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Posted 12:19pm

Euthanasia: A Moment of Grace and Heartache



I've been here before. I bet you have, too.

My dog Scout, only just 7, has entered into end stage renal failure. It won't be long now. No matter the daily chores, I find myself in that otherworldly, preoccupied state of heartache. My vet told me yesterday that I need to prepare to say good-bye.

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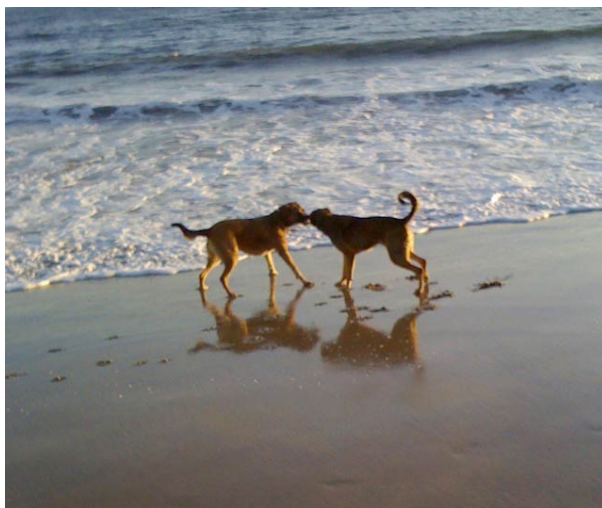
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Scout and her brother Teddy were born on the streets of the island of Turks and Caicos in the Caribbean. Their mother died the night they were born. Three siblings didn't make it to sunrise. These two lived, starving, for a week on the streets. I found them shortly thereafter and brought them home to Los Angeles. I remember holding Scout in my arms those early days. She was always the vulnerable, sensitive one. Teddy the naughty daredevil.

At only three months, she was diagnosed by my vet as having severe congenital kidney disease. He showed me the ultrasound. Her kidneys were extremely small and had swiss-cheese-like holes throughout. He said she wasn't going to make it.

We started her on special kidney food and a series of meds. Those first few months, it was if I was on egg shells, waiting for signs of failure. Yet the months flitted by. She romped on the beach, agile and fleet of foot as she soared off the sand bluffs and darted along the water's edge. Yes, she was always too thin. Always finicky about that awful-tasting kidney diet. But, knowing what a strain any other food is to her kidneys, I was fastidiously faithful in giving her nothing but the kidney food.



And so the years stretched out. Four, five, six. This August, Scout turned seven. By then, I guess I had figured we had beaten all the odds and the kidneys aging prematurely was just not going to happen.

Three weeks before Thanksgiving, she just wouldn't eat. Days would go by and I couldn't coax her to take down even a morsel. Her weight plummeted drastically. This week she started vomiting, even though the water she's drinking is the only thing in her system. She's been at the vet on a continuous IV for four days now. I visit her twice a day. The IV fluids have helped

get her appetite going again, to a degree. When I bring her home today, we'll start injecting her subcutaneously with fluids. And now we'll feed her anything she wants.

I've been told this is the end. There are no kidney transplants for dogs yet. I won't put her through painful dialysis, to unrewarding ends.

[3 captures](#)

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About this capture

suffering. One day we will reach the wisdom to have similar choices for our own species. Yet the impending decision grips me with fear and disbelief.

I've been through the euthanasia moment before. I sometimes thought I'd never recover from the agony of my chocolate lab Badger's last breath, Bonnie and I holding him tenderly in our arms. But our animals teach us. We love again.



The difference here is that Scout is only half way through her life. Her eyes are not going to lose their brightness. Her paws are not going to stop dancing. She is not going to stop wagging her tail when I cuddle her. She's young. It's just her kidneys that betray her.

It is clear that, come the time, I will do the right thing by my Scout. My baby. I will not let her suffer. We are told that we love our animals so much, we know when that moment is upon us. And we do the right thing. But how? How will I summon the courage, when she is still vibrant in all other ways? Tell me how.

My 11-year-old friend Oliver Opie handed me a small swatch of paper yesterday. I unfolded it to read a quote by Dr. Seuss:

"Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened."

When Scout comes home today, I'm going to try my damndest to heed Dr. Seuss's words. Teddy and I are going to revel in her sweet company.....no matter how few days may remain.

[3 captures](#)

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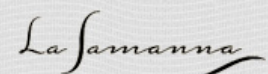
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