans have patience. These humans I can understand.

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My masters talk to me, too: "Alice!" they say. That must be my name! I perk up at the sound of it. They've attached a collar around my neck with a little heart-shaped metal dangle, and I think it means I'm theirs. I sleep way down deep under the covers with my masters in bed every night. They might be afraid of crushing me, because every once in a while they reach down and pat me where I nestle amongst their knees or against their backs or bellies.

My new humans teach me many words: their names, *bathroom*, *walk*, *dinner*, names of my cat roommates, *Pup-peroni* and *jerky* (my favorite treats), and names of my toys. "Bad kitty" means the nasty collarless tabby tomcat that sometimes stalks about our backyard: I growl and bark madly to be let out the sliding glass door and chase him up the fence. "Critters" means raccoons, and I do the same with them late at night, except my big grumpy master comes out with me to give me backup.

When I chase the bad kitty or raccoons through the backyard or garage, my growl takes on an otherworldly, snarly tone as my lips curl

and I inhale their fresh scent through passageways in my snout only known to dogs, and I prance and run weirdly and aggressively.

I teach my humans many other “words” of mine. Oh, of course I can do the usual barking when someone knocks on the door or walks down the sidewalk: “There’s an interloper, someone we don’t know.”

But, did you know? I can also talk just like a human when I want something special. I move my jaw up and down, my tongue flits in and out, and out comes a series of chortling tones. It’s not a bark, not a yip, not a whimper, not a growl: It’s my attempt to actually talk. I can do this for several minutes, accompanied by some body wiggling and tail wagging. Oh how I wish my neck and tongue muscles and lips could form human words, but I can only do my best to imitate what my masters do. Usually my people understand: I want an accompanied outdoors bathroom trip or dinner or a chase-and-tussle session with one of my toys.

There are also

- My happy whimper when one of my most important masters comes home: “I’m so thrilled to see you!” I can do this for a whole minute.
- My anticipatory whine when one of my masters alerts me to a car driving up and another master will soon enter.
- My low grumpy growl when I hear something outside no one else has detected.
- My chortly, talky growl, “Slide open that door for me and I’ll chase that bad kitty up the fence.”
- My yip, “ouch!,” when someone steps on one of my feet (I’m so tiny and dark). It’s rare, and I accept apologies graciously.

- A sigh, when I've settled into bed or on someone's lap and I think I could fall asleep at any moment. They need to listen closely to hear this one.

Then there's my laugh. Dogs laugh, you know. I open my jaw and make a panting sound: "Ha, ha, ha." (Just the consonant sounds: the Hs.) I'm not hot and I'm not winded from running around; I'm just amused. I laugh when I'm especially pleased with myself, as when I say I want something badly and my master responds instantly. I so love it when we talk together like this.

And, of course, I "talk" to my humans in many other ways, with my ears (they fold in various directions and combinations) and paws and body and tail.



My one ear back means I'm not quite sure what's wanted of me.

I wish my eyes could say more, but they are only tiny, bead-like, dark-brown irises without much white around them.

Humans, I notice, are quite something. I can understand much by seeing the whites around their eyes and hearing the way they say things.

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One night, communication fails. Two raccoons have entered through my dog door—the knuckleheads!—and are chomping on the kitty food in the kitchen. My humans are asleep and ignore my loud warnings. I weigh 6 pounds now, half the size of any of my kitty pals (I wish they had helped me), and 6 pounds is all I'll ever be, but I do my best against these rascally raccoons. Only my human masters show up to assist, and only after blood is dripping from many punctures in my back legs. Ouch.

My biggest, grumpy master squirts a yucky pink liquid down my throat for several days after that. I think I'll forgive him.

5. Comfort and Joy

On days when my masters are gone and it isn't raining (what is that stuff, anyway?), I enjoy going out my door and through the garage and out to the backyard. There, I hop up onto a picnic table and lie basking in the sun. I'm very quiet and patient all the day long. I sense that my masters will always return, eventually.



The picnic table is a favorite sunning spot of mine.

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My big master doesn't seem so grumpy now. Dogs don't have a good sense of time, but I believe many, many days have passed.

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Sometimes he takes me to the dog park. “Second Saturday of the month: Chihuahua day,” he says happily. I leap into the car. Car rides are always welcome, and we go somewhere together almost any day. I like the long ride and long, long walk to the dog enclosure, but for the dogs themselves, well, eh. It’s always the same: so many tiny yipping dogs in their silly overcoats, a reminder of something sad. I look into my master’s eyes: “I wish instead we had gone to the beach,” where I run freely, wildly, dig in the sand, and chase sand dollars my master tosses.

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I do so love lying on my master’s chest whenever he returns, from wherever. My master strokes my belly with the backs of his gentle, warm fingers: I’m too tiny for him to use the squishy palm of his hand, but that’s alright. He looks into my eyes, and I look back. Mmm: touch and togetherness. All this reminds me of something from my distant past, though I’m not sure what.

“Everyone needs a dog,” he says. “You’re the best.” I don’t quite know the meaning of the words, but I like the sound of it.

He and I are almost asleep, perhaps I more than he, I atop him. My paws flex in some doggy dream of chasing critters. I hear my master rumble, slowly, “Dooo yooouuuu ... ,” and then quickly “*want to go for a walk?!*”

“Ha, ha, ha,” is my instant reply.