

Wolfdog Scruffy

By Hailey Hatter

“Scruffy!”

Scruffy the dachshund heard his name called from the porch. “Just a minute!” he yipped and continued his conversation with the dogs across the pond.

“Scruffy!”

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” Scruffy barked a quick goodbye to the other dogs and padded towards the porch of his backyard. Belle, the German shepherd who shared the yard with him, looked with amusement at his retreating figure.

The tallest female person let him in. “Get in your crate,” she said. Scruffy obediently went down the hall and into the last room, where he crawled into his crate and lay down. Someone closed the door, and Scruffy lay there, thinking, which he rarely did.

“I wish I was a wolf,” he thought, remembering a time Belle had told him about wild dogs called wolves that lived in the forest. “Then I could stay up late, and howl at the moon, and do all sorts of fun stuff.” He pictured himself running with the wolves.

“And that’s exactly what I’ll do,” thought Scruffy the next morning as he stared down at a small bowl of kibble. “Is this all?” he moaned at the tall male human who had fed him.

“No more,” said the human. “You need to lose weight.”

Scruffy sighed and started eating his kibble.

After all the humans had left for whatever they did when they weren’t in the house, Scruffy sat outside, staring at the fence.

“That’s what you’ll have to jump...or dig under,” Belle informed him. She was smiling wolfishly. “Are you sure you’re going to do this? You...well...you are no wolf.”

“Sure I’m sure,” yipped Scruffy stoutly. “You’ll be sorry when I’m out eating bacon and ham with the wolves while you’re stuck with that big bowl of kibble.” He knew that she was more wolfish than him. He couldn’t understand why she didn’t run away.

“Um...Scruffy?” Belle seemed to be about to tell him something, but she must have thought better of it.

“You can join me,” barked Scruffy, beginning to dig.

“Scruffy, don’t go,” Belle was no longer smiling. “Here’s some advice. Dogs and humans have been together for a long time. We are man’s best friend, right? We need humans...and humans need us. Where else would we get food, water, a warm place to sleep? And what would the humans do without us to cheer them up?”

Scruffy didn’t answer. He was busy slipping through the small hole he had made. Belle watched him from the other side of the fence.

“Don’t go,” she growled again. “You have everything you could ever want here. Why leave?”

“Sorry Belle,” Scruffy padded down the road, and then broke into a run.

“You’ll come back!” Belle howled at him. “You’re no wolf! You’ll come back!”

Several hours later, Scruffy finally found some dog tracks in the forest. He was tired, yes, thirsty, yes, hungry, of course, but he had made it to this forest and that’s what counted.

He sniffed along the ground. He was so busy sniffing that he didn’t notice a pair of long, slender legs right in front of him.

He bumped into the legs. He looked up. His tail wagged as he saw the long nose, the gray head, and the lean body. It was a real wolf!

Scruffy followed the wolf back to a clearing. There were a bunch of wolves in a line, waiting for something. The wolf he had seen took a spot near the middle. Scruffy tried to get a spot at the front, but the wolf already there growled at him and he got in the back instead.

The wolves set off running. The wolf at the head of the line ran faster than the others. They didn't talk much while they ran. Scruffy started to pant, and then slow down. The wolf in front of him looked back and growled at him. Scruffy kept it up.

Just when Scruffy started to think that his legs would fall off, the wolves stopped. They circled around a strange animal with huge ears that looked like branches of trees. Scruffy stumbled around the circle until he found an opening.

The wolves leaped in and out of the circle. *This must be a game*, thought Scruffy, getting excited. Finally here was a chance to have some fun!

Scruffy leaped in at the animal with huge ears. It saw him coming and kicked him. The hoof only grazed his left leg, but it hurt. Scruffy tried to lie down, but one of the wolves pulled him back into the circle.

By the time the "game" was over, Scruffy was tired. He didn't jump into the circle after that, but he did stand with the wolves.

He saw that there was food now. His mood lightened. *Ham*. He thought. *Bacon*. *Eggs*. *Steak*.

He went up to get some. One of the wolves growled and nipped at him. He waited until all the other wolves were done, and then he took a step up to the meat.

“You eat *this?*” Scruffy was repulsed. It was raw meat.

“Yeah, uh-huh,” growled one of the wolves, tearing meat off of a bone.

“Are you going to eat that?” another wolf asked, nosing the rest of the meat.

“You can have it,” Scruffy stepped back.

There was another long run back to the clearing. Scruffy was even more tired. He just wanted to lie down and rest, because it was very late now. But he perked up as he saw what the other wolves were doing.

What seemed like the head wolf started to howl. The other wolves joined in, until it was impossible to make out one voice from the other. Scruffy decided to try it. He tipped his head back, closed his eyes and...

“*Yip yip yaroooo....*”

The other wolves looked around. “Who’s the puppy?” one asked, laughing. The others joined in.

“Free howling lessons from that shrimp!” howled another wolf, pointing at Scruffy. The other wolves howled with laughter.

*There’s a puppy?* Thought Scruffy. At least he was able to howl. Finally, the wolves started settling down to go to sleep. Scruffy wasn’t used to bedding down this late.

“Where do we sleep?” he asked one of the wolves.

“Wherever you want,” the wolf yawned and lay down, settling his head on his paws.

Scruffy looked around. “Where are the crates?” he asked. “The blankets? The dog beds?”

The wolf sat up and looked at him. “What are you talking about?”

“You mean...you sleep on the ground? On the...on the dirt?”

“Sure,” the wolf lay down again.

Scruffy lay down too. He couldn't believe it. He had thought being a wolf was so much fun, but it wasn't what he had expected. *I should have listed to Belle*, he thought miserably. *Now I don't have a crate, or a bed, or even kibble! And I miss being hugged and petted.*

The next morning, Scruffy knew what he would do. He would find his way back.

Belle sat up when she saw the lone tan figure padding down the road. “Scruffy! I told you you'd come back.”

“Yeah,” Scruffy wriggled through the hole. “I don't like being a wolf. Where are the people?”

“There are no people,” Belle laughed. “It's the wilderness, Scruffy. That's where wolves live. You know, our ancestors are wolves. They were the first dogs.”

“But I don't look like a wolf,” Scruffy wrinkled his black nose. He was confused. “I look like a hot dog.”

Belle laughed. “Oh, Scruffy!”

“Well, I'll see you later Belle,” yipped Scruffy. “I'm going to go find the people.” He jumped up on his hind legs and scratched at the door furiously. He added some yips and whimpering that Belle would never do. The door opened.

“Scruffy!”