



Puppy Tails

MIALIE T. SZYMANSKI

*As the moon goes to bed,
the sun comes up
And here we meet a sleepy pup,
Who was walking through
G-ville one bright sunny day,
Then saw The Villager
and decided to stay.*

Doodle Dog scampered down the sidewalk as the cool air flew over his nose. It was still a bit chilly outside, but finally the weather had let up enough that the little floppy-eared puppy ventured out from the office. Sure, he'd had plenty of fun inside for a while, but he couldn't wait to see all that he had missed out in the world, too!

As Doodle Dog made his way past the playground and all its bright toys, then past his favorite meadow and all its grassy hills, he couldn't wait for the day very, very soon when the sun would come out and chase the very last bits of the chilly winter away. Doodle Dog thought of how kind Spring would warm the brightly colored toys in the playground and bring brightly colored flowers to decorate the green grass of the meadow. But for now, Doodle Dog's paws plodded past several little mounds of melty white snow, the last remnants of the winter's mean storm. Doodle Dog didn't think winter was really mean – all the seasons have their jobs to do – but the thought of how icy cold the wind had been not that long ago made Doodle Dog shiver all the way from his floppy ears to his twitchy tail just remembering it! BRRRR!

The shops in town had started to take down their winter window displays, hoping to encourage the warm weather to come as fast as

it possibly could. Doodle Dog trotted past giant wooden eggs brightly painted and settled into green shredded plastic so that they resembled the flowers that would be in the meadow. Then he slowed his pace and began to wander past the next few shops: one window was full of freshly baked doggie treats wrapped in bright plastic tied with green leashes and displayed in green water dishes. They sort of looked like the flowers in the meadow too! The next window had bunches and bunches of real flowers tied together with pretty satin ribbon. THEY didn't look like anything Doodle Dog had seen in the meadow, but the wildflowers and forest moss he loved were much better for rolling in than the beautiful buds he saw through the glass. The little floppy-eared puppy must have missed Spring more than he thought – everywhere reminded him of what the world would soon look like!

Before he knew it, Doodle Dog was at the end of the row of shops and he found himself coming to a stop in front of what he thought was certainly the best display of the day. In the window of this particular shop were rows and rows of books with their covers facing out to the street. Friendly-looking dogs peered out from the covers of these books, barking silently to passersby, beckoning them into the store for a quick look or to stay awhile. On one book there was a painting of a Collie; on another a photograph of a protective German Shepherd sitting at the knee of a man in a blue uniform; and off to the side was a book with a little cartoon puppy looking quite ready to play. Around the display were

magazines with fat, furry puppies being held by their happy humans, and a well-behaved dog balancing a treat on his nose. And front and center, in the place of honor, was a book with a Golden Retriever looking quite proud. The Golden Retriever wore a red vest that made him look very important as he sat in the middle of a group of smiling children – Doodle Dog's favorite kind of humans! Doodle Dog almost thought he could hear them all talking!

As the little floppy-eared puppy sat in front of the shop with all the books, he listened very carefully. He COULD hear them all talking! The front door was open, so Doodle Dog scampered up a few stone steps and quietly slipped into the book shop. There, at the back of the shop, was the Golden Retriever from the center book, red vest and all! A lady was standing next to him and chatting with a young boy about all the interesting places the dog has been as she signed a copy of the book. The little boy smiled, gave the dog a hug, and carried his new book out the door and down the street.

When the little boy was gone, Doodle Dog softly padded over to look at the books up close. The lady smiled at Doodle Dog and began to sign another copy of the book. Then she gently put it on the floor so the dog in the red vest could put a paw print next to her autograph. For me?! Doodle Dog thought. The lady slipped the book into a special bag with a handle so Doodle Dog could carry it in his mouth without biting the book. The little floppy-eared puppy smiled, gave the dog a friendly nudge with his nose, and carried his new book out the door and down the street. He knew just where this very special book was going to go – on his bookshelf with the dust bunnies!



Lenten Foods

IVA WALKER

Here we are getting Lenten again. Hope you got all shriven by the festivities on Mardi Gras or Shrove Tuesday or whatever. It's a forty-day slog to get to Easter... although it depends on whether or not you count Sundays as part of the fasting, deprivation and penitence period how long you take to get to the far end of all this. You could side with the Archdiocese of Milan and go with the Ambrosian Rite (Yes, that would be St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, 4th Century) which gives you six weeks before Easter or go orthodox and observe Great Lent, which sounds like more penance than I can really carry off effectively.

Anyway, the whole point of the celebrations before Ash Wednesday is to use up and get rid of all the tasty, tempting foods in the house so that you can get SERIOUS about fasting--at whatever level and giving up whatever indulgence you've chosen--until Easter. Of course, it helps to remember that when a lot of these observances came about things like sugar and meat...heck, just EATING in some cases...were sort of luxuries for quite a number of people. Eggs and dairy foods didn't get a Lenten pass until quite a bit later. Doesn't matter if you're scarfing down those jelly-filled doughnuts (Paszci?) or Shrove Tuesday pancakes or some other ethnic treat, the good stuff is supposed to be gone when you trot off to get the black mark on your forehead on Ash Wednesday. In New Orleans, Rio, Venice, really big party venues all over the world, the whole party thing just sort of expanded (Well, if you're going to party on Tuesday--Fat or not--you might as well take Monday off; and if you're making merry on Monday, what the heck, Sunday is a day to rest up for that, and if you don't have to work on Sunday, why not whoop it up on Saturday night and...you see how it goes?) to cover

quite a lot of fun-n-games for quite a while and for quite a few people.

Gosh, even the Methodists can get into the swing of things. This year a hardy band of pierogi-makers (spell them however you like) got together to make the little noodle pockets (potato, cheese, sauerkraut, etc) for a church dinner (Virtually any ethnic cuisine you can name has some variation of this, starting with cheese ravioli) on Ash Wednesday (It's just a little flex in the calendar). Of course, there was a certain amount of backsliding in evidence when somebody scheduled a chili cook-off at church on the following Sunday evening.

Actually, you could count Pretzels for God as originally Lenten food, which started out as real basic bread dough--wheat flour yeast, water--twisted into a loose knot resembling children's arms in prayer and called *bracellae* (little arms) then later the Germans called them *bretzells*; they didn't become a snack food until the 1900's.

Speaking of which, I may show up there with a vat of Anglo-Saxon chili. We did not do savory-type spices in my family. Chili powder? Perish the thought! I'm pretty sure that garlic never graced our table either. Chili was ground beef, onion--the more, the better--celery, beans--red kidney beans, I doubt that the A&P had black beans on its shelves in those days--and home-canned tomatoes, we always had home-canned tomatoes. That was it. No chili powder, no Tabasco, no jalapenos--Celtic and Anglo-Saxon to the last bite. I remember once thinking that I would crank it up by putting in some paprika--hey, it's a spice, it's red, why not? Unfortunately, I grabbed the wrong container on the spice shelf and I'm here to tell you that cinnamon-flavored chili is not likely to be a big hit on anyone's table; Chi-Chi's has not called for my recipe. We certainly did not strive to replicate the cuisine in Hades as regards hotness; we liked to taste our food.

New Mexico State University School of Agriculture has just come out with a brand-new rating for what it calls the hottest pepper in the world; this is the Trinidad Moruga Scorpion (Sounds like a sweetheart already, doesn't it?). It's about the size of a golf ball and averages about 1.2 million units on the Scoville heat scale, although individual flamethrowers may hit 2 million units. The Chile Institute (This is the preferred, more Hispanic spelling) has recognized other varieties listed in Guinness World Records, 2007--Chocolate 7, Bhut Jolokia, 7-pot--but says that this new screamer has got them beat for sheer volume of capsaicinoids (the hot stuff). They are so hot that the folks peeling and seeding them can feel the heat through multiple layers of latex gloves. Yum! Endorphins on a rampage!

None of those in my cooker. Think penitence!

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