



March 5, 2018

My dog takes me places.

Places I'd forgotten I wanted to see.

Like my backyard at 4 a.m., scooping up the poop. But, if she hadn't taken me there, I'd have missed the shooting stars streaking away from the rising sun.

I'd have missed moths and lightning bugs if she hadn't told me to put my laptop down, if she hadn't taken me out into the nighttime. On the couch I'd have missed the warm summer rain, the sunshine flickering in the forest when the fingers of the

wind rattle the dry leaves. If she hadn't insisted I put down my book, I would not have heard the solemn song of the wind in the woods after a snow.

The world is clanky and demanding. My dog Oona is a force who won't be pushed. But when she's good and ready, the places we do go. Long ago places that are new again because she is new. She sees with the laser eyes of a sighthound and the heart of a young child.

Somehow I've turned old. Oona will be one of my last wolfhounds. I want to bond with her, to understand her nimble, wild mind. I shift gears, roll with it, sync with her rhythms. And Oona takes me to a place called Now. Her time is slow time, dust motes and winding blades of grass, ants crossing the vast plain of our patio. Our focus is like a dandelion seed in the thick summer air, floating, pirouetting, swooping. And the wheel of life spins 'round from wonder to wonder.

Time spent in Oonalandia. Magic time. Maps are useless here. The hills and plains and honeysuckle brambles are never the same from day to day. Destinations are not nearly as important as treasures we collect along the way. I seem to know this place, I know it from another time. It's how life would have been, should've been. But I grew up and went away. Oona is patient and relentless. She pulls me back to where I began.

A dog is good for you, they say. You get more exercise. You get out of your rut and meet like-thinking people. Your blood pressure improves and sunshine and fresh air boost you. But they forgot to mention what a dog does for your soul. They're healers, whether they realize it or not. In many cultures, dogs are

believed to be guardians of the crossroads and spirit guides. But the ticket to the trip is to forget your ideas *about* dogs and simply experience one. An Irish Wolfhound insists. They're gentle but they are not subtle. Oona is funny and Oona is wise. She takes me places. Places I now want to go. Because she goes there. She makes it all worthwhile...