

# How Dewey Got Lost

Short Story Prequel to Season of Us



*Pamela Sanderson*

## How Dewey Got Lost

Julia became aware of a sound that wasn't on the study soundtrack she was using to block out distractions. She removed an earbud. Those pounding thumps were someone rapping on the door.

She marked the place where she stopped and pushed back from her desk. The knocking grew more urgent.

"Hang-on," she called in a not-friendly voice. She opened the door a crack.

"It's me." Zach, her neighbor, stood there, his shaggy hair hanging in his eyes. He was tall and decent-looking, but also a jock. A professional jock. He was wearing what Julia had come to understand was his team's travel attire, red and black athletic pants, and a red polo shirt with the Condors' logo.

She lived next door to two Condors. Zach was the dark-haired, skinny one with the perpetually knitted brow, like he constantly had an unsolvable problem on his mind. He was like the big brother that you wanted to look after. His roommate, Chad, was the broad-shouldered, flirtatious one who infused more meaning to their acquaintance than actually existed. He was like the big brother you pretended you didn't know.

"Hey Jules," he would call to her from across the parking lot, his hand waving in the air. "Catch you later?"

Julia would hop on her bike and ride away without answering.

Zach was friendly, if not slightly formal. He was also terribly disorganized.

"Let me guess," Julia said. There was no need to guess because the dog was with him and Zach had a bag of dog food under his arm. "Hi Dewey," she said. Dewey nuzzled Julia's hand and wagged her tail without enthusiasm. She knew she was about to be left.

Zach shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I can see from the expression on your face, I didn't mention I was going out of town for a match this week."

Julia shook her head.

"Do you mind taking her?"

It was cute the way Zach acted as if he had another option. Julia was waiting for the day when she arrived home and found Dewey tied to the front door with a sign around her neck.

"The usual cash gratuity would apply," he added.

She opened the door so Dewey could come in. “I love Dewey. She can hang out here anytime. The *gratuity* is a penalty for poor planning. What if I was busy?”

“That’s what you’re known for,” Zach said. “Party central.”

She knew he didn’t intend to be mean but the observation of her sad social life stung.

“Student. Remember?” Julia said. “Classes? Homework? Exams?”

“I remember,” Zach said. He followed the dog in and set the dog food on the kitchen table. “Sorry. You could download our schedule from the team website.”

“Or, you could,” Julia said. “Me having zero interest in your vultures and their boring game.”

“Boring game?” Zach’s hands flew to his chest in mock outrage. “That’s my livelihood you are referring to. Not everyone feels as you do. Did you know people pay good money to come see us? In fact, to some people, admittedly mostly little kids, we’re kinda famous.”

Julia scratched Dewey around the ears. To the dog she said, “Do you hear that? Kinda famous.”

“The offer to bring you to a match still stands. I could introduce you to some of the guys. I could get you a jersey from any player you choose.”

Julia made a face. “No thanks. Not my thing. You and Chad are the only players I’ve heard of and I don’t look good in red and black.”

“No one looks good in red and black,” Zach said. “And getting back to the schedule, you’re right, I should bring you one.”

“How many times have you told me that?”

“I’ll try to actually follow through this time.”

Julia moved the dog food next to the sink. “Dewey hates this food, by the way.” She wondered if she still had any of the canned food she’d bought the last time Dewey stayed over.

“She’s a dog,” Zach said. “She’ll eat whatever you’re offering. Plus, she likes you. I need to be at the team bus in about five minutes so I have to run. Be good, Dew.”

Dewey had her tail between her legs.

“Don’t worry,” Julia told the dog. “I’ll get you better food.”

Zach smiled. “Thanks Julia. I owe you. Again.”

He shut the door behind him.

“I don’t know how you put up with that guy,” Julia said. Dewey licked her chin before taking a lap around the kitchen. She settled down on the floor with a *huff*.

Julia wasn’t upset with Zach. She loved dogs and was in no position to have one herself while she was in school. Plus the cash came in handy while she was a starving student. Dewey was no trouble. If Julia were to invent the perfect part time dog, she would come up with a lovable dog like Dewey.

Dewey got back up and took another lap around the kitchen, this time sniffing every corner and licking the floor in a few spots. She looked back at Julia and made a high-pitched dog sigh.

“Let’s go then,” Julia said.

\*\*\*

The afternoon was warmer than Julia expected. The sun felt good on her bare shoulders. She lived in a sprawling rundown apartment complex that was poorly managed. Its main selling point was the location and affordability for college students. And apparently kinda famous soccer players. She’d seen other guys in the Condors’ uniform around more than once.

The park was nearby but first she had to walk a few blocks along a busy street. Dewey pulled her along, straining against the leash.

“You’re yanking my arm off, Dog,” she said.

They had to cut through a series of tennis courts. Dewey remained alert, as if an errant ball might find its way to her. The courts were fenced-in but the dog could dream.

On the other side of the tennis courts there was an open greenspace with paved paths that circled through the trees. The park was dotted with picnic areas and play equipment for kids. There was a popular disc golf course on the other end. At certain times of day she could get away with letting Dewey off-leash but this wasn’t one of them. The park was busy with bicyclists, runners, and families with strollers.

Dewey dragged her along the path as if on a special mission. She darted from one side of the path to the other, making sure to thoroughly sniff every light post, garbage can, and tree trunk. She would stand politely if another dog approached, but Dewey was mostly indifferent to other animals.

“Your dog is stuck-up,” Julia had told Zach once.

“She is particular about who she keeps company with,” Zach had said.

Dewey seemed hell-bent to circle the park in record time. Julia practically jogged after her to keep up.

“Dewey!” Julia stopped the dog and held her between her legs while she bent over to examine the collar. The stitching was frayed and the band was pulling apart from the buckle. Dewey’s walking style didn’t help matters. Julia had pointed it out to Zach more than once and, in typical Zach fashion, the problem remained. Maybe she should buy Dewey a new collar and bill him for it. She was so absorbed in trying to fix the dumb thing, she didn’t notice someone talking to her.

“Hello?” He cleared his throat. “Did you need some help?”

Julia glanced up to find a really cute guy looking down at her. He had a bright orange disc that he spun in hands.

“What?” She stood up. Her voice sounded harsher than she intended.

“I thought you might need some help.” He gestured at the dog. “What’s her name?”

“Dewey,” Julia said. She still didn’t sound friendly. She reminded herself to smile. Why was she so terrible at the simple activity of talking to people?

The guy pushed a hand through his sandy-blond hair and gave her a wide smile showing slightly crooked teeth. His smile was thrilling.

“Her collar is falling apart. It’s no big deal. I should get a new one,” she said. “How about you?” She wasn’t sure what she was asking him.

“I’m Charlie,” he said. He had a bag over his shoulder and more brightly-colored discs peeked out of the top. His eyes were dark brown and his nose was peeling as if recently sunburned.

“Julia,” she said. “Hi.” She searched her brain for something clever to say. Or something marginally interesting. Or anything.

Dewey was still pinned between her legs, and had grown impatient. She wiggled to get free. “Sorry Dog.” Julia checked the collar before she let Dewey loose. The dog ran to sniff Charlie’s legs and then nuzzled his bag of discs. He pet her on the head.

A group of people came through the trees and called, “Charlie!”

He turned to them and gestured that they should go ahead.

“We’re not waiting,” one of them, a girl, said.

Charlie took a few quick steps and flung the disc into the air.

Dewey lunged after it, almost yanking the leash out of Julia's hands. She grabbed the flimsy collar and pulled Dewey back to her side. The disc floated slowly across the grass and straight into the hands of one of the friends.

While Charlie was turned she checked him out from behind. He was a finely formed guy, compact, but all muscle. He probably spent his weekends rock-climbing or riding trail bikes. Her Mom would have described him as scruffy, but her Mom would say that about anyone with a little bit of chin stubble and shorts that looked like they'd been balled up on the floor overnight.

He had a nice butt and muscled calves. She wondered what it would be like to slide her hands over the calves and work her way up...

Charlie turned around.

Her eyes went wide and she blushed, hoping he couldn't read her mind. "Are you going with your friends?"

"I'll catch up with them later." He gave her that crooked smile. "Does Dewey like to catch things?"

"Probably," Julia said.

"Probably?"

"I don't know about catch. Dewey will chase a tennis ball and bring it back. I haven't tried throwing anything else."

"There's an open spot down the hill where we can play catch." Charlie pointed through the trees. "It's quiet enough."

"Okay," Julie said. She fell into step beside him. "You sure you want this maniac chomping on your fancy discs?"

"I've got a dog disc in here," Charlie said. His arm brushed against hers and a warm jolt went all the way to her toes.

"So you have a dog," Julia said, taking effort to sound natural.

"Igor. He's a mutt. Imagine a big, brown hairy shepherd. He's at home with my folks. At some point I'd like to get a place where I could have him here, but not possible at the moment."

"Igor won't mind sharing his toys with Dewey?"

"Not like he's using them," Charlie said. "I've seen you around campus."

"I thought you looked familiar," Julia said. "Bike racks?"

Charlie nodded.

Now that he said it, she realized she'd noticed him, too. He always seemed to be with a group of friends. She envied people who moved around in packs, finding each other between classes, or meeting-up for pitchers in the evenings. How did they become a group? How did their friendships form? Julia had occasionally found herself on the fringe of such groups, but never truly a part of one. She often wished she would wake up and know she was meeting friends for a barbecue at the lake. They would study together in the afternoon and in the evening make popcorn and watch a classic comedy, cuddled together on the couch, repeating the best jokes to each other.

"I live in those crummy apartments on the other side of the park." Julia pointed back over her shoulder.

"I live in one of those big, crummy houses near campus. Tons of roommates. No one does dishes or empties the trash. You know how it is."

"Not really," Julia said. "I live by myself."

His hair was curlier than she had thought at first. She wasn't standing close enough but she imagined he smelled like cedar. His lips looked soft. She could hardly tear her eyes away from his mouth. She wanted to stare but every time she looked over, their eyes met and she dropped her gaze back to the ground.

Charlie led them off the paved path and into a small clearing with a slight downward slope. He dug around in his bag and pulled out a bright yellow disc.

"See? It's cloth covered and bendy. It's perfect for dogs. Do you let her off leash?"

"She knows I'm the source of her food," Julia said, unhooking the leash. "She won't run away."

Charlie showed Dewey the disc and then flung it across the grass. Dewey ran after it and waited for it to hit the ground. She sniffed it before picking it up and bringing it to Julia.

"Give it to him," Julia said, nudging the dog toward Charlie.

"No, you throw it," Charlie said. Off her uncertain look he added, "Even my Mom can throw it."

"Oh, well, if your Mom can do it." The disc was lightweight and easy to throw. Julia's throw had more height. Dewey chased after it and watched it in the air but waited for it to hit the ground before picking it up and bringing it to Julia.

"I'm going to try something," Charlie said. He came over to take the disc from her. He wore a tank top that showed off his muscled arms. His skin was suntanned and he had a tattoo around his upper arm. When he stood next to her she could see it was an intricate pattern of twining leaves. Their eyes met briefly and Julia smiled.

Charlie walked several feet from the dog and threw the disc right at her and she caught it. He stepped back and repeated the motion. He did this several times until he was throwing the disc from across the clearing. Dewey would catch it each time.

Julia didn't throw as accurately as Charlie. Her first long throw was off, but Dewey ran over and caught it easily.

"Nice," Charlie said.

They went like that for a while, trading turns. Julia learned that Charlie had lived on both coasts and for a short time in Toronto, a place he recommended she visit. He had a younger brother, and had to rely on his bike for transportation until he could get enough money together to get his car fixed. He worked part time at a restaurant bussing tables and washing dishes, but the manager didn't give him consistent hours.

Charlie spoke slowly as if considering every word. He was also an intent listener who asked thoughtful questions. She told him she was an only child of divorced parents and he managed to coax the story out of her. They'd had a toxic relationship. The divorce was ugly and they'd used her to get at each other. She was mostly estranged from them for now although they both gave token support while she was in school. She survived off a small trust from her maternal grandmother and worked part time in the college's media relations office.

"Living off a trust sounds swankier than it is," she said. "It's enough for four years of school as long as I'm careful. I can't afford to screw up."

Dewey carried the disc back to a shady spot and dropped it. She plopped down, her tongue hanging out the side of her mouth.

"I guess she's finished," Julia said. She knew she should take Dewey home and get her some water, but now that she was getting to know Charlie, she didn't want to leave. She clipped the leash back onto Dewey's collar.

Charlie rooted around in his bag. He had another disc but this one popped open into a shallow bowl. He pulled out a water bottle and filled the bowl and set it next to Dewey.

"That's clever," Julia said. She sat down in the shade, too.



“It comes in handy. I can show you where to get one for Dewey.” Charlie joined her and offered the bottle. She took a quick sip, not wanting to be greedy. Charlie took a long drink and offered it to her again before pouring more in Dewey’s bowl.

“There’s a water fountain at the beginning of the disc golf course, if we need more,” Charlie said.

Dewey held the bowl between her paws.

“Are you playing a game today?” Julia asked, nodding at the discs.

“I was going to play around with my friends,” Charlie said. “I decided to talk to you instead.”

“Oh.” Julia’s eyes dropped. She played with the loop of Dewey’s leash. “I’m glad you did.”

“Do you want to do something together sometime?” Charlie asked. “Or, I guess we are doing something together. Do you want to do something else?”

Julia’s heart was pounding. She forced herself to meet his eyes. “Yes, I would.”

Was that relief in his smile? Maybe he wasn’t quite as confident as he put on. “Good,” he said. “We’ve established that I don’t have the means to take you someplace fancy. Have you played disc golf? Or would you like to learn? I know there are people who aren’t into that.”

“I am,” Julia said. “Or, I would. I haven’t tried. But I’d like to.” She imagined herself in the future, walking through the park as part of a group, sharing jokes while they played the course. “I’d like to learn.”

“Good.” He gazed thoughtfully into her face. She wasn’t sure what to say next. She was pondering her options when Dewey went rigid. The dog jumped to her feet and took off.

“Dewey!” Julia jumped to her feet, too, and ran after the dog.

A bright green tennis ball had flown over their heads and bounced across the grass. Dewey grabbed it and danced around with it in her mouth.

“Get over here,” Julia said. Her heart hammered in her chest. She wasn’t clear if it was from chasing after the dog or sitting next to Charlie. She picked up Dewey’s leash and led her back to the shade where Charlie still sat. He watched her with an intent look in his eyes.

Julia took a deep breath. “She likes tennis balls better than discs.”

“So I see. Note for next time,” Charlie said.

Julia was about to sit down when Dewey dropped the ball she had and tried to run down the hill again. Julia had a good grip on the leash but Dewey strained against it. Another tennis ball bounced across the grass and out of sight.

“Dewey, there’s a ball right here,” Julia said, trying to pull the dog back. Suddenly, the leash snapped back and Dewey was free. She raced down the hill and disappeared through the trees. Julia stared at the broken collar in surprise.

“Let’s go get her,” Charlie said, running after the dog.

“Dewey!” Julia called. She ran after them.

She made her way through the trees expecting Dewey to appear at any moment. The dog would never run away. There was no reason to worry that she wouldn’t return as soon as she had the ball. Except Julia couldn’t find her.

Beyond the trees there was another stretch of paved path that led to the golf disc course. Julia ran that way, thinking Dewey might have found something else to chase after.

“Dewey!” she called again and again. No dog. She stood there holding the leash, trying to decide what to do next.

One of the disc golfers broke from his group to approach her. “You looking for your dog?”

“You saw her?”

The guy pointed to the parking lot. “I think your friend has it.”

“Thanks,” Julia said, sighing with relief. She jogged toward the parking lot wondering how to get Dewey home without a collar. Who knew what else Charlie had in his bag?

She walked through the lot but didn’t see Charlie or the dog. A van pulled out suddenly, its tires squealing on the pavement.

“Julia?” Charlie crossed the parking lot toward her.

“Where’s Dewey?” she asked. “That guy up there said you had her.”

“I don’t. I couldn’t find her. Sorry.”

She noticed a tennis ball next to the curb.

“What am I going to do?” Julia said, a sob catching at the back of her throat. “I can’t leave without her.”

“We’ll go back through the park and keep looking,” Charlie said.

“She’s never run away like that,” Julia said.

“It’s okay, someone will find her. She’s friendly. She’s chipped, right?”

“I don’t know,” Julia said. Off Charlie’s questioning look, she said, “Dewey isn’t mine. She belongs to my neighbor. He plays for the Condors.” She could tell from his expression, Charlie didn’t know what she was talking about. “The Condors are the professional soccer team. When they play out of town, I keep Dewey. She belongs to Zach Carrey. He’s the tall, skinny one. I don’t know. They all look the same. He’s going to kill me. I lost his dog.”

“Try not to worry,” Charlie said. He took her hand and laced his fingers into hers.

“That guy said someone had her. Do you think someone took her?” Her heart squeezed tight at the thought. “Poor Dewey.”

“I hope not,” Charlie said. “I’ll stay with you and we’ll keep looking. We’ll make signs. If someone took her, we’ll find them.”

“Okay,” Julia said. Her mind was fuzzy with disbelief and shock.

Charlie squeezed her hand. “I won’t let some guy who plays soccer kill you.”

Julia managed a small smile. She squeezed his hand back. Knowing he was there for her made it a little less terrible. “I don’t know what to do.”

“First, we’ll find that guy who saw her with someone,” Charlie said. “And we’ll go from there.” He tugged on her hand. “Come on. We’ll figure it out together.”

Julia already knew she trusted him. “Thanks Charlie,” she said and followed him back to the park.

Thank you for reading. This is a teaser to the novel, *Season of Us*, the story of Zach and Shelly. For more information, visit the author's website at [www.pamelasanderson.com](http://www.pamelasanderson.com).

\*\*\*

Copyright 2015, Pamela Rentz writing as Pamela Sanderson. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination and are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons living or dead, is coincidental.

The cover, editing and formatting were all done by the author. Any disappointment with the quality of this work should be directed at her. (This is a freebie. Don't worry, she hired pros for *Season of Us*.)