



MY TIME IN THE PEN

I don't know what I did wrong. What could have been so serious to make you send me away? Was it chasing the guy in the fast wheelchair? Honestly, it looked like a car. Or maybe on the playground, when I kept all the kids inside the jungle gym until they started crying? A herding instinct. Blame nature.

I knew it was a prison from the minute we drove up—the high, wire fences, the yard, the warning barks from the other inmates. They may give it a harmless name like “Coral Rock Pet Boarding,” but to me it will always be “The Rock.”

Right away the guards slapped me into solitary. Everyone was in solitary. The only relief was a couple hours a day when they let me use the exercise yard. This was where I hatched the escape plot.

It wasn't hard to find some others to join me. Most of them had no idea why they were there. Some had been in and out of the system for years. Everyone I talked to there hated the screws—the ones in the bottom of the cages. They hurt. And no one could stand the chow. Not the chow-poodle mix, but the pure chow. He had shifty eyes.

My plan was simple. Dig a tunnel behind the water pipes, under the fence, and into the woods. From there, we would change our

collars and try to find new families. I had everyone working in shifts. There were the big diggers. Then the lookouts—small, tough guys who kept an eye on the guards. And then the medium-sized dirt-eaters who ate all the dug-up dirt so no one would know.

Our escape was all set for the night of the full moon. That night, we all got together and howled for a while, maybe an hour. Just for fun. Then, one by one, we slipped into the hole and scrambled our way through—little dogs first, then bigger and bigger until finally it was just Ajax, the Great Dane.

Ajax had a tough time of it. But he was determined. He kept digging and pushing the last plastic water pipe out of the way. And then came the snap—and all the water. And the sirens. And the blackout. And the screaming night guard. And you know the rest.

At least I can say I'm the one who closed down that prison for good. Or until they fix everything that went wrong. But I don't think I'll be going back there anytime soon. No sirree. No one wants that.

Bandana

