

Willow was an elf who had been raised by wolves. There were three pups in the pack, named Togo, Tyson, and Tala, Mother and Father wolf, and her. One day, Willow was walking with Tala when they came across a campsite. There were the remains of a fire and it looked like someone had been sleeping there. "That's odd," said Willow. "People don't usually come this far into the forest. I wonder what they were doing here." If it is at all possible that a wolf can shrug, Tala did it. "Oh come on, we need to be careful! They might find us, take me away, and hunt the rest of you!" Tala just rolled her eyes. She thought Willow was overreacting. Willow sighed, "Let's go home and tell Mother and Father about this." They went home and told the adult wolves about what they had seen. "Hmm," said Father. "That is very interesting. Humans don't normally feel comfortable in the woods, so it's odd that they should come this far in, unless..." Here he paused and looked at Mother "Yes" she said. "That is a possibility..."

"What is?" asked Willow and Tala at the same time.

"It might be elves," said Mother.

"Yeah, but I thought I was the last one and you didn't know where I came from," said Willow.

"We don't know where you came from, but elves are said to have lived here even before the animals of the woods. Before they disappeared that is," said Father.

"Yes, when the humans came into the forest looking for them they did disappear. Some say that they went to live somewhere else. Others say that they went to live with the humans. We think some of them went to live with the humans, yes, but others just went into hiding," said Mother.

"Oh yeah, so we don't know if any are left, and if there are, we don't know where they are?" said Willow.

"Right," said Mother.

"We aren't sure though, so I don't want you to go over there again," said Father.

"Ok," Willow and Tala said.

Mother could see they needed some cheering up. "Why don't you go play with the other pups until dinner?"

"Ok!" they said and raced away. Playing with all the pups was always fun. They played tag, (Willow was never it, they couldn't catch her) and when they were all tired out from running, they played a game they had made up that they called 'Climb the Willow' in which all three pups climbed up Willow and she had to stay on her feet. They pulled her down and tried to sit on her. Then it was time for dinner and bedtime.

Willow woke up in the middle of the night and looked around. Something felt...off. Then she realized what it was. Tala was gone! Willow got up and went outside to look for her, but she wasn't there either. Where could she have gone?! "The Campsite! Of Course!" she said to herself. "Tala is just as curious as I am, but less obedient." Willow looked back at the cave. Should she wake Father? No, she could do this on her own. She set off in the direction of the campsite. On the way over, she started thinking, *What if Tala was hurt or something else bad had happened to her?* She walked a bit faster. Maybe there were elves around here. Father said they always helped out the animals, but Willow couldn't rely on that, she didn't know if they were real. When she reached the campsite she started looking around; she could see pretty well in the dark. Now, she was starting to get worried, Tala wasn't here! Then she heard a noise in the distance, a howl. She knew it was Tala. Willow took off running in the direction of the howl. She knew she was being really loud but she had to get there before Tala got hurt! She was almost there when she felt her foot catch on something and she tripped. She looked up and saw a girl, a few years older than her, leaning over her. "Shhh " she said with her finger on her lips "You have to be quiet or they'll know we're here and I won't be able to save that wolf pup," she whispered a little harshly. "Sorry, that pup is a friend of mine, I want to help you save her," Willow replied in a whisper. "Really?" the girl asked. "How do I know you're friends?" "Her name is Tala. Ask her if you don't believe me." Willow stopped. "Never mind, you won't understand her, you can't talk to animals like I can."

“You can really talk to animals?” the girl asked, frowning. Willow sighed and called out to a passing fox in the animal language. “Hello fox.” Holding out her hand, “Can I pet you?” The fox said in the same language, “Yes, please.” Willow smiled. “I guess you really can talk to animals too,” the girl said. Bending down, too, she said “There you go little guy.” “Thanks!” replied the fox as he ran off. Willow stared at the girl as she pulled back her hood. “You’re an elf too!” Willow said in amazement, switching back to the normal language. “Yes, I am. My name is Pine. Now let’s see what we can do to help your friend. She was captured by humans who are camping out here looking for wolves.”

“So it was their fire we saw,” Willow said to herself. Then louder, “My name is Willow. We need to find their camp and free her.”

“Yes, I know where it is. I passed it earlier. Come on!”

Willow followed Pine to the campsite where there were two men packing up their things. Tala was tied to a tree where they could keep an eye on her. Willow snuck over and whispered quietly to Tala, “Psst, Tala.”

“Willow!” she exclaimed.

“Shh, I’m going to get you out, I just need to untie this rope.”

Just then one of the men came over to get Tala. “Come on you, someone will pay a good price for a little wolf pup like you.” He unknotted the rope and dragged Tala away. “Help!” she cried as she got farther away. Pine pulled Willow back and whispered in her ear, “We can’t get them head on, they will be going to the black market to sell her. We can cut them off and surprise them at a clearing near the edge of the forest.”

Willow nodded and followed Pine to the clearing. Willow and Pine talked on the way over and came up with a plan. Willow would distract the men while Pine set Tala free.

Soon the men came, dragging Tala behind them. “Come on, if we get there fast enough then we might sell her for more.” Willow stepped out in front of them, “Hello” she said quietly.

“What do you want, girl?” asked one of them.

"That's my wolf pup," Willow replied shyly.

"How do you know it's yours? How do we know that you aren't just trying to steal it?" said the other one.

"I know because my pup is gray with a white stripe down her face, like that one, and she has a white spot on the back of her neck. Her name is Tala and she responds to her name, but I guess none of that matters because we have to go now, bye!" Willow took off running into the forest.

While Willow was talking to the men, Pine had gotten Tala free. Now they ran as fast as they could into the forest to hide because the angry wolf hunters were after them. Soon they came to a small cave hidden from view. They jumped in and held their breath. "Where did they go?!" called one. "I don't know, but they aren't here, that's for sure. Let's keep looking." Willow, Pine and Tala waited there for a while until Pine said, "OK, it should be safe now."

"Thank you so much for your help, Pine," said Willow.

"Yes, I don't know what I would have done if it weren't for you," jumped in Tala.

"I'm glad that I could help you, Tala. In the future, don't go wandering the forest alone, ok?" Pine said laughing.

"OK" Tala said, a little bit embarrassed.

Willow hugged her new friend and said, "We should get home now. Mother and Father will be waking soon and will wonder where we've been. Thank you again, Pine! I hope that we see you again soon. If you ever need anything we would be happy to help."

"Thank you for the offer, but now you should get going." said Pine.

Willow smiled and nodded, then she and Tala got up and left. Pine watched them for a while and thought about what had happened. She liked Willow and had a feeling that she would get into trouble again soon...