

## Hey There, Delilah!

*By Alesi Floyd*

A loud crashing filled my ears in the middle of the night. I sat up in bed and blinked a few times before throwing my legs over the side of the bed and walking into the living room. I parted the blinds slightly and peeked outside. I couldn't see much in the darkness, but I noticed that a broom and chair had been knocked over. I thought it was just the wind. I was too tired and cold to think much of it, so I returned to bed and fell asleep quickly.

The next morning, I woke up and shivered immediately. The room was freezing and all my covers had fallen off the bed again, probably due to my constant kicking in my sleep. I rolled over and pulled the covers back over me, still tired and longing for more sleep. I heard someone walking through the house and rolled back over just as my mom walked into my bedroom. She silently signaled for me to follow her.

I sighed and threw my legs off the side of the bed, stumbling as I put my glasses on. I followed my mom into the other room, irritated that I was needed so early in the morning. It was barely light outside, despite the fact that it was already nine o'clock. I blinked, adjusting to the light, and peered out the window my mom was pointing to.

Surprisingly, it had snowed overnight. Where I live, snow is a very rare thing, despite how cold it sometimes gets at night. Even when we get snow, it all melts within a few hours. But, the snow didn't appear to be what my mom was pointing out. Even if it is rare, snow isn't important enough to get me out of bed early. I looked in the direction my mom was pointing and couldn't help smiling.

I recognized the medium-sized dog who was lying on our front porch. She was a brindle color, mostly varying shades of brown with black flecks. Her eyes were brown, the same shade as the majority of her coat. Her thick body was set on short legs with small paws. She had a small, square head and button ears. She also had a short snout and a black nose.

This was the same stray who had been roaming our neighborhood for nearly four years. I always felt sorry for her, despite the fact that I scared her away when she came into our yard. The poor thing survived on garbage, leftover pet food, and whatever she could catch. She was scruffy, and I often saw her limping as she fled from yelling people with brooms and sticks. I knew the story, the one that had happened a million times in this neighborhood -- she was an abused dog, one who was mistreated and abused badly before being set out to fend for herself. It was terrible, and it made me angrier than words could describe.

I leaned forward, noticing that the chair and broom were still knocked over around the dog. I figured she must have knocked them over by accident last night. I leaned a little too close, hitting my forehead on the window. The dog looked in our direction and jumped up, running as fast as her short legs could carry her across the snow-covered yard until she disappeared into the forest beyond the road. I rubbed my forehead and sighed. My mom had already left the room.

I knew that this dog had been roaming the streets for years now. I had seen her many times, more than I could count. But she had never really caught my eye until now. I wanted a puppy more than anything else at the time, but my parents wouldn't let me have one because I had never shown much responsibility. I stood there at the window for a long time -- I don't even know long -- and thought about the old, stray dog. After a while, I went to eat breakfast. I had made my decision. I wanted to have that dog as my own.

Fast forward a few hours, when my little brother and my mom went outside in the snow. Despite the fact that I hated snow, I pulled on several pairs of pants, a few shirts, socks, tennis shoes, gloves, a scarf and my winter coat before going outside. I stuffed a package of lunch meat in my pocket before I went outside, hoping that my mom didn't mind. I walked to a nearby field and looked around.

I studied the snowy ground in front of me. I knew the stray dog stayed in his field all the time, probably because the grass was almost as tall as me, so it's a very good hiding place that would shield her from the elements. I noticed a mark in the snow and looked closer at it. After a few seconds, I realized I was looking at a paw print. I knew it had to be the stray dog's. Even though she was nowhere in sight, I took the lunch meat from its package and placed it directly on top of the paw print before walking away, the snow crunching beneath my feet as I walked.

From that day forward, I always went outside to that field and left the stray dog food. The food always disappeared. I didn't know for sure if it was her taking it, but I hoped it was. I didn't see her often and, in my clumsy state, I usually frightened

her away when I did. She stopped to examine me a few times, but she always ended up fleeing.

It had been about two months since I had last seen the dog when I ran outside, tears streaming down my face. I had always been a lonely person, and it usually didn't bother me. But that night was one of those nights it actually did. It was late, completely dark outside. I had enough intelligence to put a coat on and turn the porch light on, at least. I didn't know why, but I also brought leftovers from that night's dinner.

I sat down on the porch swing, setting the plate of food beside me. I held my face in my hands, allowing my tears to soak my dry palms. The moon was full that night, the full white orb surrounded by millions and millions of tiny, sparkling stars. I was choking on my tears, so I finally just opened my mouth and began to sob. My loneliness was getting to me again.

In between my loud sobs, I heard a stick crack. I looked up and noticed something in the distance. It looked like some kind of canine, but I couldn't be sure. There were coyotes around, so I knew I had to be careful. I was a wimpy little thing, and a single coyote could easily take my life in all my clumsiness. But I didn't care anymore. I didn't care if I lived or died. Nothing mattered. I just bowed my head again and began to cry once more.

Suddenly, the paper plate beside me began to move. I glanced sideways and nearly fell off the porch swing. My sadness was automatically replaced with pure shock. My lower jaw dropped as I leaned over and stared. I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

After almost five years in the wild, the dog who had fled from everything that moved was coming close to a human! And that human was me -- clumsy, wimpy, ugly me. The brindle dog quickly gulped down all that was on the plate before she looked toward me. I gazed back at her, still in shock. She stepped back a little ways, and I expected her to flee into the darkness once more. But she stepped forward again seconds later.

I heard her whimper softly as she lifted one paw and placed it on my knee. Her soft, brown eyes met my sad, hazel ones. I slowly lifted my hand and placed it on her head. I stroked her softly and couldn't help smiling. I could've sworn her black lips curled into a smile as well.

The only streak of moonlight in the entire yard seemed to be shining down on us. The night itself seemed to gasp at the sight of me petting the wild dog. I could have been petting a coyote; this dog acted exactly like one. I hadn't thought of a name for her yet. I had always called her "the dog," or something similar to it. Now was the perfect time. At the moment, I had the song "Hey There, Delilah" stuck in my head. I gazed into her eyes and smiled.

"Hey there, Delilah..." My voice was a choked whisper.

And from that day on, Delilah and I have been best friends. I'm never lonely anymore. I always have her, no matter what. The rest of the world could abandon me, and I would still have Delilah there.

Now, I bet you all think I made this entire thing up, and that all of this is completely fake. No matter how untrue it may seem, this story is true. I really did this. Delilah really did learn to trust me. Every word is the exact truth. You just have to believe. And, even if you don't, Delilah and I know the truth. As I wrote this, I found myself smiling and crying tears of happiness. And now, as I type this sentence, I hear myself mumble something: "Hey there, Delilah..."