

The Pard Letters

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For Pard ~Born a dog, died a gentleman.



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Grief - Sheâs a fickle thing

My sweetest Pard,

The days preceding your passage from this world to the next were anguished, full of discontent, unanswered questions and fear. Many times I asked myself how could anyone make such a choice, how would I possibly pick up the phone to make the call, carry you to the car, drive you to the unknown and sit on a hard sterile floor and watch your life ebb away from me? I cried a lot as I agonized over what to do. I wrote a poem inspired while I was showering one day, the week before. It was inspired by God, there's no way I could've written that alone.

My darling boy, you had spent your life running, playing, chasing, raising Macady, loving the animals and all the children who met you. The winter of your life was spent indoors, going out on the deck to do your thing and coming back inside. Days you rested, nights you would start with Stripes as she dug her face under your chin, kneading and meowing until her face was soaked with kisses. Gus would come and sit right in front of you so you could lick his old shoulder wound that healed 5 years ago. You are the only reason it ever healed well in the first place, all the medicine in the world couldn't touch the magic of whatever was in your spit. And every night since then, Gus has come to sit in front of you. Paisley waited patiently for her turn. She loved you and tried to show you just how much. Even though you couldn't see them, you knew they were there. You spent every night of your life on the bed, by my feet. And when your bones and joints weakened and you couldn't jump up anymore, I made a bed for you that slid underneath mine, and I'd pull it out every night. Even though sight and sound abandoned you, you knew where I was always. You couldn't see, but you knew if I left the room and you always followed me, no matter where I went. Even in the end, when you struggled to push yourself off the floor, you were always making sure you were close to me. I can only wish that you will remain here in spirit, following me room to room. I still expect to see you lying on the living room floor, right where you always were.

I called the vet on Thursday morning and made the appointment for 11:30 a.m the following day. I had wanted you to fall asleep at home, and I knew your strong old heart wouldn't give up. So I settled on having you put to rest on the living room floor, where you would be most comfortable. Mum told me that the vet's would be best, in case anything should go awry. I was sick about it all day, I cried all morning and into the afternoon. Even at work, I cried and couldn't seem to stop. I'd made the call and I knew it had to be done, and I hated myself for dialing the number. I had picked the phone up other times, and always closed it without dialing. I had a dream about sweet little Astro on Wednesday night, and Macady had dreamt of German Shepherds. I can only imagine it was Jazzy and Anka - all of them waiting to accompany you home. So I made the call the next day. I always said you would tell me when you were ready. I tried to listen and do what was best, maybe you had been telling me all along? I don't know for sure. That's the stupid thing about grief. It ebbs and flows and I can't make sense of it. I don't know if I did the right thing, but I know I did. Jill called me Thursday night, because I'd texted her and Kammi to tell them what I'd done. Jill had talked me out of taking you to the office, and counseled me to go with my gut, and have you put to sleep at home, like I had planned. She gave me the name of the lady who had put Cassie girl to sleep, but she was away. I called Clark's office, whose staff were blunt, as usual. He has yet to return my call. I called John at Willowcreek and made the final arrangements.

Thursday night came too quickly. I cooked an incredible marinated steak on the grill and I watched the snow fall. I couldn't eat, and when it had cooled, I put that steak in with your dinner. I always mixed something in

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with your dinner, every night of your life. What's better than a perfect, cut-into-bite-sized-pieces steak? I fed you your last meal and didn't go to sleep. I stayed up with you, and watched you sleep. You tried going to bed once, and you knew I wasn't there and came plodding back to the living room. So you slept there, and I watched you. And I cried and cried and cried. Part of me didn't even want to touch you, because I was afraid that if I did, I wouldn't be able to let go. So I just watched you sleep.

Work had adamantly refused I go in on Friday, which was a good thing, because as the sun rose that morning, I was a wreck. I woke Macady up, she got ready for school and she said goodbye to you before she left. She was late, goodbyes are never easy. Scott took her on her way. I showered and I cleaned and cleaned and cleaned the house. I wanted everything perfect for you. I couldn't have you passing in a dirty house, so I cleaned and organized and wiped and scrubbed until 11:00 a.m. I did everything to not touch you as you lay on the floor as I vacuumed around you. The Biederlack blanket that was 20 years old, the one that reminded me of my stepdad, of Ohio, of Mischief the cat, of many things, had been part of your bed for many years. I washed it the other day, folded it and knew that I would wrap you in it. I put Gus and Paisley in the car, so it wouldn't be so loud when the vet came. Star was kenneled in Macady's room and I put Mr. Jingles in the room with him. I put Thomas in our bedroom, but I left Stripes out with you. I walk past the check, left sitting on the counter. I stop and stare at the amount. Death costs us in many ways, but the thought of paying for this experience makes me weak and I feel faint. A check - the balanced cost of loss. I'm sick that I filled it out, angry in a way, that someone will cash it and the thought that they will benefit from it leaves me blank inside.

When the time came, and the house was clean, I brought up the ancient Biederlack blanket and laid it on the floor. I let you out one last time, but there wasn't much left. I'd already cleaned off the deck, who knew poop could evoke memories? You've wet your bedding every morning this past week, drank buckets of water and peed all over the floors, the carpet, everywhere. They say it's diabetes. Your pancreas is failing, and you're peeing sugar water. You've lost a ton of weight and your collar now hangs on your neck. You were my big strapping boy. I don't want you to die in a diabetic coma. So you go out one last time. You wobble into the house, and your steps are slow, one at a time. You limp, because your joints are shot, your muscle structure gone and I know you are hurting. You can feel the vibration as I snap my fingers and you follow. We baby-step side by side to the blanket on the floor. I know they'll be here soon and I don't want them to come. A strange calm has settled over me and I can't shake it. I want to cry, yet my eyes stay dry as bone. I can't understand why I'm not crying. I haven't cried all morning, just the night before. I start to wonder if I'm going crazy, because I can't feel anything at all. I get up and wipe the bathroom counters down. I see my face in the mirror and I know I'm scared. I look like crap, I'm pale and I feel like I'm going to be sick. I've been sick all night, so maybe if I can throw up I'll feel better. I go back and realize that I know have about 20 minutes before they arrive, so I turn on the fireplace to make it feel like home and I sit down with you and hold you in my arms.

They were late, and came ten minutes to noon. I'm not ready for this. Scott is outside, he's left us alone. I hear G&P bark and the instant they do, my tears come. They come fast and burning and I can't see anything. I've sat holding you and I am glad I'm on the floor, because I'm afraid I couldn't stand if I had to. They walk in the door and say â ohhhhâ and I can't even look at them. They try to make conversation about Stripes. She's in her 'loving mood' and is all purry, kneading and begging you to love her. You give her one last big old lick on the top of her head, and she goes to say hello to them. She hates people, so why is she in such a mood? They talked about her, but for the life of me I can't remember what was said. They explained the sedative to me, and I am so afraid that it will be like it was with Nigel, when I had to have him put to sleep for that lady. I can't stop crying and I am trying to not sob out loud. Minutes later, I ask if it's working. They say something about the sedative, but not the actual injection. Your head is dropping lower, and your breathing is labored, more heavy than what has become usual these past few days. They say whatever it is they said and Scott repeats them, but I can only hear a dull roar in my head. It sounds like rushing water and I bury my face in the top of your head as everything crashes down around me.

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I can't remember how many times I tell you that I love you, that you are my boy, my P-Dog, my old man. I whisper, â I'm so sorry Pard. I'm so sorry.â I can feel you breathing slower now and I want to scream, and I want this to be peaceful, but how can I find peace when I know your heart will stop any second? I sob, and it comes out a choked and scary sound. I have dog hair in my mouth, your head is soaked with my tears and the strangest thought crosses my mind wondering if that's how you and Stripes feel? And then, as I am sitting on the floor with my arms wrapped around you, sobbing into you, soaking your head with tears, and a runny nose and kisses, I feel you breathe for the last time. I cannot hold you close enough and I want to sink into the floor. I cannot tell you how much you mean to me. And just like that, it's over. My handsome gentleman, you fell asleep in my arms with dignity and peace and quiet solitude.

I don't remember what they said, or their leaving. I don't remember anything but the sound of my voice saying over and over and over that it's ok, and I love you, I love you, I love you. I feel Stripes moving around, and she hasn't left your side. You are her best friend and she lies down next to you. I cannot let go of your body and I cannot quiet down. I am a wreck, and unprepared, and grieving in a way I didn't know was possible. You have been my baby for almost 15 years; nearly half of my life, and I have just said goodbye to my dearest friend. I can't stop the waves crashing over me, so I give in and drown.

I don't move from the living room for three hours. Your passing is heart-wrenching but things went as planned. I take pictures, because it's all I have left to do. I'm not sure what I'm going to do with pictures of a body, probably nothing, but I take them anyway. Scott and I make small talk. He tries to comfort me, but doesn't know what to say that hasn't already been said. So he sits with me - he on the couch, me on the floor with you. He leaves to get Macady from school and I take off your collar and snip the little dovetail of fur that grew at the end of your stubbed tail. I cut off two whiskers from your beauty spot on your cheek and put it all in a clear bag. When the snow melts, I'll find your tags that fell off under the deck and put them back on your collar, and into a frame. I cover you up before Macady gets home. Stripes has moved to the couch cushion above your head, but she hasn't left the room. I've called my mother, texted K&J back, a friend from work called, but I can't remember what I said. I selfishly put my phone on vibrate because I can't talk and haven't the words I need anyway.

Morbid as it is, I am glad that your body has gone stiff, so I know that your spirit is gone and left just a vessel here on earth. I run my hands over your body, feeling the lumps and bumps of an invasive cancer that I knew was growing inside and I couldn't fix. I hold you and kiss your head one last time. Macady isn't sure she wants to see you, but comes in to look anyway. She just said â Ohâ and gently touched your face. Scott has dug a deep hole between the lilac trees and that is where you will be remembered. It is a beautiful green and purple place in the summer, where the birds roost and chirp. Macady's swing is there hanging in the big tree, and it's the most beautiful spot in the garden. He makes extra room for Gus, when it's his time. He rips out the sprinkler line and jokes that at least we won't forget where the spot is. I have to go in and finishing wrapping your body. I want to be sick and I don't want to do this part. Scott and I take the corners of the Biederlack blanket. Your body is not the only thing to be buried today. There are many memories in that blanket and I see to have them buried as well. We tramp through the snow, and Macady gets the doors. You're upside down in the blanket and I think I'm going to vomit. I don't want to see you this way. I tell myself that your spirit is still in the living room, this is just a temporary body for this earth. Scott jumps down into the hole, and because he's so darn strong, he packs you down with him and gently lowers your body into the ground. You face West, in true cowdog tradition. I think how good it is to see brown earth during this long winter. I wonder if I will take your bones with me if we ever have to move? Macady has a little box with her hamster's body inside (since it died last week too) and Scott puts it next to your body on the blanket. I throw a piece of my heart down into the ground to follow you, and I turn and walk into the house. I cannot bear to watch the earth cover you over. Macady retreats to her room. Scott and his backhoe treat the ground and what's in it with respect and dignity. Forgive me that we couldn't watch. I sit on the couch and stare at nothing until night falls. At 9 o'clock, I fix a hot water bottle, take enough nighttime cough medicine to knock out a horse and as my eyes close, so does the biggest chapter of my life.

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I woke up at ten the next morning and my first instinct as I kick myself out of bed is to make sure I don't step on you. Tears spring and I want to roll over and not wake up until the pain goes away. But I get up. I shower and take a much-needed, albeit difficult, phone call from an old friend. I follow through with plans to take Macady to meet a friend at the mall. I talk to people there. I put on a smiley face, wander around and take a strange satisfaction in feeling so numb. I buy nice perfume at Victoria's Secret and don't wish that I looked like the models there. I take Star to Adoption Days at Petco, and meet back up with Macady and friends for pizza. I eat, but I don't taste. I come home, get ready and put on another smiley face to deal with Macady's awards banquet being held in Pocatello. We are looking at a new pickup, so we take it down there. I drive it home, and tell Scott I like it but it has lots of miles. We feed horses, switch out cars again and go home. I let the dogs out and automatically pick up your dinner dish from its rightful place on the floor. I remember that I'm not filling it again, so I put it away, and feed the dogs. I have taken care of Macady, given her medicine for the cough we have all had/have, tended to her needs and those of the animals. I'm done for this day, so I go and sit down. I have planned my lesson for church. I have sat here, watching generic TV and thought of you all night. It's four o'clock in the morning and I have cried three times since I started writing. This is a therapy of sorts. I think if I can type it all down, the swirling words and thoughts and feelings will fly to fill a blank page and finally be out of my head. I wish for sleep, for morning, so I can get up for church and find another smiley face to wear. Strangely, I like being numb. I don't have to feel. I can just disappear into stillness and I don't have to move. I am waiting for it to hit again, next time with more force, or maybe less? They say if you stay busy, your days go faster. I wouldn't know, time is going whether I want it to or not. Thinking of you is the only thing I have to hold on to right now, because everything seems so surreal. Yet I know it happened, I felt it happen, and I keep reliving the moments as they wash over me. I miss you, Pard and I love you so very, very much.

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