

Paddington's Story – Part 4

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It was the start of another week and it was dinner time – my favourite time of the day.

I sat in front of the kitchen counter, looking up at my bowl that sat beyond my reach, with the most delicious aroma of cooked meat and biscuits drifting from it. I wiggled my nose, sniffing and drooling in anticipation. Dinner never came quickly enough for me.

Pet Sooz was busy doing stuff. I was never sure what it was she did, until Lola's and my bowls were placed on the counter – then I knew. The trouble was she'd get distracted doing other things. I'd sit looking at my bowl, while she moved around me, emptying the dish washer, fetching and carrying to and from the fridge, stacking cups and saucers into the cupboard. It was always the same at this time of night – while she played, we waited for our dinner.

Tonight took longer than normal and the thought hit me, perhaps she'd forgotten about our dinner. I woofed softly and smiled up at her, before turning my vision back to the bowl on the counter. Hopefully she would pick up on my hungry look.

'We have puppy class tonight Paddington. You'll have to wait until we get back home for your dinner.'

Puppy class? It was the first I'd heard about a puppy class.

'Wait!' I woofed sharply. 'But Sooz, I'm starving now, I can't wait.' On cue my stomach grumbled loudly. Surely she would hear it and take pity on me?

The rattle of what was becoming a familiar sound drew my attention away from Sooz to Pete. He had that darn lead in his hands and was stooping over me to attach it to my collar.

'Oh no, not the lead,' I grumbled nudging his hand in the hope he'd change his mind. Pete didn't take any notice of my gesture and instead stood up and made an annoying clicking sound with his tongue. I wondered if he was deliberately trying to sound like a kangaroo – I'd seen them on television at the other house. My mother's pets used to leave it on for us pups to watch and I'd been getting addicted to the kid's channel.

'Come on, Paddington. You've got to get used to walking on the lead,' said Pete.

'Why?' I grumbled and sat down.

'If you want to go for long walks with us, you have to learn this basic lesson,' said Pete tugging on the lead, which in turn yanked at my collar and drew me back to my feet. I tossed my head from side to side and pulled back against it, while digging my heels in. As he slackened off the tension, I sat down again.

'You're hurting my neck. I hate it,' I woofed. 'I don't need a lead, I will follow you. All you have to do is ask me.' I looked up at Pete with my heart-breaking shattered expression.

It worked. Pete relented and bent down to scoop me into his arms. 'Might be quicker if I carry him to the car,' he commented to Sooz. I noticed her raise an eyebrow at him and wasn't sure why and I didn't get time to ask, as Pete whirled around and strode out of the kitchen.

Sooz joined us and Pete drove the car into Balhannah and parked it in front of the vet's rooms. Could my night get any worse? I panicked. 'Not another injection,' I yapped. 'I thought we were going to puppy school,' I couldn't stop my tone tipping into stressed.

'It's okay Paddington. You'll be fine,' cooed Sooz in a voice meant to soothe. But it wasn't having the desired affect and as Pete took me from her embrace and made for the door, I tried to tell him how I felt about going to the vets.

He ignored me and walked into chaos. The rooms were busy with pets and their... I blinked and stretched my neck down Pete's body to sniff the wonderful, delightful smell of – puppies.

'Put me down, put me down, put me down,' I yapped. 'I'm Paddington, hello. I'm Paddington, hello,' I yapped. I was so excited I couldn't stop my body squirming.

'Calm down, Paddington,' said Pete, as he placed me on the floor and I took off across the room with him attached to my lead.

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'Hi, I'm Paddington,' I said shoving my nose into the face of a Spoodle.

'Hello I'm Paddington,' a black Labrador licked me back.

'Hello, I'm Paddington.'

'Don't get in my face, Paddington,' said the Blue Heeler pup.

'Sorry, I'm didn't mean to offend. It's nice to meet you. I won't do it again.' I was waffling so fast and I couldn't stop my crazy chattering.

'Hello, I'm Paddington, it's nice to meet you.' The white fluff ball took a frightened step back. 'Don't come so close. I don't like it,' she said. 'You look scary.'

'Sorry, sorry,' I bounced away from her and made for another pup. 'What breed are you?' I asked in ignorance.

'I'm a Short Haired Pointer. One day I'll be trained to hunt with my pets and fetch their kills for them. My mother said...'

'That's nice,' I yapped. I had no idea what he was talking about and moved on to the next pup.

'Hello, I'm Paddington,' I licked the nose of an Australian Shepherd. 'You've got a blue eye,' I woofed.

'Yeah. I'm special,' said the Shepherd.

I couldn't stop my tail thrashing wildly from side to side and my body quivering and shaking in my excitement. 'I didn't realise puppy class was going to be so much fun.' I barked as I started making the rounds of all the pups again.

A woman clapped her hands and called us all to attention. 'If you could gather your puppies up, we'll start with the basics,' she said.

'That's your teacher,' said Sooz, yanking me to her side and asking me to sit.

And I should be impressed? And why would I want to sit when there was so much to be said. I wasn't sure why Sooz would tell me this and make me sit, when all I wanted to do was find out about the other pups.

'So, this is Paddington,' said the teacher walking over to my pet Sooz. 'He has big shoes to fill, if he's to be as good as Gromit!'

'Yes, he certainly does,' replied Sooz. 'He comes from a herding line. Not that we're going to herd with him. But we thought we would put him through obedience.'

'Gromit?' I woofed. There was that name again. I gazed up at the teacher, ignoring Sooz's words about obedience. 'I need to find out about Gromit! How do you know Gromit?' I asked the teacher.

She ignored me and carried on chatting to Sooz. 'He's a handsome fellow,' she smiled at me and scratched me behind my ear. But before I could ask any more questions she moved to the

next pet.

'My mother always said I was a good looking boy,' I woofed loud enough for the other pups to hear. I wondered again about Gromit. Lola wouldn't tell me about him. I'd asked her several times and all she ever did was grunt and stalk off shaking her head. Somehow, I needed to find out about Gromit, especially if I was to... fill his shoes.

Finally the class started and I found it hard to concentrate on the lesson. Sitting and dropping seemed so boring, when so many fun loving pups wanted to play with me. And whenever I was pulled out in front of the class to do my new trick, I'd try and talk to one of



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them. It would have been easier with Pete, but Sooz had control of the lead and she wasn't standing for any of my nonsense. The saviour of my predicament was the tasty treats Sooz kept offering every time I did as I was told. Whether it was luck or not, by the end of the first lesson, I was one of the star pupils.

I didn't let on to anyone that pet Sooz had already started my education, so when the teacher praised our efforts, Sooz grinned and I held my head high. I even blinked my long lashes at the teacher. It seemed to work quite well on all the pets.

'What beautiful brown eyes you have,' said the pet who's pup was a black Labrador.

And then the teacher came back and patted me on the head and offered me a beef titbit for doing nothing. 'You know Sooz, he's eyes are almost as beautiful as Gromit's.'

I nearly bit her when she said that. 'Nearly. No way. I have very beautiful eyes. You can ask my mother, she will tell you.'

'Everyone can let their puppies off the lead for five minutes of play time before we call it a night,' announced the teacher ignoring my comments.

I forgot about Gromit, as I reacquainted myself with the smells of the other pups. I was becoming familiar with the strong odour of the Labradoodle, when Pete scooped me back into his arms and carried me to the car.

'Will I see you again?' I woofed to the Shepherd.

'Yes, I'm sure you will,' she replied.

'See you next time, Paddington,' said a couple of the other pups as they were loaded into their cars with their pets. 'It was nice to meet you.'

'It was nice to meet you as well,' I yapped loudly.

'See you, Paddington,'

'See you next time,' I barked loudly.

I suddenly felt all warm and fuzzy and I couldn't wait to get home to tell Lola about my night. She would be green with envy when she heard about all the treats and the fun we'd had.

She stood waiting at the other side of the front door, with only her black nose visible through the slit in the door that was the letter box. When Pete unlocked it she greeted our arrival in her normal style, with a smile for Pete and Sooz and a look of scorn for me.

'Lola, you won't believe what I've been doing?'

'Tell someone who cares.'

'There were lots of puppies,' I woofed ignoring her. 'I was given treats for being clever.'

'Don't make me bite you. You clever – please.'

'Yes, I'm clever. The teacher said, I was as clever as Gromit,' the lie came easily to my lips.

'Arr,' I screamed as her teeth sank into my ear.

'Don't ever lie to me Paddington or you will live to regret it.'

'I'm sorry Lola. She didn't say it quite like that.' I whimpered.

What could I say to make amends? 'Lola,'

'What?'

She didn't look around at me as I followed her into the kitchen. 'Will you tell me about Gromit?'

'Yes, Paddington, one day I will tell you.'

'Oh, thank you Lola.' What a night it had been.

'Paddington sit,' Sooz commanded with my bowl in her hands.

I sat and she placed my bowl in front of me.

'Wait,' commanded Sooz.



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I couldn't stop the drool dripping down my front, as I watched her face intently for the signal, and when she gave it, I dived into my dinner, wolfing it down in a few mouthfuls.

Licking my lips, I sat a short distance from Lola and watched as she picked over her food. She was a lady after all and ladies didn't gallop down their food, well, that's what she'd told me. And if I waited long enough she'd leave me a few morsels of her dinner.

I sat watching Lola and thinking of my great night and all my new friends and what Lola had said about telling me about Gromit. This could be the turning point in our relationship.

Perhaps, at last, my relationship with Lola was about to change for the better.

