

Waiting
By
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She awoke in the long grass with a clear sky overhead, a warm summer breeze ruffling her fur. The warm touch of a small tongue on her nose brought her closer to awareness. A flash of white fur in the corner of her eye and a nip on her foot drew her to wary consciousness.

Paisley lifted her head and gazed around. She took in the cool meadow with its beautiful blue flowers. The forest in the distance looked inviting.

She turned her head to look at the source of the irritation nipping at her side. It was a small white puppy with sleek fur and just a few colored spots on its body. This was quickly replaced by the imposing bulk of a sable and white, long-furred rough Collie, blocking the puppy as if to say *Give her time, she's only just arrived.*

Paisley knew this dog. As her head cleared, she realized it was Echo, the matriarch of the pack before Paisley. Smiling down on her, Echo urged Paisley to motion with a nudge of her long nose.

Struggling to her feet, Paisley found that rising wasn't a struggle after all. The aches and pains, the stiffness of joint, the muscles that could barely

hold her bulk were all gone. Instead, in their place, were the tight sinews of youth, strong and able, well toned and ready for action. Instead of a struggle, her rise became a surge of joy as she leapt to her feet with a triumphant bark. She was young!

She stood looking at the small pack of dogs around her, searching her memory. Echo she knew from long association. But what was she doing here? The small white puppy looked strangely familiar. It had a familiar smell as well. After a moment she realized it was her long lost pup, Penne that had *moved on* at the young age of six months. Here she was whole and strong as she had never been before.

The two remaining dogs were unknown to her but waited with friendly grins and madly waving tails. They both had similar coloring to Echo but one was a male, stolid and firm. The other was female, bouncy and energetic. These must be Lance and Jenny, whom Echo had mentioned often, in that way dogs have.

With a gleeful yelp, Paisley charged across the meadow, thrilling to her new found muscles and vigor. She bounded through the flowers in delight. She hadn't felt this good in years.

After a moment's hesitation, the others followed. Thus began a strange game of tag. The dogs would tear first one way across the grass,

chasing each other. Then a different dog would change the direction of the race and become “it” with the others following.

As the game wound down, Paisley reflected upon what had brought her to this joyful place and in such wonderful health. She had been in a different place at a different time before. But what is that to a dog, who usually lives only for the present?

She remembered the time before as one of ups and downs. Her earliest memories seemed much too distant. She recalled her dam vaguely as a warm and comforting presence. Then she was swept up into the life of her first Mistress with training and competing and happiness and love.

But then her Mistress had *moved on* at much too young an age and Paisley’s littermates had been sent to new homes. Some went to good homes and became family pets. Some went to show homes and competed for more glory. Paisley ended up with a nice older couple that was too old and too ill to care for her properly. She spent several years in small cage with barely enough room to move and barely enough food to live, seeing daylight only rarely.

Then she found herself freed by the Mistress, who patiently nursed her back to health. But Paisley wasn’t the same after her ordeal in the cage. She

was no longer the youthful, energetic pup she had been. She was now a somber, loyal and loving friend. No longer the Champion show dog of her youth, she resigned herself to the place of family friend, especially of the Mistress.

As the years passed and her health deteriorated, Paisley remained loyal to her one true Mistress. Her bones ached and her muscles hurt with just the effort of movement. On that last day before coming to this wonderful place, she had made a supreme effort. Her Mistress was gone but Paisley was determined to see her just one last time. If she could only hold on long enough for that one last glimpse, then she could rest easy, happy in the knowledge that her Mistress loved her.

So she slowly made her way to the Mistress' favorite chair and placed herself where she could not be missed. Here she waited her Mistress' arrival with shortening breath and weaker vision, unable to move.

Finally the time arrived, her Mistress returned home. "You poor thing," she heard, "it's ok, I'm here." At those words, Paisley knew she could *move on*, her Mistress loved her and always would.

Then she awoke in this strange and beautiful place, full of joy and full of spirit. She spent her days playing with the pack and her nights at The

Place. This was where the humans lived, those that liked dogs. They took care of the dogs; fed them and groomed them and sometimes played with them. These were nice people, and yet... And yet, something was missing.

Those times Paisley felt something was missing, Echo was always there for her. *Not yet*, she seemed to say, *be patient*. And Paisley would go on, enjoying her days and her nights.

Sometimes it rained, and that was alright, for it made the grass grow and provided water for them to drink. And sometimes it snowed, and that was alright as well, for Collies are designed for the snow. Most of the time, it was mild, with green grass all around and a forest to explore. Things moved in the meadow and must be chased.

And there were always humans to keep them company, for dogs have been with humans as long as anyone remembers. There were also cats, although not so many as there were dogs. This may have been because not all cats liked dogs. But this was alright like everything else. This was just “how things are”.

Still... There was something missing. *It's not time*, Echo would tell her, *just wait*.

Shortly after her arrival, a friend arrived, waking in the meadow as Paisley had. The pack went down to greet him. This was Carson, a tri-colored Collie, smooth coated and short of fu as both she and Penne. He was mostly black with a white ruff and brown spots on his face.

He was groggy, just like everyone, when he arrived. One minute the meadow was empty, the next, there was a magnificent black dog lying in the flowers. As he stretched his newly young muscles, everyone stayed back. Everyone except Penne, who was eager for a new friend. She darted in with her characteristic eagerness, first licking him on the nose, then nipping at his feet. As with Paisley, Echo had to interject her body, to save Carson from being overwhelmed in his first few moments.

Soon Carson was on his feet, grinning at all his old pals, ready to play. His grin was lopsided and his fur was scruffy but that had ever been his way. Off they went on a merry game of “tag” just as on Paisley’s first day. This day was in every way as good as that other.

Still Paisley felt a longing, still something was missing.... *Not today*, Echo would tell her, *Not for a while*.

Paisley learned more of this strange and wondrous place in which she now resided. Echo showed her everything she needed to know. She learned

how to view her old life as if from a great distance. She could look on the ones she loved and see how they were doing. However, she was warned not to do this too often or the vision would fade and so would her memory.

So she did this only when she was feeling slightly depressed and felt the anticipation of whatever was *next* getting to be too much. At these times she would glance at the Mistress and be reassured that all was well in her old family.

Every once in a while Paisley would find herself unexpectedly viewing an odd scene with herself in it. Sometimes these scenes were happy and sometimes sad. Once the unexpected scene was even scary. Echo patiently explained these as the dreams of her loved ones, remembering her in their sleep. Over time these dreams decreased in frequency and eventually faded away altogether.

Every once in a while Paisley would look around, as if someone had called her name, knowing someone was expecting her to come but not finding anyone looking for her. She felt sure these times were when one of her loved ones was thinking wistfully about her.

Through all of this Paisley waited expectantly with Echo's reassuring, patient demeanor always nearby. *Don't worry* she seemed to exude, *it will all happen in time.*

The days and the years passed in this manner, playing in the meadow and the woods. Romping with friends, providing strength and comfort to humans, who also seemed to be waiting for something.

Every day new dogs would arrive and would be greeted by one pack or another. Once in a while her pack was called upon to greet an arrival. The first few were dogs she had known in her time, the time *before*. Eventually there were dogs she hadn't known but they were welcomed into the pack as all the others had been.

Together they played and they waited for what was *next*, for something was definitely *next*. They could all feel it, the day approached slowly and inexorably.

Finally, the day was upon them, it was here. Whatever they had been waiting for all this time was finally going to happen today. All were restless as they moved through their day. None could sit still and no game seemed able to continue for more than a few minutes. Even chasing the ever elusive moving objects in the meadow lost its glamour for just this one day.

As night approached, they were reluctant to sleeping, knowing it could happen at any time. But finally, one by one, they all drifted off, to restless sleep and hindered slumber.

In the middle of the night, just before the new day, Paisley was wakened by a soft whispering in her ear. "I'm here old girl. I'm finally here." There was the familiar scratching in just the right spot. There was the comforting smell. "I knew I would find you here."

Paisley knew that whatever happened, whatever was *next*, everything would be fine. The Mistress had arrived.