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LIFE, WITH DOGS

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Buckley



Elliott Erwitt

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A letter to Napoleon
written by
Sarah Hoover

Dear Napoleon,



Dear Napoleon,

I'm not sure I ever told you this, but your namesake, Napoleon Bonaparte, was born on August 15th, 1769.

You, Napoleon Hoover, died on August 15th, but in the year 2020. And technically you died on August 14th, but at 5PM - which is 1AM in both France and Corsica. So I like to think you two have that date in common.

You shared other things, as well. Both short in stature, but tenacious and tough--fiercely determined to always win - you seemed especially focused on absolutely pointless wars, all of which you started.

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One of your greatest battles was against the martini shakers in the lobby bar of Chateau Marmont, at which you'd bark and growl savagely while I sipped my martinis with extra olives, that month that we stayed there when Baby Guy was first born. Your Waterloo was in the Washington Square Dog Park, where you bit any creature that dared to take a stick or leaf from you, even though you sent mixed signals by running around with leaves and sticks in your mouth, begging to be chased.

When Napoleon Bonaparte was two weeks from uniting with his beloved Josephine, he wrote to her asking her not to bathe. Similarly, you had a curious and horny sense of smell, and you were known to topple seemingly sturdy trashcans in order to get to my used tampons. You'd swallow them whole, leaving no evidence of their ingestion, and wait until we were in public to puke them up, washed clean by the digestive system, bloated and obvious. I remember twice screaming desperately at taxi drivers to pull over, reading your gag reflex as only a mother could; I closed my eyes and hoped Tom was asleep on our first night in bed together when I heard the same choking noise coming from somewhere in the dark.



I WONDER IF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE EVER CRAWLED TO THE HEAD OF THE BED AND PUKED UP A WEEK-OLD TAMPON ONTO THE BREASTS OF A NAKED AND FRESHLY FUCKED WOMAN IN THE PRESENCE OF HER BRAND NEW SUITOR? WELL YOU DID, NAPOLEON HOOVER, AND BECAUSE OF YOU WE LAUGHED, AND I KNEW THAT ONE DAY I'D HAVE A BABY WITH THIS MAN AND WE WOULD, ALL THREE OF US, PROMISE TO MAKE AN HONEST GO OF FAMILY LIFE. I KNEW HE'D GROW TO LOVE YOU AND UNDERSTAND THAT YOU WERE A HUMAN DEEP DOWN; I KNEW HE WAS CAPABLE OF THE IMMENSE CARE AND RESPECT YOU DESERVED FROM THE WAY HE CHUCKLED THAT NIGHT.

I went home to Indiana the summer of my 21ST birthday, depressed after my college breakup, some irrelevant relationship whose failure I knew was inevitable and a good thing, but I felt lost nonetheless. Waiting in line at a restaurant, I bumped into a friend holding you; I told her you were cute when saying hello, noticing the white patch on your chest and the little dot on your chin, slightly off center, making your face adorably lopsided. Little did I know that she was babysitting you for my mom, who'd bought you as my birthday gift.

It wasn't until four months later, in November, that you came to New York City to live with me, and you had never peed on anything but suburban grass. Your first day of New York life we went up to Bergdorf Goodman in a taxi, walked around the shoe department and touched stuff we couldn't afford. I finally got you to pee in the little park between the department store and the Plaza Hotel, which was my mistake, because you'd remain this high maintenance and spoiled for the rest of your thirteen years, looking forward to your time in my chair at hair salons, lunches outside with my girlfriends, your bi-weekly grooming appointments. You had an obsession with being clean, and I wiped down your paws with lavender scented, warm washcloths every night, right after brushing your teeth with poultry flavored paste. Then you'd rest your head on a Porthault pillow case, and sleep in just as long as I did, never waking me or abandoning me to be alone in bed.

The first night in my studio apartment, I took you out of your crate and put you in the crook of my arm in bed. I didn't get a puppy to not snuggle him constantly, despite the claims of your dog trainer that staying in a crate would give you boundaries, a word I like to pretend doesn't exist.



The minute you curled up against me, my heart exploded and I never looked back: I could read your mind through your eyes and know what you needed; I could sense your fear and tell when you were smiling; I knew where your ticklish spot was on your tummy that would make you giggle like a toddler. You were my best friend and I'm so, so sorry for the weekend I left you with that terrible roommate who didn't take care of you right, and the time I slept over at some horrible asshole's house without coming home to you until morning and you pooped inside. You were never mad at me--you chose joy and goodness every second of your life--but I'm so mad at myself for the ways I wasn't good enough for you.

After all, the care you gave me changed the way I felt about and treated the important beings in my life.

Though someday it feels like you never happened at all, I'll suddenly remember how you impacted absolutely everything, how outrageous it is that you've left a life you were so instrumental in building. I never could have fallen in love, or had a child if you hadn't found your way to me. I never could have survived my twenties without your support. I never could have survived that first year with a newborn without your comfort.

I am eternally grateful to you, and I will never recover from the grief of your loss. I feel like I'm missing a limb; something I had to care for during this huge chunk of my life, a part of me I always had to worry about, now gone.

When Baby Guy was born and we brought him home from the hospital, you were despondent.

For days, you made a show of refusing to eat your organic, carefully



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prepared, grain free meals of arugula and sweet potato and probiotics; and until I saw you slyly sneak away to nibble at your dog bowl when you thought I wasn't looking, I wondered how long that would last. The night you realized the baby was staying for good, when we took him to his first doctors appointment and then much to your chagrin brought him back, you puked up water all over the house and peed everywhere you could--but got it out of your system, and then decided you two could be some sort of friends.

For the next three years, you did your best to lick every part of him as if trying to satiate your real urge for the flesh beneath his skin, but you also let him ride you and steal your toys and you never so much as nipped him, saving your vitriol instead for dangerous interlopers, like the disheveled squirrels of our NYC streets. You even snuggled him on airplanes, where the Delta flight attendants came to know you by name, after many a cross country flight where you made not a peep, and never went to the bathroom, instead choosing to snack on pretzels and snap your head up at any dog that appeared on the small movie screen.

For thirteen years, every yellow light I drove under, every penny I threw into a fountain, every birthday candle I blew out, every graveyard I went by, I wished for you to have an easy, painless, and fear-free death--something I fretted over from the day you became my little furry soul mate. You're gone now, and I hope you weren't scared at the end.

I hope you knew how much I cherished your existence, how much I now miss your snores at night, the little bald spots under your armpits, the cold part of your upper lip I used to kiss before bed. Napoleon, I even (and especially) miss your farts.

Please haunt me as much as you want,

Your eternally loving mother,

Sarah