



An Angel Paws Story



FOLLY

JORDAN TAYLOR

Folly

an Angel Paws short
story

Jordan Taylor

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Short Stuff Press

Folly

“Folly!” Jessie gripped cold steel of the chain-link fence in both trembling hands. “Folly!” she shouted again, tears in her eyes.

Her breath fogged before her as she stared into weedy neighboring yards and the

deserted street beyond: left, right, fingers numb on icy metal.

“*Folly*,” she whispered, the word catching in her throat.

Jessie closed her eyes. Where else could she search? She had been over all four rooms of the little house. She looked through the tiny, fenced yard, under the sagging steps, and opened each door. She even peered inside the bedroom

closet, just in case.

Shivering, Jessie turned away from the fence and hurried up the wood steps to the back door.

“Folly?” she called into the house.

No whimper or joyous, baying bark. No claws clicking over hardwood floor. No collar tags jingling. No floppy, silky ears, or licking

tongue, or thrashing tail. No Folly.

Jessie shut the door and leaned against it. Deep breath. He had to be somewhere. Her puppy, now almost six months old, was always into something. When she adopted him, Lois, the foster mother with the rescue group, laughingly told her it was a breed trait. Jessie never had a Beagle before Folly—

nor any dog of her own—so she had no way to compare.

Somewhere. Dogs don't just vanish. Think.

They had been for a walk that morning, as always. Then he raced around the house with his favorite rubber squeak toy—a hamburger—while she got ready for work and played with him at the same time.

Uniform on, coat over that,

purse in one hand, keys in another, she tossed down Folly's Kong—stuffed with peanut butter mixed with kibble and frozen overnight—as she stepped outside, then locked the front door behind her.

She jogged the four blocks to The Seven Seas, having left late, then worked three hours before her break. At the break, she hurried home to

take Folly for another walk and play while she ate lunch.

But they didn't walk. And they didn't play. Not today. Today, when she walked in, Folly was gone.

Gone and she had only fifteen more minutes to find him before returning to work. Or she could lose her job. She couldn't lose her job because she had to make rent and take care of herself and her dog.

Her missing dog.

Breathing fast, hardly noticing the ever-present grease smell on her clothes from months behind the counter at the fish and chips place, Jessie paced from the door, around the kitchen, and back again.

There was the cat flap, of course. Her landlord had two cats and had installed it when he lived here. Folly would

squeeze through to chase birds, bay at cats, sniff his way around the yard, or simply bask in the sun. But it was November now. She only left the flap uncovered so there wouldn't be accidents in the house. He rarely ventured outside without her, often poking his head through the flap, sniffing energetically, then calling it good and retreating to the warm kitchen.

Yes, he could have used the flap and gone outside. But that did not explain things.

As Jessie's pacing took her to the back door, she pulled it open. Again, she jogged down wet wood steps and called Folly's name. She looked under the stairs and poked carefully all around the fence. The yard was tiny, hardly bigger than the living room. The fence was strong,

four feet high, secure down to the inch. No holes had been dug under it. No gate had been left open.

Everything exactly as it should be. Except for Folly.

Looking again up and down the little back street, Jessie felt sick. The fence was not so secure someone could not take her puppy. He was a purebred dog. And young. People did things like that.

Someone could be driving him away in a van of caged puppies right now, off to the doggie black market—or wherever stolen dogs go.

“Stupid, stupid, stupid,” she said, voice shaking as much as her hands now.

She hurried inside, tears falling. How could she not have covered that flap? Locked her Folly inside? How could she be so stupid?

So careless? The living creature she loved more than anything in the world, her angel, her inspiration for the new life she fought so desperately to start. And she let him wander into the yard while she was at work so someone could kidnap him?

Jessie sagged onto her thrift store chair at the kitchen table. She crossed her arms on the table and dropped her

head against them. She couldn't do this: self-pity was a luxury for people with time on their hands. But she sobbed, unable to stop, desperate for someone to come along and hold her and tell her everything would be okay.

No one came. No one ever did.

Only Folly had come, at the end of that summer, wagging

and kissing his way into her heart. Finally, she had someone to prove to that she could be a better person. Someone who would never judge her, never hate her—only love and admire her, always be there, giving her strength.

He needed her. His first family had two puppies left from their Beagle's litter and ran out of time to sell them

when moving day arrived. They called a rescue that placed the puppies in a foster home. When she visited, Jessie was treated to a lecture from Lois about that kind of irresponsible backyard breeder giving all breeders a bad name.

Jessie didn't care a fig how irresponsible they had been, or who, or why, when she looked into the big, soulful

brown eyes of her puppy. All she cared about was taking him home.

She needed him also. Far more, really, than he needed her. The adorable puppy would soon have found a good home with someone else if Jessie hadn't fallen in love and just managed to scrape together the adoption fee.

Yes, Folly could have found a

home with anyone. But Jessie had tried for a long time to find hers.

She had been in only her third AA meeting when Connor started talking about what a help his dog was: the walks and activities, the motivation to take care of something dependent on him, the responsibility of a schedule.

“I can’t just let him out when I feel like it,” Connor had

said. “I’ve got to be there for him in the morning and at night and in the middle. It’s not all about me anymore.”

Now Jessie also had a dog. It wasn’t all about her anymore either. But her dog was gone.

She could not stop crying against her arms on the table. She had to do something. Go to the police, the shelters, post signs on telephone poles, place an ad online: BEAGLE

PUPPY STOLEN.

Just the thought of the headline made her feel more sick. One dog—one living creature in her life who depended on her, needed her, trusted her, loved her—and she let him down. She left him exposed to the world of evil that she herself had been working so hard to escape.

“I’m so sorry,” Jessie choked against her arms. “I’m sorry,

Folly.”

She couldn't do this without him. She couldn't get up and go back to that outdated, greasy cash register and popping fry oil and impatient customers and leering manager, Danny, son of the owner. She couldn't stay on this routine without Folly.

She couldn't get up in the morning and into the fresh air, fix breakfast, go to work,

play, get out more, fix dinner, go to meetings, read, study, dream, all of it—every single day—without Folly. Or a drink. With one, she did not need the other. With one, she could do this, start this new life, be this person she ached to be. With the other, she was no one, trapped at the bottom of the abyss for the rest of her life.

“I need you, Folly,” she

whispered, tears still flowing. She gripped her own hair with both hands. “Please, please, please....” Please what? After a long pause, she finished with, “Help me.”

A shrill *brriinnng* burst through the kitchen and Jessie jumped.

She looked up to the vintage phone mounted on the wall by the refrigerator. Her gaze went past it to the clock. She

was late. That would be The Seven Seas calling. Danny.

No, no, no—she couldn't take Danny right now. Not without Folly running around with his rubber hamburger, giving her something to laugh at while she talked. Not without Folly for so, so many things.

Four more rings. Jessie stood to grab the phone.

She struggled for a deep

breath before answering. She wouldn't go back. She was going to find her dog. She would make it up to them. Or get another job if they fired her. But, first, she would find Folly.

“Hello?” she croaked.

“Jessie?” It wasn't Danny. It was Ariel, Jessie's coworker on the register for Tuesday through Friday. “Are you all right?”

“I can’t come back—” Jessie pulled in a sharp breath, fighting to keep her voice steady.

“Can’t come back? You need to come down here for your dog, Jess.”

“What?” Jessie almost choked. “What did you say?”

“Won’t you come get your dog before you’re back on?”

I'll cover you for another half hour."

"What are you talking about? Folly is ... there?"

"Sure he is. I'm just making sure you know so you'll get him before you're back on."

"You're serious? Folly's there? With you?"

"Yes." Ariel was starting to sound annoyed. "I had to

close him in Danny's office since he's not supposed to be in here. Danny's out until three.”

Jessie was crying again as she hung up the phone.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you.” It was all she could say or think as she burst out the front door and ran four blocks to The Seven Seas, Folly's red leash bunched in her hand.

She dashed through the front doors, into the hot, thick smell of fried fish and chips, past a line of customers waiting to order, down the hall of the bathrooms to the end door proclaiming: EMPLOYEES ONLY. Through that, into the back, right turn, throw open the door to Danny's office.

Folly sprang at her, lashing his tail, bouncing on his back

legs, pawing her pants.

Jessie dropped to her knees and pulled him to her chest. “Thank you, thank you—” Still all she could say, all she could think.

Folly, delighted, licked his way across her chin, panting puppy breath in her face, lashing his tail, scrabbling over her as if they had been parted for weeks.

It was some minutes before Jessie could steady herself enough to gather the Beagle in her arms, then carry him out the back door so no customers would see.

Not until they were halfway home, Folly sniffing every inch of sidewalk, tail high and waving, collar tags jingling, did Jessie begin to wonder what happened. How, if no one kidnaped him, had

he gotten out? And what was he doing at The Seven Seas? If he had been going there, why hadn't they crossed paths as she walked home? Maybe he had gone a roundabout way? Following his nose through backyards?

At home, Jessie sat with Folly on her lap, holding him tight until her heart rate slowed to almost normal. Her legs shook as she stood to fetch

him a biscuit. Only then did she remember that she herself had eaten nothing since breakfast. Too late now.

But Folly followed her to the kitchen, waving his tail like a white flag, gazing eagerly up at her. He looked as if nothing special had happened.

Jessie pulled the sandwich she had prepared for lunch that morning from the

refrigerator and ate half while she flipped the ottoman on its side and pushed it against the cat flap. Careful that both doors were locked, she left with the second half of her sandwich in hand, tossing Folly's biscuit to him on her way out.

All the way to work, she wondered how he had done it.

With the lunch rush past, Ariel explained how Folly

arrived at The Seven Seas a few minutes before she had called Jessie to let her know.

“He just came bouncing in here when someone opened the door, running around, sniffing everything. I thought you were walking him on your break and he’d given you the slip. When I didn’t see you outside, I put him in the office and called. You know, I think he must have

been looking for you. He just got bored at home and came down to find you.”

“But how?” Jessie shook her head as she rung out a bleach rag to wipe down counters. “I checked every inch of the yard. There’s no way he could have gotten free.”

“Should be easy to figure out. Put him in the yard, go outside the fence, then wave a biscuit at him.”

Jessie laughed, though she still felt shaky. Her puppy was a bit of a glutton.

When she arrived home, Folly was waiting at the door as usual. She tried to hug him while he bounced and wagged, then took him out back and let herself out the gate. Before anything else happened, she had to get to the bottom of this. Was there a hidden hole? A loose piece

of wire?

With Folly closed in the fence, Jessie started away, then turned back, knelt down, and called him, clapping her hands.

Folly raced up and down, along the fence, whining, then baying in frustration. He leapt at the wire, but came up so short it was ridiculous to think he could ever jump it, even full-grown.

“Come on, Folly.”

Back and forth he ran, yelping now as if in pain.

No, this was cruel.

She started back to the gate. He could not possibly get out of that yard on his own.

Halfway back, Jessie stopped.

Folly was in the corner of fence and house, scrabbling at

the wire and wood with all four white paws. As she watched, he hoisted his little body up against the corner, left legs braced on the house, right paws in chain-link.

Mouth open, Jessie stared as he climbed.

It was all over in seconds. Folly pulled himself to the top of the fence and, as Jessie realized what was about to happen and ran forward to

catch him, he launched himself from the top and landed in thick, damp grass.

Unhurt and clearly thrilled with his accomplishment, he bounded to her, a big, Beagle smile on his open mouth.

“Oh, Folly.” Jessie gathered him in her arms, kissing his silky ear. “I think it’s time we sealed up that cat flap. No more outings in the yard alone, Mister.”

She carried him inside and dried him off with his own blue towel hanging on the back of the kitchen chair. Folly loved being dried, biting the towel, leaping backward into a play bow, swinging that long tail.

“Well, it just means we need even longer walks, right? And we’re definitely going to be more careful in the future.”

She dropped the towel in a heap at his feet. He looked up at her, head cocked, brown eyes curious.

“Thank you,” Jessie whispered once more, gazing back into his eyes. “Let’s get some dinner.”

Folly let out his baying bark and raced ahead of her to the pantry.

About the Author

Jordan Taylor has been a professional dog trainer for over ten years, working in a variety of areas from private consultations to agility and entertainment—training dogs for film, advertising, and live theater. Her first book, *Wonder Dogs: 101 German*

Shepherd Dog Films, traces the history of German Shepherd Dogs in movies from the 1920s to modern times. Jordan continues to merge her love for writing and dogs at home in the Pacific Northwest.

Stories in the *Angel Paws* series celebrate the unique bond between canines and humans with heartfelt, moving, and insightful tales

for anyone who has ever loved a dog.

If you enjoyed *Folly*, please leave a review on Amazon and find more *Angel Paws* stories on Jordan's author page:

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