

## Paddington's Story – Part 6

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If the booming bark of a very large black Labrador wasn't enough to scare me, then the shaking battering thump of its body against the kitchen door should have. I was in Marree with my pets and they'd taken me to stay at a house, where said dog, wanted blood, my blood.

It all started when we arrived.

'Hi Judy, how lovely to see you,' Pet Sooz kissed and hugged the lady called Judy before passing onto a man called Campbell.

I was in her arms during this greeting of bodies and found myself crushed against Judy and then Campbell, as they came together in the human ritual of hugging and kissing. It all seemed extremely odd to me and when they'd finished with each other, I became the focus of their attention. It was good to see Judy and Campbell were trained, because they knew where to tickle and where not to. I instantly felt safe in their hands.

Sooz carried me into the house on Judy's instruction. I wanted to walk, there was a strong smell of dog on Judy and Campbell and I wasn't going to find out about it in Sooz's arms. I tried to leap to the ground, but Sooz hung on to me with fingers of steel, and her voice raised a level in a threatening tone.

'But Sooz, I need to sniff the ground.'

'No, Paddington.'

It was no good arguing, she wore that look of *'don't cross me – or else!'*

My nose twitched as I sniffed the air, while pretending not to care as she walked into the kitchen. Above the smell of food, I detected the same dog smell and the odour was stronger here. Whoever the dog was that lived here, it smelt of authority and power.

Judy must have read my mind, because she started telling Sooz about someone called Power. It seemed Judy had concerns Power wouldn't like me. Whoever Power was, I had no doubt he would not only like me but love me. I hadn't met anyone yet that didn't.

I forgot I wasn't speaking to Sooz for not letting me walk. 'Don't worry Sooz,' I yapped in her face and sliced my tongue across her chin. 'Everyone loves me.'

She looked at me with a blank expression.

Sometimes I worried about Sooz. She was missing the conversation. If only she'd listen to me, then she would know it would be fine. Pet Pete, had the same problem with Sooz. I'd heard him say she never listened to him. Sooz obviously had a problem listening.

The kitchen door shook and a bark boomed from behind it. Everyone jumped to attention. I noticed Sooz lose her smile and wrinkle her brow and Pete came over to assure her all was well. But he too looked pale and worried as he patted my head.

Judy disappeared through the shaking door and it sounded as though she was fighting with an unmanageable beast.

Bang, thwack, thump – 'Power No.' shouted Judy.

I pressed myself into Sooz's arms and listened to the onslaught.

Thwack, clunk, whack, the door rattled and groaned and then Judy appeared again through it, ruffled, dishevelled and breathless. She slammed the door quickly behind her. The door shook again as the beast on the other side laid siege to it.

'Darling, let him calm down and we'll try later.' I liked Campbell's deep voice and it was easy to see why everyone looked up to him. I worked out quickly he was a man of wisdom.

'Yes darling, I think you're right,' Judy was speaking. 'He's so strong. Poor little Paddington won't stand a chance if he doesn't like him.'

I assumed they were talking about Power. Why wouldn't he like me?

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As I watched Judy straightening her clothes, I started to wonder about the beast on the other side of the door. What was it? It obviously wasn't a dog, or if it was, none I'd ever encountered. I'd heard Labrador mentioned and remembered my mates at puppy school. It must be a different kind of Labrador – I couldn't imagine any of them turning out like Power.

The lights lit the house as darkness descended and I'd prowled the front of the kitchen door, sniffing under it, until exhaustion threatened. It was way past my bedtime and I was happy when Sooz announced she was going to bed. I followed her into the room we'd been given to sleep in. She'd spread a swag on the floor and crept into it and with little choice, I curled up next to her. I was still learning the names of all the things humans needed to go bush with. The swag was a strange one and I couldn't understand why she'd choose to put it in the house and sleep on the floor, when a perfectly good bed stood nearby. I decided, understanding my pets, might take a few years.

I forgot about the bed and drifted into a dream filled sleep where beasts took over the world.

I woke early. I needed to pee. I looked at Sooz, she was fast asleep. I prodded her in the face with my nose. 'Sooz, I need to pee.'

No response.

'Sooz,' I woofed quietly while slicing my tongue over her face. 'I need to pee.'

She swiped the back of her hand across her face and rolled over. I climbed over her and nudged her in the face with my paw. 'Sooz, please wake up, I need to pee.'

'Paddington, do you need wee wee's?'

'Yes, Sooz. I need to pee – now!'

'Okay, okay.'

I was crossing my legs by the time she'd pulled on her shoes and there was no time for her to change out of her funny pyjamas. I cringed and hoped nobody would see us.

Before exiting the bedroom door, she poked her head out and seemed to be looking for something. I wasn't sure what – finally she tiptoed along the corridor towards the kitchen.

'Its okay, Paddington, I think Power's sleeping with Judy and Campbell.'

Oh, so that was it. She was worried about meeting Power. I wasn't worried about the beast. 'Don't worry Sooz, I'll protect you,' I woofed softly, so as not to wake anyone.

The need to pee became paramount. If I didn't get outside soon, I would disgrace the family name. 'Sooz hurry.'

Sooz pulled open the back door and I followed her into the garden. The dry desert smell of the morning hit my nose. I found a place amongst the pebble garden and ducked down to pee. Oh, it felt wonderful. I was so engrossed sniffing at the unfamiliar smell under the rock by my nose, that I didn't see the beast coming.

'Paddington, come.'

I heard the urgency in Sooz tone and looked up at her. A strong smell of dog swamped my sinuses and as I swung my head away from Sooz, towards the smell, my eyes locked with the beast.

He towered over me blocking out the morning sunlight. His muscles rippled under a coat as black as night and his lips were slightly apart revealing long white teeth.

'Are – you – Power?' I asked in a small quavering voice.

He glared down his black nose at me and his hair rose along his spine. 'Who wants to know?'

'Paddington, from Balhannah, somewhere south of here.'

'Paddington, from Balhannah,' his masculine voice sent a shiver down my spine. 'Are you trying to be smart?'

'No. It's just I'm travelling with my pets.'

Power looked over my head at Sooz. 'Is she one of them?'

'Yes. That's my pet Sooz.'

'What's her problem?'

'I think, she thinks, you're going to eat me.'

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His body twitched then shook as the laughter erupted from him. 'Yes, I guess I could. But I don't eat pups,' his lips wobbled as he spoke. 'Come on Paddington from Balhannah, it's time for breakfast.'

Power walked past me and Sooz towards the kitchen door. I smiled at Sooz as I walked past, to reassure her. I waited behind Power at the closed door and Sooz pulled it open for us and we all stepped in.

'Good morning. Did everyone sleep well?' Judy stood at the sink filling the kettle.

'Yes, thanks Judy,' replied Sooz.

'Looks like the boys are getting on okay.' Judy gestured towards us.

'Yes, I think so,' replied Sooz.

I busied myself sniffing Power's paws. They were huge and I placed my paw next to his to compare. I barely reached the top of his leg. I felt skinny and feeble next to his massive frame and decided I needed to muscle up if I wanted to look like Power.

'Sooz, feed Paddington over there,' Judy gestured where my bowl had to go. 'I'm not sure how Power will like Paddington being near his food.'

'Sure. Come Paddington.'

'But Sooz, I'm getting to know Power.'

'Paddington, come.'

'Can I come in a minute?'

'Paddington – sorry Judy, he sometimes ignores me.'

'He's still a pup and they can be frustrating. To make it easier you feed Paddington in here and I'll take Power's food outside for him.'

Sooz picked me up. 'I was coming,' I protested squirming in her arms.

'Behave yourself, or no breakfast.'

No breakfast, I nearly choked at those words. 'I'll be good, Sooz,' I said licking her hand.

She placed me in front of my bowl. Biscuits – yum. My stomach rumbled and for a few seconds, while I gobbled down my breakfast, I forgot about Power.

While the pets and grand pets sat down to enjoy their breakfast at the kitchen table I got to know him.

'Do you want to play?' I asked.

'You attack me and I'll pretend to fight you off.'

'Okay.' I wasn't sure about this game, but I'd give it a go.

I jumped at him and he dropped to the ground rolling onto his back. I climbed onto his chest and he chewed my neck, while holding me with his front paws. I attacked him, biting his neck and ears. His big mouth and teeth looked more ferocious than my puppy teeth, but I managed to hold my own. As we rolled around under the breakfast table, colliding with chairs and table legs and hitting into human legs and stumbling over feet, I heard a few snippets of their passing conversation.

'For a big dog, he's being gentle with Paddington,' said Sooz.

'Yes. Last night I was a little worried,' said Judy.

'See, I told you they needed a little time to get to know each other,' said Campbell.

'Paddington's found a true friend,' said Pete.

'I think they need to move from under the table though,' said Judy.

'We'll go out for a drive. I know a waterhole they can swim in.'

'Do you like swimming?' I asked Power.

'Don't speak with your mouth full, say again.'

'Sorry Power, I had your neck in my mouth.'

'That was my point, Paddington.'

'Oh, right.'

'Yes, to your answer. What Labrador doesn't?'

'I don't know. I love the water. I like to paddle in my water bowl.'

'Huff, huff, huff,' Power's lips went all loose and floppy when he laughed.

I attacked his neck again. He rolled me onto my back and placed a paw on my chest.

'Paddington, it's time for you to take a rest.'

'But, I'm not tired.'

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'No good exhausting yourself before we go out. We can play later.'

'Oh.' I didn't want to rest. 'Will you stay with me Power?'

'Sure.' He took his paw off me and we lay side by side watching the pets clear up the kitchen.

I must have drifted off and woke to frantic activity.

'Okay everyone let's go.' Judy clapped her hands. 'Power, let put your lead on.'

Power jumped up and went to his pet Judy.

I watched from my comfortable position under the table.

'Paddington, don't you want to come for a walk?' asked Sooz.

'Sooz, I hate the lead,' I whinged. 'Can I come without it?'

'Paddington, stop that whinging,' Power's deep voice stopped me dead. 'Haven't you learned yet, the lead means going outside for a walk? What is it with you youngsters? It's an easy lesson to learn.'

'I hate it though. It hurts when I pull against it.'

'Stop fighting it then. Use your head pup. You do have brains in the little head of yours?'

'Yes.' I replied indignantly.

'Follow me and I'll show you.'

I jumped to my feet and followed Power. Judy had clipped the lead to his collar and he walked relaxed by her side. As they walked to the front door, I trailed after him nipping his tail as he waved it in front of my nose.

'Paddington, come.'

Sooz waited with my lead. 'Okay, Sooz,' I let her clip it onto my collar and we all left the house.

'Paddington.'

'Yes, Power.'

'You're going to learn about bush life while you're visiting me.'

'Yes, Power.'

I ended up having a brilliant day. I saw a dingo and a lizard and lots of birds. I trailed after Power whenever I could and even got my feet wet in a waterhole, while he swam in the depths.

Pet Judy told my pets about poisonous bait that lay around on the land, to be gobbled up by unsuspecting animals. Sooz wouldn't let me out of her sight after hearing that piece of news and I was kept on the lead.

By the day's end everyone was exhausted. Darkness had arrived by the time we arrived back at Judy and Campbell's house. After dinner, the pets and grand pets sat chatting in the sitting room. I rolled around with Power and he chewed my fur and mouthed my feet, pretending to bite and maul



me. He never hurt me once. In fact I think I might have dug my sharp baby teeth into him a few times and caused him pain, because he yelped.

Exhausted, I retired to bed that night with Sooz and Pete and slept soundly. I remember Power popping in during the night to say hello. He said he was checking my pets were okay. I mumbled something to him and he cuffed me with his paw and licked my ear. I fell back into a deep sleep of happy dreams.

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I couldn't believe it when a few days later my pets and grand pets started packing up the vehicles.

'Where are we going?' I asked Sooz as she picked up my bowl and lead and packed them into a bag.

'You're leaving,' said Power.

'But, b – u – t,' I stammered. 'I don't want to go. I can't leave you.'

'Paddington, you're a big boy now. It's time for you to travel on with your pets. Now let's see if you remember the things I taught you about the bush. What don't you pick up?'

'Snakes,' I woofed.

'And?'

'Lizards.'

'What don't you eat?'

'Anything, that isn't in my bowl.'

'Good, Paddington. You were listening to me.'

'Power, I'm going to miss you.' I licked his nose.

'I'll miss you too, Paddington,' he grabbed my ear and I thought of Lola, but only fleetingly. 'Who knows we might meet again one day.'

'I hope so.'

Sooz picked me up and carried me to the car and buckled me into my seatbelt. After the pets farewelled each other in their ritual hugging and kissing and as the car slowly moved away from the house, I pressed my nose against the window and shed a tear at the sight of Power, standing tall, wagging his long black tail with his pets at his side as he howled his goodbye.

'See you again, Paddington. Be a good pup.'

'Ooooooh Ooooooh, I love you Power.' I howled as loudly as my voice would allow.

The car drove slowly away from my new friend, until I could no longer see him and I vowed I would never forget my visit to Marree and the fun I had with Power.

