

Friend at the Window



a flash fiction by
Frank Martin

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Friend at the Window

Apollo was comfortable with his role in the family. He was a weathered German Shepard at thirteen years old, but if you could ask him, that just meant you couldn't call him a puppy.

The Robertson family took him in shortly before their son Charlie was born ten years ago. From the moment he saw him, Apollo knew his job was to protect that boy no matter what.

They had a lot of fun together. Running through the park. Playing catch in the yard. Eating cake on Charlie's birthday (even when his parents told him not to feed Apollo under the table).

But those years have passed. Apollo's body doesn't move like it once did. Every step away from the house requires more energy than he was used to. So Charlie was forced to play by himself. And Apollo was forced to lie on the windowsill, watching patiently for his boy to come home.

Which he hasn't on this particular day.

Normally, Apollo wouldn't be as worried as he was. Charlie had only been gone ten minutes and sometimes he would be outside for hours before deciding to come back in. But something didn't feel right.

It was a snow day. Nearly eight inches of fresh, white powder fell overnight, cancelling school and creating a winter wonderland for Charlie to play in. He wanted to run out the door as soon as he could, but of course, Mrs. Robertson forced him to sit down and have a decent breakfast before heading out into the cold.

After inhaling a plate of toast and eggs, Charlie scrambled to put on his snow pants, boots, and jacket, nearly tripping over himself five times before he was fully dressed. Once he was ready, gloves, hat, and all, Apollo watched Charlie bolt out the front door and into the woods surrounding the house.

Apollo sat on the windowsill, where he always was these days, and scanned the tree line for any sign of Charlie running back and forth. There wasn't any, though. All the old dog could see were tree trunks and a pristine sheet of white coating the ground.

Ten minutes came and went. Apollo could feel himself getting anxious, even though Mr. and Mrs. Robertson weren't worried at all. They were chatting in the kitchen over coffee, completely unconcerned about their son playing outside.

Apollo felt something was off, though. He could sense it. He didn't know how or why. And he knew he wasn't smart enough to explain it. But Charlie was in trouble and it was up to him to save the boy.

He struggled to get up off the windowsill, but Apollo fought through his creaking joints to rise to his paws. Once he was up, everything clicked. Like his body was suddenly awake. He made his way through the living room without either human noticing. They didn't pay much attention to him these days, anyway.

Apollo then took off through the door and into a straight beeline for the woods. He found the snow to be deeper than expected, coming all the way up to his stomach, but the light, white fluff offered no resistance as his legs seamlessly passed through it. Instead, Apollo was more concerned by the uniformity of the forest. The deeper he went, the more the trees and snow looked the same. A never-ending canvas of green and white.

Apollo had no reason to head in any particular direction, but he carried on, driven by instinct that he knew Charlie was lost. More than that. The boy was in dire need of help. And Apollo wouldn't stop until he found him.

It took nearly five whole minutes before Apollo's ears perked up at a constant rustling noise against the silence. His hazy eyes spotted movement in the snow. It appeared that a stream was blocking his path.

Apollo followed the rushing water for several minutes before a more distinct object caught his attention. An odd bump lying beside the stream. Apollo took several cautiously optimistic steps and discovered the bump wasn't a bump at all. It was Charlie collapsed on the ground.

The boy's only movements came from a serious shiver that quivered his whole body back and forth. His jacket and pants were soaked from when he tripped into the stream. He was tired and cold. Probably too weak to make it home. Apollo couldn't pull him back to the house even if he wanted. So the dog

whimpered and barked by the boy's face, hoping to catch his attention.

Charlie slowly lifted his head to see the dog in front of him. "Apollo. Is that you, boy?"

Apollo barked once.

Charlie tried to smile but his cheeks wouldn't move. "What are you doing here?"

Apollo paced back and forth, whimpering his concern.

Charlie understood him right away. "I know I'm in trouble. But I fell pretty hard against the streambed. My arm hurts and I don't know how to get home."

Apollo jumped up and down, trying his best to fill the boy with life.

Charlie weakly bobbed his head up and down. It was the best he could do to nod. "Okay. I'll try to follow you back."

The boy used his wet gloves to press up off the snow and stagger to his feet. Wrapping his arms into his chest, Charlie stumbled forward a step at a time. Apollo led him back through the woods, moving slowly by the boy's side. It might've taken ten minutes. It might've taken an hour. Neither of them knew how much time had passed, but eventually, they emerged through the trees and into the front yard.

Losing feeling in his feet, Charlie limped several more steps forward when Mr. Robertson came running out to greet him. "Charlie! What happened to you?!"

The boy tried to answer but only one word came out of his trembling lips. "Apollo."

Mr. Robertson ignored his son's answer as he ushered his son back towards the house. "Come on. Let's get these wet clothes off of you."

Together, they walked through the front door, entering the house's warmth and passing by the urn containing Apollo's ashes sitting peacefully on the windowsill.

About the Author

Frank Martin is a comic writer and author that is not as crazy as his work makes him out to be...seriously.

Since his writing career began he's had multiple short stories published in horror anthologies by both Burning Willow Press and Stitched Smile Publications. Frank has also had comic shorts appear in the "fluff noir" anthology series Torsobear and the all-ages horror anthology Cthulhu is Hard to Spell. Frank also wrote and produced the comic anthology series Modern Testament, which featured a wide ensemble of artists throughout its four volumes. His novels include the YA sci-fi thriller Predestiny published by Crossroads Press and the zombie horror Mountain Sickness published by Severed Press.

Frank currently lives in New York with his wife and three kids. To hear more about his work you can sign up for his mailing list at www.frankthewriter.com or follow him on Twitter/Instagram @frankthewriter.