

Maggie

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A look into the wonderful companionship of a furry friend.

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“I am sorry, I am so sorry.”

The words crawled out from between my father’s quivering lips. His head was nuzzled in the nape of the limp animal’s neck. His face, which was buried beneath a golden brown sea of fur, began to glisten while a single stream ran down his cheek. Through muffled sobs he took a few short breaths, sucking the air in quick bursts at a time, as if it were attempting to flee the room.

I had never seen my father cry. This wasn’t a sight I wanted to get used to. I clenched my fist as I turned my head. I felt the blood leave my hand as my knuckles turned the color of the pale walls that lined the suffocating room we had gathered in. The lump that had cultivated in my throat began to swell, and I didn’t breathe for fear that I might choke on the air my father seemed so desperate for.

I looked down and my eyes fixed on my worn tennis shoes. I began examining them thoroughly as I felt myself frantically trying to tear away from the excruciating reality before me.

My shoes were a few years old. Like most shoes, they were adorned with dirt smudges and gravel stains, remnants of a busy life. What my shoes lacked, however, was any kind of rip or tear from the jaws of a teething puppy or a bored dog. As I came to this subtle realization, I felt the trickle of a smile begin to fight its way onto my face. My Maggie, our precious Golden Retriever was always so well behaved.

I stayed facing down, gazing into my shoes as I allowed my thoughts to take me.

Suddenly, it was the summer of ‘97. The setting sun beat down upon my tan, six year-old skin. The grass felt cool between my toes as I ran with my older brother and sister. To my tiny body and inexperienced mind, our backyard seemed endless. It was full of possibilities and potential. At the very end of our acre-long yard was a rustic metal fence. Lining the fence were vines that grew in harmonic patterns, hugging the fence the way the ocean hugs the shore. On these vines were hundreds of honeysuckle flowers. We would pick them and suck out the one or two sweet drops these plants produced.

As I plopped down on the damp grass to enjoy my newly picked flowers, a moist, rubber-like nose began to nudge me. “Maggie! These aren’t for you!” I heard my childish voice squeak out. The beautiful, golden-brown creature continued to nudge me. I giggled as she softly pushed me to the ground and proceeded to lick my face with love.

“I never worried about you guys when you would play outside,” I heard my father’s voice make its way through my fantasy. Suddenly I was transported through time, it was several years later, we were in our cozy Texas kitchen, and my father’s socked foot stroked the now older pup from underneath the table as he spoke. “I would look out the window and there she would be, right next to you all, following you wherever you went, like she was part of the gang. I trusted Maggie with you. She was always looking out for you guys.”

I smiled casually at my father’s words and looked down at my napping pooch. My dad let out a soft sigh as he opened up a bag of chips. The sleeping dog’s ears twitched and she shot up with anticipation. Her tail began to pound the tile floor rhythmically.

“Maggie,” my father’s voice commanded, “take it nicely.” He lowered his arm--cheesy potato chip in hand--down to the anxious dog’s mouth. She sat, staring at it, unwavering. The room was silent, I could

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barely hear my dog's heavy breathing, I'm not sure she was. The only apparent sound was the thudding of her soft tail beating the floor.

His hand was mere centimeters from her watering chops. She stood still with eyes completely fixed on the treat. She wouldn't dare go near it until her beloved human gave her the go-ahead.

Okay! My dad said excitedly.

The golden retriever parted her lips ever so slightly and gently took the chip from my father's open palm.

Good girl, baby! Good girl, Maggie! My dad lavished the old puppy with adoring compliments. He grabbed her face and kissed her snout. Her tail was out of control now as she pounded the tile with it in excitement.

I suddenly felt the warm grasp of a sweaty palm grab my hand and I was quickly awakened from my daydream. I looked to my older sister who was now clutching me in support and I squeezed back, in a feeble attempt to comfort her. We stood side by side, watching my father give everything he had to our faithful friend in her last few moments with us. He was leaning over the limp dog on the table, his face next to hers.

Thank you, I heard him whisper in her ear, his voice had changed now to a hushed, comforting tone of gratitude. Thank you so much. For everything.

The nurse who had just come back in the room put a soft hand on my trembling father's shoulder. He nodded without looking up. The nurse gingerly placed a hand on the older dog's back and slowly injected the dosage.

I watched as Maggie's brown eyes, surrounded by silver and grey fur, slowly began to shut and her breathing slowed. My dad kept his head on her chest and I watched him rise and fall with it.

Thud, thud, thud

I heard that familiar noise. It was one that personified love and contentment perfectly. Through weak tears, I smiled at Maggie, and I swear she smiled back as her tail gently tapped the table. I felt a warmth rush over me as we stood in the room. The noise soon came to a soft stop. Our Maggie was happy. She was free.

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