

Taylor spends most of his time in the local library, looking at books on dogs. Care and feeding, discussions of different breeds, training, everything he could find. That's where he met Peter.

Rejected Wizards

Peter's Tale

©2018 David Woodruff – all rights reserved

Taylor Martin had always wanted a dog. He wanted a little dog. Mostly he wanted a pal that was smaller than he was. The kids at school teased him unmercifully. Taylor was the only boy in his school with his first name. All the other Taylors were girls and none of the other boys in the school ever let him forget it. Taylor's school was filled with anti-bullying posters. Somehow, the sight of them made Taylor want a dog even more. In one of the side hallways, there was a big poster on the wall near his locker. It read, "Bullying Stinks ... Stop the Bullying" in big, black, bold letters. Near the bottom, next to the small copyright data, someone had added "... accept for Taylor" in equally small letters.

He reported it to a teacher and they had it taken down and replaced. Two days later the addition was back. Only now it read: "... except for that sissy Taylor."

Dogs didn't care what your first name was, they love you anyway ... and Taylor was desperate to be loved. But both his parents worked and they worked long, long hours, so they weren't too keen on getting a dog. "Who would take care of it?" was the refrain. Admittedly, his parents had trouble taking care of themselves.

Yet each day, Taylor when to sleep praying for a dog. He prayed to the figure on the cross at his church. He prayed to Shiva. He prayed to a picture of Stonehenge he found in a book. He prayed at a wishing well. He even prayed at his friend Jason's synagogue. Jason had been his only friend because the other boys picked on him for being Jewish. But that friendship ended when Jason discovered he could become popular with the other boys by tormenting Taylor. He was particularly disappointed at the synagogue. After all, shouldn't this God, in particular, care about people who are persecuted? Nothing seemed to work, it seemed, as usual, no one was listening.

Taylor spends most of his time in the local library, looking at books on dogs. Care and feeding, discussions of different breeds, training, everything he could find. That's where he met Peter.

Peter was a wizard. No, not one of those slight-of-hands artists who did kids parties or changed a cane into a bunch of flowers. Peter was a real wizard. The only trouble was, he was astonishingly bad at it. Peter Arjun was in his middle fifty's, having discovered he was a wizard later in life. Most high schools and universities don't offer wizardry as a class you could take or a subject you could major in. Peter had an eclectic, heavy-set face, with widely spread eyes that always appeared as if they were squinting. He had thick curly grey locks with a fading hairline. His eyebrows were so grey and thin, they were practically camouflaged on his face. At a distance, you would swear he didn't have any at all.

Peter was perhaps one of the worst wizards anyone had ever seem. Peter was, in the words of the spell casting elite, an 'Assembler.' Most wizards would build things with the right amount of raw materials. Give a good wizard a ton of Iron, carbon, and rubber and he could turn it into a Ferrari. With Peter, the best he could do was put things together. So, for example, if you took all the parts of a lawn mower and put them on a table, Peter could cause them to form themselves into a perfectly good twenty-one-inch Cub Cadet. But take one piece away and the others sat there, taunting you like a fly you couldn't kill with a rolled-up newspaper.

More than anything, Peter, wanted to create new things with raw materials ... not just put them together. He'd seen other spellcasters perform the feat, but he couldn't master it. So, he spent all his spare time in the library, reading old books on alchemy and treatises on attempts at sorcery. That's where he met Taylor.

The two were kindred spirits 40 years apart. Loners in the extreme and facing similar frustrations, like a scratch you can't itch. So, the two of them launched into a research project to create a dog. They called it "Project Fluffy."

Most of Project Fluffy was spent at the library reading tomes, pamphlets, folios, records and special collection items in the library, but both of them also spent time collecting dog hair. Until, over time, they had a large plastic garbage bag full of local canine tufts and castoffs. Peter built a laboratory in one of those rentable storage units, the ones which resembled a garage, but didn't have a car in it. Peter's lab was full of heavy tables, mountains of paper, test tubes, beakers, and various pipettes. In the center was a large wooden vat. The kind of thing one normally saw in a barn next to a vineyard ... and was mostly put to use crushing grapes. Above the vat, suspended from cables descending from the ceiling, was an oval-shaped silver ball, slightly larger than a football. The kind of thing one usually saw at the top of a Van De Graff generator.

It was the vat where Peter and Taylor put their collection of dog hair. Their first few attempts were about as successful as early Mercury-Redstone rocket launch tests ... but with less fiery explosions. Peter said the incantations and flicked the power switch. Sparks and lightning flew from the silver ball over the vat and there was a significant flash, like a camera going off. Fluffy One turned out to be a large, slimy pile of fur, which didn't move so much as it slowly settled into around clump of wet hair.

Fluffy Two was a less slimy ball of fur. Once it coalesced, it started to grow, like it was an inflatable toy someone was blowing air into. The furry ball continued to expand, until, like a balloon, it reached its elastic limit. It took the two of them a week to clean up the lab from the remains of Fluffy Two. Fluffy Three wasn't as messy as Fluffy Two. What they got was even alive ... and healthy. The only problem was Fluffy Three wasn't a dog ... it was a fully-grown chicken. It was fun to have around for a while, but it pooped all over the lab. In the end, they snuck over to a local farm and gave Fluffy Three a home with a friendly group of other chickens.

Fluffy Four through Seven resembled what your average five-year-old's version of what a clay doggie looked like. None of them where animate like the chicken and most had a consistency closer to Jell-O than clay in any case. Neither Peter or Taylor could figure out what when wrong with the spell for Fluffy Eight. Peter finished the incantation, and what they got was a turtle. Not a hair in sight and its loyalty factor was a bit low, even for a reptile. They set it free in the local swamp, where it seemed quite happy.

Fluffy Nine was ... well the less said about Fluffy Nine the better. Fluffy Ten was interesting, it turned out to be very dog-like. It loved to put its head in Taylor's lap and would rub its head against his shoulder in an extremely friendly way. It did extremely well at fetch, using a tennis ball they would throw around the lab. But there wasn't any way you could call an Emu a dog. Although Fluffy Ten spent a fun period of time with them in the lab, private ownership exotic animals were illegal in this state, so they were forced to sneak it into a local zoo.

Fluffy Eleven was an interesting result and it was the first time they got multiple subjects from the spell. But what they got was a whole colony of honey bees. Peter build a home for them in his back yard and they made excellent honey which the two of them enjoyed from time to time. After the bees, Taylor was about to give up in despair. He now seemed more depressed than when Peter first saw him. The boy

had brightened up considerably working in the lab on “Project Fluffy.” He even remained cheerful after Fluffy Nine, much to Peter’s surprise.

After Eleven, Peter went to the local toy store and purchased their entire stock of Erector sets and Legos. The two of them opened every box and threw the contents in the vat. Peter, being as an assembler, had no problem with building components. He waved his arms and performed a few detailed moves with his hands. The pieces began to dance around the vat in an excited state. They whirled around like they were caught in a tornado. The wind increased until Peter was afraid this would tear the storage unit apart. After a giant flash, the mass of parts was replaced with a magnificent robot dog. About three feet high, it was the type of robot that would put a NASA probe to shame. But if anything, Fluffy Twelve made Taylor more depressed than he had ever been before. Peter was crushed as well by what appeared to be his complete failure at almost every level.

All the other Fluffys had been disposed of gently, well perhaps with the exception of the pieces of Fluffy Two, which met the same fate as Peter’s dead fish he had when he was a kid. He was so disappointed in the whole result, he cast a removal spell to banish the robot into another dimension. This too was a major disaster. Failure would hardly be an appropriate term for what happened next. Did I mention Peter was a terrible wizard? I mean truly bad, in the realm of a blind, one-armed driver in a formula one car. Needless to say, the banishing spell didn’t work. Not even close.

What remained in the vat was a three-foot-tall, miniature Tyrannosaurus Rex, with the most dog-like demeanor you ever saw. It was as if someone had transplanted a poodle’s brain into a dinosaur and hit it with a shrink ray. It bonded with Taylor instantly. It had those puppy-like eyes that screamed love and excitement when it looked at you. They ran around the lab together, like two crazed boys playing Cowboys and Indians. Peter sat with his head buried in his hands. What was he going to do? You can’t sneak a miniature T-Rex into a farm or a zoo. The next thing Peter heard was the storage pod’s door sliding up. When he looked up he saw Taylor and Fluffy Twelve in the doorway. Fluffy was wagging its tail like an over-excited Skye Terrier.

“Thanks, Peter,” Taylor waved at him in absolute joy, “this is great!”