

Savannah

Do you know that feeling when the room seems to disappear?

A small inner voice told me to go the North Shore Animal League that morning, even though I had been there only the previous day. “Oh no,” I told it, “I am too tired!” I did my best to ignore the voice. North Shore was a four- hour round trip drive from my home, and I was not feeling up to it. But the voice was persistent, and would not let me relax.

I was on the lookout for a dog again. Annie had died two months ago and this time I didn't wait. I knew I could not go through the agony of being without a dog for so long, this time around. I understood now that the wound of grief would never heal, as long as I did not have another soul to lavish my love on. I would speak about this to my clients, when they would say to me that they could never find another dog to love the way that they loved the one they just lost. I would tell them, that the love they felt was actually their own. That love was within them, their own love was reflected back to them through the dog. They would surely have it again. Granted each dog is unique, with its own personality and gifts and lessons to teach. And we may love them in slightly different ways, but they will surely have that love again. I knew what they meant, I really did. This knowledge had not come easily to me. When Shadow was killed in a tragic car accident, I was distraught, consumed with grief. I didn't want another dogI wanted Shadow! You couldn't just thrust another dog into my life to take her place. I understood that. But actually, our truest nature is Love. Love is the essence of the universe. It is our very core. And to love is a verb. It is the process of loving. You can love a multitude of people and dogs and others. It is a question of opening your heart. Once we do that, Love comes into our lives again,

Shadow's sudden death had been a shock to me. It was the deepest grief, the largest loss in my life up until that point. But with Annie, well, I was practically preparing for her death, her whole life. I don't mean that to sound cavalier. On the contrary, I had learned, truly learned, not to take anything for granted. Each day with a loved one is a gift and a blessing. I knew I had been extremely lucky. Despite being so sick at three, Annie with good holistic care had lived until sixteen. Granted the last two years of her life had been very rough. My close friends would joke, “This is the dog that never dies” I kept bringing Annie back from the brink. It reminded me of when Mother Theresa was dying, the nuns kept praying and Mother kept holding on!

So off I went back to the shelter. I arrived there very early, one hour before they opened to the public. It was a Sunday, and the placed is jammed on weekends. I wanted to get there before the crowds came and swooped up all the dogs. However even at eight am the line was already dozens of people long.

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Racing through the doorway, I walked quickly through the aisles. My heart would recognize the right one. I was getting pretty good at this.

No immediate heart recognition in the adult dog room, so I rather reluctantly walked into the puppy room. That is where most of the families generally gather to choose their pet, particularly around the pure-bred dogs or the rambunctious happy labrador types: all wagging tails and wiggling bottoms.

Then the room disappeared. As in a film, the background went out of focus, blurring into a soft haze, with only my little Savannah in crystal clear focus. The din of the people and the barking dogs melted into silence and a golden cord seemed to draw me to a cage in the corner where not a soul stood. All alone looking so frightened and timid, huddling and shivering by herself in a cage, I saw my baby.

She was a medley of everything that I loved in a dog. She had a collie head: a warm golden brown coloring, ears daintily turned downward at the tips edged in black, almond shaped hazel colored eyes, and a delicately tapered nose. Her body was cloaked in that luscious blue merle coloring that I so loved: part Australian sheepdog. I had fallen in love with this breed when I first saw them. Bright, alert, gorgeous, their eyes shining with intelligence. Her coat was short and fuzzy like a peach, but I knew that this kind of fur would sprout into a luxurious long thick coat in adulthood, that would be wonderful to snuggle into. She had one white paw, what my good friend David, would later jokingly call her Michael Jackson glove.

She was so small though! I had wanted a dog of at least 60 pounds: a dog that you could really hug. Although only 3 months old, she couldn't have weighed more than 8 pounds.

I took her out of the cage. She was timid and nervous. "Hi sweetheart" I said. She was so shy, her eyes barely meeting mine. She crouched, huddled in her own world of fear. I spoke with her gently, trying to gain her trust. Every so often, she would give me a tentative lick, and then clam up again. I felt her fear and her pain, her sadness and her loneliness. It is true, we often choose dogs that we resonate with, that remind us of ourselves. We spent about an hour together. My only hesitation was that she was so small and I was fixated on the idea that I wanted a larger animal. But when I put her back into her cage, and she gave me a disappointed look with those sad soulful eyes, I know that I could not let her down. I just couldn't. I had gained her trust. And I was a person of my word.

It was actually nothing short of a miracle that despite dozens of people crowded into that small puppy room, nobody at all had noticed her. She was clearly the most beautiful dog in the room.

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And so it was. Savannah came home with me.

She is now exactly 60 pounds.

