

R.I.P.

❤️ 🐾 BEAR OBAN ARISTOTLE 🐾 ❤️

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*Please, write, they said. Just, write, I heard. I have no story, I replied.*

And now, here I sit. Hands to keys. The pain of death; an unwelcome muse. Words inked and tears leeching paper; a bloodletting of grief. Pallbearers can carry these paragraphs while I let my words carry the weight that my heart cannot brace.

To my sweetest Bear. To those he loved and to those who loved him back. I invite you to take a walk with me. Once more, around the block.

Come, *let's go for a walk*, my new friend.

You are young and fresh with puppy breath and electric energy. I will hold you, under your belly with one hand, and carry you to the car. And you will ride with me to your forever home, nestled in soft blankets and t-shirts that smell like me. I will gently place you in a laundry basket, (that you will want no part of), in the back of my SUV. You will cry and whimper, but I will reassure you that we will be home, soon.

You'll inspect your new space, the new smells, strange sounds and unfamiliar textures; car horns, carpet floors, knocks on doors, suede couch, splintering balcony, street lights buzzing, slick-under-your-paws linoleum, fireplace clicking, chenille blankets, humming refrigerator, my bed.

You will see toys, and you will know that they are yours. You will see my shoes and my rare books and my remote controls, and you will think that they are yours, too—and I will learn to forgive you for this mistake, over and over again. I will stay up with you all night because I know that you are scared, and I will hold you in my lap, whispering, *I am right here, sweet boy, and I am never going to leave you.*

And you will know that you are home, at last.

Come, *let's go for a walk*, my Wingman.

You will become an explorer. You will find adventures on the beach, chasing sandpipers as they tease you towards the ocean, and you will learn that you hate getting wet. You will run through the mountainous woods of the Sequoias and the San Emigdios, embracing your inner dog-ness. Running free. But, never too far from where I stand, because showing dog-ness feels safer for you under the watchful eyes of me, your human. You will nudge your nose out of even the smallest cracks in the backseat window of my car, and you will shine an ineffable light of joy as your ears blow back against your head and we race, together, through the wind. I will take you

on a trip to wine country—just us two—where we will sleep on a farm, watch the sunset, and feel held by the stars etched in an ink-black sky. I will taste wine and I will smile and I will laugh as you run alongside grapevines and weave through oak barrels and stop strangers with your smile, collecting admirers one high-five at a time. You will love being loved—everywhere that you go—your tail a proud feathery plume for all to behold. It will create a breeze whenever it's wagging and happy.

Our explorations will include the delicacies of foreign, and often forbidden, foods. We will have dinner dates on the kitchen floor; salmon sushi sans wasabi, pizza plus extra crust, and ice cream socials. You will become a pioneer of insatiable hunger, forever pursuing uncharted and unattended countertops with full determination to your cause—no fallen crumb should be forgotten. Your stomach will present itself as iron-lined. Your ravenous constitution combined with your counter-surfing skills will introduce you to many exotic flavors such as: laundry detergent pods, candy canes, brownies, and whatever the trash can has on its menu. You will forage deep into not-securely-sealed bags for poppy seed muffins, chocolate chip cookies, and halloween candy. Despite your exposure to all of life's near-toxic tastes, your preference towards simple carbs will always prevail: an entire package of Lavash bread, unlimited rolls of pretzel bread, ginger bread, bread holding grilled cheese, sandwich bread, scones, donuts, tortilla chips, potato chips and your most favorite...crackers—both animal and goldfish. We will have popcorn catching contests and you will always win.

You will watch me dance in the kitchen, and I will try my best to convince you to join me. On the couch, you will sleep at my feet. You will always and forever be annoyed with me when I try to struggle-cuddle you, especially while you're napping in a sunny spot. You will bark when I leave you and ignore me when I return to you. And this will be our couplehood. This, will be *us*.

Come, *let's go for a walk*, my best friend.

I will teach you of our human imperfections. You will learn what anger is. You will meet fear. You will leave the rooms that are filled with sadness and you will sit close by when you hear the echoes of laughter. You will grow to understand the complexities of human hearts; how they are both impossibly fragile and yet, unimaginably strong. How they can grow. You will learn that they break easily, but also repair. You will decide to never break my heart, and I will return that promise to you. We will form an agreement, one that we will honor even on the hardest of days. As you look after me, you will watch me collapse into fragments and feelings, and you won't understand this, at all. But you will trust that the messy pieces of me will come together again, and you will know that you helped in that healing. Your presence alone will act as glue; slowly mending my broken parts, supporting my reconstruction. You will feel purpose, and pride.

You will love me, even during the moments when I don't love myself. And this is important: I will never understand why you love me. But, you won't need me to understand. You will love me anyway. In spite of my human flaws. And at times, perhaps, because of them.

You will bark at me, lick my face, nudge me to get up off of tear-soaked floors and climb free from curled-up covers because *Mom, it's time for breakfast, and I need to go out.*

You will save me. More than once.

Come, *let's go for a walk*, my protector.

You will watch my body change as it carries another life within, and you will feel my gait slow at the other end of your blue leash. You will be patient with me, slow down for me, head at my hip, my hand on your head, and you will learn that I am no longer one person, I am two. You will begin to love us both. You will welcome a tiny new human into your home and show wonder at the cries he makes, find confusion meeting each of his small movements and you will live with a continued curiosity at why this creature always smells like me, and milk. You will watch my love for him grow and my attention shift from only you, to mostly him. You will watch me suffer with the guilt of this transition, and your response will always and simply be, to love him, too. With me. And we will both feel it.

Come, *let's go for a walk*, my old friend.

We will move homes together. We will make new friends. We will watch the world change around us. We will spend two years together, bound to these homes. We will grow older in this time, and I will feel you begin to pull, and bark more. I will feel you change, and I will be frustrated with you. And all too suddenly, I will feel your gait slow at the other end of your blue leash, and then, I will understand. And I will be patient with you, slow down for you, your head at my hip, my hand on your head. I will learn that you are no longer one friend, but one holding two hurts; a chest full of air and a mass filled with blood. I will take you to five doctors in ten days—I will struggle with that betrayal as you hate going to the doctor. I meet each visit with teeth chattering and fists clenched, eyes tear-swollen, aching with desperation and outsourcing my prayers: *Please, please let him be ok. Please, please, let me be able to save him.*

And I will be told that I cannot.

I will be given two short weeks to sit next to you, sleep near you, breathe you in and watch your body change; heaviness will replace lightness, silence will replace barking, fear will replace hope.

We will both feel pain. This pain will have sharp edges—steep mountains of uncertainty sloping down into valleys of *hold on, just hold on*. Waves of sorrow ebbing into shores of calm; tears eroding contours down my cheeks like rivers meeting dams, fracturing their walls, coursing with power through the channels, again and again and again. You will watch my humanness become animal; you will watch me cry, watch my face rend into lines and edges, hear me wail the sounds of the primitive. Grief driven by spirit. Primal, and raw. Grief composed only of contrast, no comfort.

You will witness my heart breaking, yet again. And our agreement will hold strong—ever still, this pain will not be your fault. And I will long for you to bark at me, lick my face, nudge me off of tear-soaked floors and untangle me from curled-up covers because, *Mom, it's time for a walk.*

But now it will be me, nudging you. *Please, can we go for a walk?*

Come, *sit with me*, my love. *Let us be still.*

Again, I will hold you with both hands, nestle you with a soft blanket. I will lay your head in my lap, and let you feel the reassurance of my presence—the comforting scent of me. I will memorize your old smells, strange sounds and familiar textures; velvet tufty ears, strained breath purring, trembling, sandpaper paws and brittle nails, chest vibrating, heart beating through swollen ribs, cheeks of silk, whiskers twitching, downy haunches, nose warm, mouth licking. Sounds, and feels, and smells of you.

I will gently run my hands through your fur, over and over and over again. Back, and forth. Down to the skin, raking through each strand, a visceral knowing of you. Over, and over, and over again. I will lift my fingers up from the combing and watch your hair dance around me one last time; porcupine quills and dandelion seeds catching air, floating through the room.

I will kiss you. I will whisper, *I love you*. I will tell you, *Thank you for loving me. Thank you for being you. I love you, Sweet Boy.*

I love you. And I always will.

Come, *lay down with me*, my love. *Let us be still.*

There will be one more doctor, but he will come to you, and he will have soft eyes and he will have soft hands and he will speak softly to us both. You will lay on your bed. You will rest your eyes. You will feel the wetness of my tears, the tremble of my hands. And as I hold you, you will feel love.

We both will cry and whimper, but I will reassure you that you will be home, soon. And I will stay with you all night because I know that you are scared, and I will hold you in my lap, whispering, *I am right here, sweet boy, and I am never going to leave you.*

And you will know that you are home, at last.

Come, *watch over me*, my love. *Wait for me.*

And we will walk together, again.