

“The Delectable Yellow Dog”
By J.R. Wudel

“And if you continue to study hard and learn your lessons, you will live a prosperous and happy life,” said Yellow Dog’s mother. She hovered above Yellow Dog and his brothers and sisters, all eagerly listening to her affectionate lecture. She usually ended her lessons with kind words meant to inspire or give hope. Like the time she told them, “Never let anyone call you a mutt, you possess the best qualities of both your father and myself and are therefore both smart and beautiful.”

Yellow Dog’s mother gave her lessons with her back along the bars of their kennel, in a darkness that left her words the only sign of her presence. Yellow Dog had been born and raised in this kennel along with his seven brothers and sisters. The kennel partitioned off the corner of a windowless room behind Joh’s kitchen. Joh owned Yellow dog’s mother and her litter. He would come storming into the room cussing, and bring them their food. On occasion, he would even clean up the kennel so that Yellow Dog and his brothers and sisters had a place to live and learn. The kennel smelled of urine and the pups often slid around in their own waste. However, they didn’t think twice on this, having never experienced it otherwise. Every day the pups would gather at their mother’s feet and listen to her instructions. Every day Yellow Dog dutifully paid attention, then studied hard on his own, preparing for the day when he would graduate and face the world. He just knew he would utilize the skills he had learned to live a prosperous life.

One day his mother ended her lecture with the statement, “you can be anything that you want to be.” The stories that made up his mother’s lessons fascinated Yellow Dog. He found their

content, structure, and especially the delivery that his mother used when telling them, intriguing. He began to focus his studies on the storytelling and knew that one day he would tell the stories to others. Perhaps he would even tell some of his own.

At night, after a long day of studying, Yellow Dog would remain sleepless thinking of his own stories. On just such a night, after his mother and siblings had already gone to sleep, to his surprise he heard the pat of paw pads outside the kennel.

“Who’s there?” said Yellow Dog, cocking his head. Perhaps this would be a good story to tell.

“Who’s asking?” came out of the darkness with an attitude as hard as the bars of the kennel.

Yellow Dog couldn’t see this stranger but recognized a feminine voice. He could smell on her a fragrance that often induced his mouth to water when it wafted in from the kitchen. This strange female smelled luscious.

Yellow dog swallowed to clear the saliva from his mouth and stammered, “I’m Yellow Dog. Who are you?”

“I’m Jayu,” she said as she came up to the bars where Yellow Dog could finally see her. He saw a stunning black and tan dog with a long pointed nose and large pointed ears that rose above her head. This, being the opposite of Yellow Dog’s own short nose and floppy ears, excited him.

“You’re beautiful,” said Yellow Dog in a whisper. His breath had been taken away. “What type of dog are you?”

“Well, thank you. I think my ears are too big. Joh says I will grow into them, but I’m not so sure. I’m a German shepherd.”

“And your smell, it’s wonderful.”

“Oh that, Joh rubs rosemary oil on me. He says it will keep my skin healthy and my hair shiny and beautiful,” she paused and looked down, embarrassed, “I guess it works.”

“Joh doesn’t do that to us. We also never get to wander free like you.”

“Joh says you are just mutts.”

“Don’t call me a mutt,” said Yellow Dog stamping his foot, “my mother says that I am both smart and beautiful.”

“Yes, you are smart—for listening to your mother. I wish I could. I haven’t seen my mother since the day that I met Joh, and he brought me here, and,” Jayu moved closer to the bars taking a good look at Yellow Dog, “you are beautiful too.”

Yellow dog beamed a smile and responded with the appropriate, “thank you.” Just like his mother taught him. With that, Jayu turned an about face and trotted off. Yellow Dog’s smile lasted until the lingering smell of rosemary faded away.

Yellow Dog smelled the scent of Jayu’s rosemary again, as she began to make it a habit of stopping by his kennel late at night when everyone but him slept. As the nights progressed, they got to know more and more about each other as they talked through the bars of the kennel. This continued through many nights as Jayu slowly grew into her ears. She also grew to become Yellow Dog’s best friend.

“There’s something I want to try,” said Jayu one night.

“What’s that?” said Yellow Dog.

“I’ve been watching Joh from afar when he opens the door to your kennel, and I think I’ve figured it out.”

“You’ve figured out how to open the door!” Yellow Dog’s tail snapped back and forth.

“Shhh! Calm down. Let’s see.” Jayu walked over to the door of the kennel, reared up on her hind legs, leaned on the bars of the kennel with her front legs, and using her pointed nose like she saw Joh use his hand, slid the latch on the kennel door. The door slowly swung open.

“You did it!”

“Shhh. You’re going to wake the whole house. We can’t let anyone see you. Now, come on out, quietly.”

Trying his best to muffle his excitement, Yellow Dog moved to the door of the kennel and stepped through to freedom. Joy overwhelmed him and he jumped up on Jayu. He knocked her down and, enveloping her in his arms, rolled around with her in his embrace.

“Enough, enough,” said Jayu through her laughter. Yellow Dog let her up. His long desire to touch his best friend finally satiated.

“Now, follow me, I’ve been dying to show you something.” She led the way through the shadows to the dark kitchen, and they began to make their way through it. A sudden flash of light from overhead brought the entire kitchen into view. Joh entered whistling a tune. Quickly, Jayu crammed Yellow Dog between the legs of a nearby shelf and followed him into the space as best as she could—they had a tight fit. Had Joh heard Jayu and Yellow Dog’s frolicking?

“Now Jayu, where are you girl? I can smell you,” sang Joh in the melody of the tune he had been whistling. Yellow Dog had to stifle a giggle at Joh’s ridiculousness—so different from

his mood when coming in to clean the kennel. “Ah, there you are. I see your tail. Come on out from under there.”

Cautiously, so as not to expose Yellow Dog, Jayu wormed out from under the shelf and slinked up to Joh.

“Joh will make himself a simple late night snack—a nice caprese sandwich. And you can have my crust.” Joh proceeded to bang around the kitchen making his sandwich and, when finished, gave his crust to Jayu as promised. He picked up his sandwich and strolled back through the door he had entered from.

“Whew, that was close,” breathed Jayu when the coast was clear. She shared her crust with Yellow Dog.

“This is delicious,” uttered Yellow Dog.

“Come, I think you’ll appreciate what I want to show you much more than that crust.” Jayu led Yellow dog out of the kitchen and down a hallway, at the end of which, Yellow Dog could see a flickering glow and strange sounds coming through the doorway of a room. He rounded the corner and froze. Mrs. Joh sprawled in a large chair in the center of the room.

“Don’t worry about her, she’s asleep. Every night she falls asleep in that chair and is out until the early morning.” Jayu walked up to Mrs. Joh and began licking her bare foot. Mrs. Joh gave no response. “See? Nothing. I brought you here to show you this,” she pointed her nose to a large rectangle on the wall in front of Mrs. Joh. Looking, Yellow Dog noticed that the flickering light and sounds came from this. “They call it a television. Watch it.”

Yellow Dog became mesmerized as he watched the television and realized what he set eyes on. The story of three funny looking men getting a meal for two important looking men

played out before him. The two men asked for traditional meals, one called a hot dog, and the other rabbit. One of the funny looking men scurried off to the kitchen in the next room to prepare the meals. While making the traditional meals, a living dog and cat enter the kitchen and interacted with him in such a way that the sounds from the kitchen, to the two men waiting for their food in the other room, made it seem that they would dine on dog and cat. This gave Yellow Dog a big grin as he thought to himself, who would ever eat a dog for dinner? After some more hilarity, the three funny looking men ended the story by repeatedly hitting each other in funny ways.

Yellow Dog and Jayu watched the television until the sun peaked through a nearby window. Yellow dog had watched the stories that he loved so well, played out in sight and sound. With great reluctance, Jayu took Yellow Dog back to his kennel. Jayu satiated this reluctance when she returned the following night and took Yellow Dog to watch the television again. This became a regular occurrence, with Jayu returning Yellow Dog to his kennel with enough time for him to get a little sleep before he began his next day's studies.

They didn't always go to the television room. Yellow Dog liked another place they often went just as well—and often more. Jayu would lead them through a doggie door in the kitchen and out into Joh's moonlit courtyard. Here, the two would nestle under the boughs of a pear tree that flowered in the spring. It was on such a night that Yellow Dog leaned into Jayu and whispered in her ear, "Jayu, I love you."

Jayu pulled herself away from Yellow Dog with a start and looked at him, "Yellow Dog, I, I don't know what to say, you have always been my best friend."

“You don’t have to say a thing.” Yellow Dog felt in his heart that one day Jayu would say those three words to him too.

Yellow Dog’s graduation came, and he had yet to hear those words from Jayu. Regardless, Yellow Dog had been preparing for this time all of his life, and he couldn’t help but feel excited. Soon, he would progress to the next phase of his life. Shortly after his graduation, Joh began coming to the kennel and removing his brothers and sisters, one at a time and several days apart. The grown pups, including Yellow Dog, jockeyed in position for the honor to leave. He watched five of his brothers and sisters taken before him and began to worry.

“Why have I not been chosen yet?” he asked his mother. He thought that maybe his choice to study storytelling had caused this. His brothers and sisters had chosen more practical studies.

“Don’t worry Yellow Dog,” his mother told him, “you will find your place in life.” At this point, his mother’s words offered little consolation, especially when the very next day, Joh came and removed Yellow Dog’s brother. Yellow Dog now became the last one remaining.

“Don’t worry Yellow Dog,” his mother told him, “your time will come.”

That night, Jayu came to the kennel and promised to cheer Yellow Dog up.

“Come Yellow Dog, there is a classic movie marathon on the television tonight.” Yellow Dog loved classic movies and felt his worries begin to melt away. On their way through the kitchen, Yellow Dog heard a whining sound. He looked for its source and found his brother, the one that had been taken earlier in the day, tied on a very short rope to a leg on the kitchen table. He could barely move his head.

“Brother, what is this?” queried Yellow Dog, but before his brother could answer, the kitchen light switched on and Joh walked in whistling. Once again Jayu shoved Yellow Dog into the space under the shelf. This time, however, she left Yellow Dog and walked up to Joh.

“Ah, Jayu, are you hungry like I am for a snack?” Joh bent down over Yellow Dog’s brother and began to untie the rope from the table leg. “Today Joh had an especially hard day in his restaurant, so tonight Joh deserves a special treat and will have an extra special, late night feast!” With the rope in his hand Joh led Yellow Dog’s brother out into the courtyard.

Curious about his brother’s fate, Yellow dog peaked his head out the doggie door just in time to see Joh, under the light of a full moon, untie the rope from his brother’s neck. Was he going to let his brother free? The silence of the night increased Yellow dog’s anticipation as he waited to see. Instead of releasing his brother, Joh tied one of his back legs to an end of the rope and used the other end to string his brother, upside down, from a branch of the pear tree.

“I planned to save your meat for the paying customers,” said Joh, “but tonight, I will be the one to dine on dog leg!” Yellow dog gave a whine of shock, which Joh mistook for Jayu. “Avert your eyes, Jayu.” Joh pulled a long butcher’s knife from a sheath at his hip and rotated Yellow Dog’s brother on the rope so that the knife lined up with his brother’s neck. Yellow Dog’s brother gave a solemn yelp that pierced the quiet. Joh slid the knife across the dog’s neck in one quick jerk. Blood gushed forth and hit the ground below the pear tree with a sploosh. Joh began to whistle again as he let the blood drain. The flowing blood slowed to a drip, and Joh started to hack the free hind leg off of the corpse that hung from the tree. “Next, to skin you and fry you with a nice pear reduction!”

Aghast, Yellow Dog popped his head back through the doggie door and wriggled back under the shelf before Joh entered the kitchen. Once more he whistled his tune, but this time Yellow Dog felt no humor in it. Joh parodied a funeral dirge. Yellow Dog cowered under the shelf as he listened to Joh prepare his brother's leg in a sizzling pan of oil, then the smacking of Joh's lips as he ate his late night feast.

Jayu couldn't bear to watch Joh in the kitchen and slunk off down the hall while he worked, but she returned after he finished eating and had headed off to bed. She found Yellow Dog with his front legs propping him up on the chair where Joh had perched while eating his brother. He stared at the plate left on the table—a leg bone all that remained of Joh's feast. Joh had said that it would make a nice bone marrow soup, but he felt “as dead and stuffed as a taxidermist's opus” after his feast and would leave it until the morning.

“So, my fate is revealed,” Yellow Dog said to Jayu. “I am just the lowliest of dogs, to be sacrificed as food to feed Joh and his customers.”

“It doesn't have to be that way.”

“But what other way can it be?” Defeated, he lowered his head.

“You can run,” she answered defiantly. She then outlined a plan where the following night she would spring Yellow Dog from the kennel and help him to escape beyond the walls of Joh's house. He listened to her plan, still numb from witnessing the slaughter of his brother, and murmured that he'd follow it. He had little faith in his abilities to survive beyond the walls of Joh's house, especially without Jayu, who made no mention of going along with him.

Back in his kennel that night, and throughout the next day, he avoided eye contact with his mother. He felt betrayed by all of her words of encouragement. He thought that she had

always known the truth of his fate. She just played the part of the brood bitch that aided Joh's operations. How many of his brothers and sisters from different litters had come before him, and then come under the knife. For the first time in his life he felt truly alone.

Later the following evening, Jayu came as planned, but this hardly cheered Yellow Dog up.

"Smile Yellow Dog," she said to him, "you are about to embark on your greatest story of all time." This did little to brighten up Yellow Dog. His spirits darkened to the color of the night that he would escape into. Jayu opened the kennel and Yellow Dog emerged, his head lowered in sadness. Jayu, with no words to cheer up her closest friend, lowered her head as well and led the way into the kitchen.

Halfway through the kitchen, the light once again switched on, and Joh came in whistling. Curse their luck! Yellow Dog moved as if his throat had already been slit, and Jayu had to force him into his hiding spot under the shelf. She left Yellow Dog and approached Joh, feigning excitement.

"Ah, there's Joh's favorite little girl. If I didn't know better, Jayu, I would say that you were waiting for Joh to come in and make his late night snack just so you could get some too. Well, Jayu, tonight I will not disappoint. Given the grandeur of last night's feast, tonight's menu lists a light cucumber sandwich for Joh, and that means some nice crust for you." Joh set about making his sandwich. While he sliced up the cucumber into generous rounds, one round jumped off the cutting board and rolled across the kitchen floor, coming to rest under the shelf next to Yellow Dog.

“Of all the luck!” Joh banged the butt of his knife on the cutting board. “Jayu, did you see where Joh’s slice went?” Jayu remained frozen, pretending she had not seen where the cucumber round had rolled, so as not to draw attention to Yellow Dog under the same shelf. “Well, Jayu, you might have not seen that delicious cucumber slice, but Joh knows where it went, and it has a special place on Joh’s sandwich!” Joh walked over to the shelf and stuck his hand under it, feeling around for the cucumber slice. His hand brushed Yellow Dog’s furry leg.

“What’s this?” Joh jumped back surprised. Yellow Dog scrambled out from under the shelf, took a hard turn to avoid Joh, and ended up in the corner next to the rope that had suspended his brother from the pear tree.

“Ah, and escapee!” Joh cracked a malicious smile. He walked towards Yellow Dog, forcing him tighter in the corner, and plucked the rope off the floor. “Well, I guess the fates want Joh to have a feast two nights in a row!” He started to bend down towards Yellow Dog, the rope held taut between his hands. With his face locked in fear, Yellow Dog saw Joh’s knuckles tighten on the rope. Joh lunged towards Yellow Dog, but Jayu sprung into his path, with a piercing whine of, “No! I love him!”

Joh, diverted the rope to the right of Jayu, and stared at his prized German shepherd with wonder.

“Jayu, I could tell by the whine of your voice, and the look in your eyes, that you love this yellow dog. Therefore, I shall spare him. Mrs. Joh needs a special dog of her own to keep her company during her long nights in front of the television. I believe this dog may be just that special.” With that, he tossed the rope back to the floor, turned around, and scooped up the round of cucumber that had rolled under the shelf. He placed the round on the top of his sandwich,

treating it as the crowning achievement. Joh removed the sandwich's crust, tossed the pieces to the floor for both Jayu and Yellow Dog, snatched up the sandwich, and walked off, whistling through large bites.

Yellow Dog rushed to Jayu and gently pressed his nose against hers.

"You do love me," he sighed.

"Of course I love you, and I have for a long time."

The long time in the past that Jayu had loved Yellow Dog paled in comparison to the years that followed. Yellow Dog lived a very prosperous and happy life, as he had the best of what he had always wanted: the love of Jayu and the ability to watch the stories play out on television, curled up by Mrs. Joh's feet, into the early hours of the morning.

Joh was not effected enough by the love between Jayu and Yellow Dog to give up on his dog operation. This gave Yellow Dog the chance to perfect his storytelling abilities. Every night before watching television, Yellow Dog would sneak up to the kennel in Joh's back room and tell the latest litter of pups stories of how to resist their fate. It didn't take Joh long to give up on his operation after receiving one too many bites to his knife hand!

The love between Jayu and Yellow Dog became the best story of all, however. They wrote that story together, shining light on the shadow of death and brightening the lives of all those they touched.