

A New Dog

Lily's dog had been sick for two weeks, but it wasn't until the storm struck that Lily realized it was going to die. Sheila, a Dalmatian she'd owned for nine years, didn't bark at the thunder like usual, even though it was the heaviest storm Lily's town had seen in over two decades. Instead, the dog lay prone in the living room, whimpering sometimes, shutting its eyes. Whenever thunder clapped, Sheila's ears twitched.

Sheila died two days later. Lily went downstairs that morning and found her lying on her side in the front hallway, her tail tucked inward, her limbs reaching out for something that was not there. For a moment, Lily was unsure whether Sheila had died or was simply sleeping, but when she knelt down next to the dog and saw her eyes staring dead ahead, Lily knew.

She called the vet's office, and was told that someone would be sent to pick Sheila up. Lily explained that she had to get to work.

"Okay," said the woman on the other end. "Well, we can come by now or later. It's up to you."

"Just come by later," said Lily, knowing she'd regret that. "I really have to get to work."

Half an hour later, Lily pulled up to Vigo's, the grocery she was working at over the summer. She went inside and saw Wendey, her coworker, frantically bagging spinach at one of the counters.

"Hi, Wendey," Lily said. "I'm sorry I'm late. I just... my dog just died."

"Oh my god!" said Wendey. "I'm so sorry! What are you even doing here?"

“Rick’s already mad at me for missing that day a few weeks ago. I don’t think I can miss another on such short notice.”

That wasn’t why Lily had come in. Seeing Sheila in the hallway that morning had made her more upset than she’d expected to be. She’d known the dog was sick, and it had always been her mother’s dog, not hers. But her mother was on vacation in California now, and it had been up to her to take care of Sheila. Now the dog was dead, and she wasn’t even sure what came next.

“Okay,” said Wendy, looking confused. “Here, take that counter. We’re swamped this morning.”

20 minutes later, Lily had eased herself into the rhythm of bagging groceries. The crowd had died down, too, and Wendy took the opportunity to start up a conversation.

“Are you going to get a new dog?” she said, clearly thinking the prospect would cheer Lily up.

“I don’t know,” said Lily, bagging a carton of milk for a man whose ears were very red. “It might be nice to have a break. It’s really up to my mom. I mean, I’m leaving for college soon anyway.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Wendy. “I’m so excited for college. But I guess... it’s also just gotten me thinking about all the stuff I wish I would have done here, you know?”

Lily looked down at the blueberries in her hand. “I guess,” she said, and handed them to Wendy. “She was a good dog.”

“You were always complaining about how bad she was,” said Wendy.

“Yeah, but that was just, you know, kidding around.” Lily had always wondered how much the extra *e* in Wendy’s name accounted for her personality. She wondered what life would be like if she, too, had been given one. Liley.

“Oh, okay, I get it,” said Wendey. “So you really loved her and stuff?”

“I mean, yeah,” said Lily. “I had her for a long time. It was nice having someone around besides my mom.” The man with the ears coughed slightly.

“I’m sorry about your dog,” he said. His voice was as red as his ears. “But you’re taking an awful long time with that arugula.”

“I’m sorry,” said Lily, stuffing it in a bag, shooting Wendey a glance.

After the man left Wendey spoke up again. “Well, if you do get a new dog, whatever you do, don’t do what my cousins in Arizona did.”

“What did they do?” asked Lily.

“Their dog died,” said Wendey, her eyes widening, “and when they got a new one, they named it after the old one!”

“Oh, that is weird,” said Lily. “I don’t want to do that. Besides, if I do get a new one, I think I might get a boy.”

“Ooh, you could name it Garth,” said Wendey. “I’ve always wanted a pet named Garth. Or a baby. But my landlords don’t allow pets.”

“Maybe I’ll name it Garthe,” said Lily.

“Yeah,” said Wendey. “Or, if you get a girl, name it Daisy. Because then you’ll both have flower names.”

“Yeah, Daisey,” said Lily.

Lily called the vet after work, so she wouldn’t have to wait at home with Sheila for long. When she opened the door, Sheila was lying exactly where she’d been that morning. Lily didn’t know what she had expected—not for the dog to be gone, surely, but perhaps for her to have

shifted a bit, for one of her paws to have bent, or her tail to have moved. But she was in the same position, her paws still stretched out desperately, eyes still staring ahead. It struck Lily that she hadn't noticed Sheila's failure to appear in bed upstairs the night before. The dog must have been in the same spot all night, unable or unwilling to move. Lily pictured Sheila pinned in place, her outstretched paws a mute cry for help.

She bent down to tuck Sheila's limbs in closer and saw that her eyes, which had always been a stunning blue, had lost none of their vibrancy in death. Looking at them now, Lily saw they were actually focused on a toy, a shredded purple starfish, which was sitting across the hallway underneath a chair. Lily had been gone the day her mom gave Sheila the starfish, but she was told it had once been plump and smiling. Sheila had mutilated it within minutes, but the collection of residual scraps had become one of her favorite toys. Lily didn't know if it was better that it had been there for Sheila to see or not.

Through the window, Lily saw a car pull up and two men get out. Already bent to adjust the paws, Lily slid to her knees. The men were large, with short hair, one dark and one blond. They didn't know Sheila's name. Lily looked down at Sheila and heard the doorbell ring.

"I should have at least closed her eyes before I left," she thought. She did that now, gently pulling Sheila's eyelids shut. With her closed eyes and curled feet, Sheila really did look asleep. Lily reached over and picked up the starfish, and placed it next to Sheila's face. She straightened Sheila's tail out and laid it flat on the ground. The doorbell rang again. Lily looked down at Sheila, and then got up and opened the door. "I found her like this," she said, pointing into the hallway. "I've had her forever. What am I going to do?"