

Our Three-Legged Blessing

For as long as I can remember, I have dreamt of having a dog. Every time my birthday would come around, or Christmas, I would always put the word “DOG” on my wish list in big letters, all uppercase, so my mom and dad knew how much I cared about getting one. I didn’t even mind if it was a yippy, annoying dog, as long as it was mine, and it lived with us. But every single time I ask for a dog, mom always says the same thing, “Sorry sweet girl, but we just can’t afford to take care of a dog with a family as big as ours.” We have **five** people in our family. I know families that have eight kids but STILL have a dog. Anyway, today is my brother’s birthday. He wants a dog too, just not half as much as I do. I live for dogs, while he lives for “zombie shooting” video games. Just then, my brother stumbled down the stairs, because he was not watching his step while absorbed on his phone. “Happy birthday Richard!!!” Mom yells as she rushes into the kitchen to give him a hug. “Fifteen, wow!”, my dad remarks as he slaps Richard on the back. Richard barely looks up from his phone, but mom sets him straight. “Richard Adison Harper, are you going to even SPEAK to your family on your birthday? Oh, you better say something when your sister wishes you.” Yeah, yeah, sorry fam”, he says, still half zoned out from what he was looking at on his phone, but at least he put it down. “Ava, anything you have to say to me?” That is him talking to me. “Happy birthday, Richy Harper.” I say. “Thanks sis”, he says, smirking. “Now, let’s get to the presents!” “Alright, fine.” Mom says. She scoops up little Tia, my 11-month-old baby sister, and we all sit down on the couch. “Wait,” I say. “How come there is only 1 present here?” “Oh baby, that is because dad and I have our present somewhere else, and we’ll get it out later, after Richy has opened your present” mom says. “Okaaay.” I say. “Okay Richman, open Ava’s present.” Dad says. Richard carefully takes out my shimmery golden tissue paper to find a brown box. He opens the box and sees the super cool new phone case I got him. It’s textured, and it was quite expensive because it has a precious stone engraved into one of the corners. “Woooooah!!! This is a sick phone case sis!” Richard says. “The best for you, Richy.” I say. He comes over and hugs me, which feels good, ‘cause he doesn’t do it often anymore. “So, mom, dad, where’s your present for Richard?” I ask. “Well, before we give you your present, Richard, we want to talk to you about it first.” Mom starts. “Now that you’re 15, you are more responsible. And we got you something that you have been wanting for a long time, but it comes with a need of great responsibility. Richard Harper, we got you a dog.” I can’t believe I’m hearing this. We got a dog! This was my dream come true. “WHAAAAAT!!!!!! WE GOT A DOG!!!” Richy screams. Huh, I guess he cares more about dogs than I thought. “What should we name him? Or her? Hey dad, is it a girl or a boy?” I ask. “A girl, now listen, your mom isn’t finished.” Dad replies. “How about Lily?” Richard suggests. “Now guys—” Mom starts. “Or how about Ruby?” I say. “Guys, listen—” Mom says. “OOOOOH!! How about Kylie!?” Richard yells. “Oh, whatever.” Mom says. I don’t know what message she was trying to convey, but it must not have been important because she stopped trying to tell it to us. After a few more name suggestions, I asked, “Hey, where is the dog anyway?” “Oh, I’ll go and grab her.” Dad said. A few minutes later dad brings her in. My dog. “Hey,” Richard starts. “What’s wrong with her leg?” I look down to see what he’s talking about, and there is something wrong with her legs. She’s missing one. We got a 3-legged dog. “That is what I was trying to tell you sweetheart.” Mom says. “At first, we were going to get you a regular dog from a regular dog store, you know, a cute little one, but WHOA were they expensive. But we didn’t want to give up on getting you a dog, so we went to the pound, the place where all the—uh, not wanted dogs go. Like this little girl here.” Richard is taken aback by all of this. “WHAT! I want a cute, NORMAL

dog!!! Not some 3-legged freak!!!” I wince. Hearing someone trash a dog so hard annoys me. But Richard isn’t even done. “I don’t want that freak bucket. Why couldn’t you have gotten me ANY other dog!!!” “Richy, baby,” Mom starts. “This dog didn’t have a home. We thought you would be happy to take care of it. But that is okay. We can take him back to the pound and see if there is a dog that is the type you want, with all 4 legs.” NO. There was no way I was going to let my selfish brother toss a poor, innocent dog back into the pound. That’s like going into a bakery that doesn’t get a lot of service, checking things out, and then leaving without getting anything. “Stop mom.” I say. “You cannot take her back just because she has 3 legs.” “I’m sorry, who’s birthday is it?” Richard says. “No, I’m sorry Richy. But she is staying, no matter what.” I say back. “Fine, but it’s yours. I don’t ever want to see that thing again. Way to ruin my birthday, Ava.” I wince again. I feel bad, mad, and sad. I “ruined” my brother’s birthday, and there was a sad, little dog, not knowing what was going on. “UHHHG!” I shout, and it feels really good. I storm over to the big, heavy dog cage and lug it up the stairs, to my room. The large cage barely fits through the door. When I enter my room, with the cage, I let my dog out. Then I see the beauty in her. She’s awesome. Her shiny, golden fur shakes as she trots all over the room, like she’s checking if it’s safe. I sit down. I don’t care what anyone says. She’s mine and I love her. Then she comes over to me. My beautiful dog licks me right on the face, as if to say, *I like it here, and I like you.* “I still haven’t decided on a name for you, my beautiful girl.” I whisper. “How about Bella?” Bella nuzzles her nose to my cheek, so I stick with that name. Tears are running down my cheeks, from Richard’s comments. Bella whines at the sight of this. “I’m okay, girl. In life, people will say cruel, cold things, to people or animals who are different. Don’t ever let that affect you. You aren’t bad just because you have 3 legs. You’re different. You’re imperfect. But imperfection is the one thing we all have in common. You, me, Richard, everyone.” Bella looks calmer now. She looks tired too. She then curls up into a fluff pile in my lap, and then drifts off, into sleep, leaving me listening to her soft snore. I don’t care if everyone in the WORLD disagrees with me. I love Bella, and I can accept the fact that she has 3 legs, because it is overcome by the fact that Bella is the BEST dog ever, because she is a happy, healthy, sweet, calm, and special dog, and even if she had only 2 legs, I would still love her to death. As the following weeks went by, I realized something. Without Bella, I would be a mess. Everyday when I came home from school, Bella would be ready at the door, to jump on me and greet me. She would kiss me all over my face, and if any day I was sad or mad, she would lie down across my body, with her face right next to mine, and we would either sleep, or lie down in silence, with me sometimes reading a book or something. Then 2 days ago, on Thursday, the BEST THING EVER happened! You see, Richard came home from school, and he still wouldn’t accept Bella, well, into the family. A couple of days after we got Bella, when she had warmed up to the family, she started jumping on us. Usually it was just after school, when we looked happy, when we looked excited, when we looked mad, when we looked—actually, it was pretty much all the time. She’s a jumpy dog. So, she jumped on Richard after he got home from school, you know, because she had thought that our whole family had gotten used to her, and we mostly had, I mean, dad and mom had, little Tia is a little scared of her, but it’s gotten better. But Richard has never given her a chance, and that first day, when Bella jumped on Richard I thought I was going to cry. He hurt her. He pushed her down and said these exact words: “Get out of my way you FREAK show! And DON’T do that again!!!” I was SO mad at him for saying that, that I gave him the silent treatment for 3 days. From then on, Bella would always run away whenever she heard his scraggly voice yell, “I’M HOOOOME!!!” to mom. But of course, that’s not the good

news, the good news is that on Thursday, when he came home from school, Bella wasn't running from the door when he yelled "I'm home" because she was on top of me sleeping. When Richard came through the door, she immediately woke up. Richard looked really sad. That's when mom said, "What's wrong, baby?" Then Richard said, "I kind—I failed a pretty important test." He looked really upset about it. Then mom said, "Oh, sweetie. That's okay, as long as you tried your best." That's when the greatest thing in the world happened. Bella came over to Richy and curled up at his feet. Richard must have realized his mistake in judging Bella for her appearance and kneeled, scooped her up, took her to the couch, and he sat with her on his lap, kissing her while he scrolled through his photos on his phone. Since then, Richard has stopped being mean to Bella and has FINALLY accepted her into the family and loves her very much, like me. Bella has brought our family so many blessings, and because of her, Richard and I are now closer than ever before.

I love our sweet, 3-legged puppy.

By: Nikita Gaonkar