



FADING PAWPRINTS

by Connor Schachow

Our dog Bella has been in our family for just over fourteen years, and her time with us is nearly over. My memories of her being her playful and energetic self replace with the sound of popping joints and whines of pain. Time has shown no remorse towards the selfless and loving puppy I have always loved.

Time first showed its ugly, twelve-houred face to me when I took her on a walk. Just normal routine at first, walking a few blocks down the street and back. We always walked this short distance; it was always her favorite thing to do. We started our return to the house, with each block she panted harder and walked slower. Finally, we approached the staircase that led us our front door.

“Come on you old fart, you can do it.” I skipped up the steps in attempt to bring excitement back to the withered husk of the puppy I once knew.

God I wish that were true.

Her old bones ached at the stab of each step. Her leathery skin burned with an unitchable scratch. She walked in a clumsy manner; she waddled with straights legs in order to not reignite the pain that burnt her joints like fire. She winced in agony as she reached the third step, tears forming in her eyes as the leash started to resist in my hands. I looked back to see her unable to move up another step. Although just a dog, her eyes spoke to me in the most humane manner: “I’m sorry, I can’t.”

Shame filled her heart as she slowly eased her way to a sitting position, finally accepting defeat. I walked down the steps and picked her up. She winced in pain but her body relaxed as she realized she was safe in the comfort of my arms. I set her down at the top of the stairs carefully, as if she were made of glass, and we walked inside.

“Come on bub, let’s go inside”

This was one of many circumstances that displayed her age. The hourglass was becoming more and more bottom heavy by the day; only a few grains of sand remain at the top. Time ticked seconds. Into hours. Into days, and then weeks. Every night she would spend hours rolling on her dog bed until she could finally comfort her bones. Torture to simply exist, and yet not once did she put her pain before loving my family.

Her only motive to stay alive was us. No matter what demons we fought, we could always come home to our pawed angel. Bella wouldn’t judge if you cried in front of her, she wouldn’t ignore you, and she sure as hell would not allow you go to bed without some kisses.

Despite her endeavors, I could not bear to see her like this. The emotional pain of watching my best friend hurt like this was too much. It got to the point where I asked my mom to kill her. My best friend.

"We can't put her down Connor. I want her to die comfortably with our family." Rage filled my heart as she said those words.

Comfortably? COMFORTABLY?!? She can barely use the bathroom anymore without yelping in pain. What life like that is even worth living?

Hatred covered my thoughts like a storm cloud. I couldn't even look at my mom in that moment. All I could do was go lay by the dog, who was laying in her dog bed. Her tail wagged as I approached her.

"How are you doing sweet pea?" I asked her.

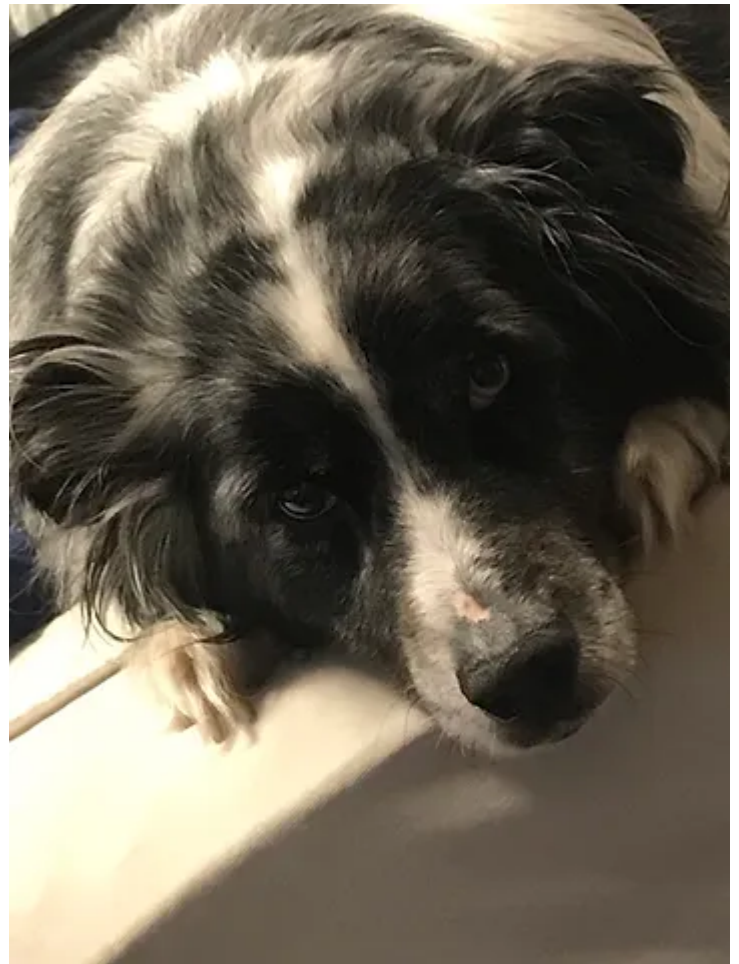
"Good now that you are here with me," her tail said as it moved just as energetically as it did when she was a puppy. I lay with her for hours, talking to her about girl problems, school, my future, and my mental health.

My future? The future?

I realized then and there that she could be gone in moments. Like a match in a wind storm, she could simply go out. My best friend wouldn't be there for me when I got graduated, when I got married, or when I had kids of my own. Tears rolled down my face as I pet her floppy ears. She glanced at me with her tired eyes.

"It's okay Connor, I'll always be here for you. Even when I am long gone." That's what I hoped she would say, but she didn't. She simply gave me a kiss and rested her head on my hand. I knew she didn't say it, but she would have if she could.

In that moment I realized that it wouldn't be fair for her to have to live through my life. She helped me through so much already; she has done her part. Bella helped me through so much. Although her time here is coming to an end, I can say one thing: Bella was a good dog.



Sweet Bella