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Epistolary Piece

My Sweet Shadow,

Do you remember the first time we met? You were so timid. You cautiously stepped out of your cage at the animal shelter for me to pet you—your tail was between your legs, but your chocolate eyes were bright and playful. Being a 3-month-old Black Labrador earned you the name Shadow—a name that effortlessly carved its way into my heart. Throughout our years together you’ve taught me how to laugh and love with a light-heart. You make me forget lingering negativity without even saying anything, and you know how to be the best listener (especially when in the presence of bacon).

Shadow, you’ve taught me how to laugh through embarrassing and unfortunate times. Do you remember peeing on me on the car ride back home from the shelter? I hope it makes you laugh like it does me now. The seat you peed on was known as the “pee seat” for years—our fur-less brother and I would always snicker when someone else sat in it. Hospitable, I know. Not gonna lie, it took me a while to forgive you for that; I was pretty grossed out. But I guess I settled the score during the tragic years I provided you with the nickname “Tabooshihead.” No wonder you wag your tail so much when you’re around me—you’re probably still laughing about my embarrassing middle school stages comprised of neon clothes, DC Shoes, and this cryptic nickname.

I always wondered what you would say if you could talk. Dad always does goofy impressions of your voice, and they always make me laugh, but I know that nobody can quite capture your personality. You really know how to live, my love. Remember when you found that 30-pound bag of dog food in the outside fridge? You were probably laughing, huh Shadow? You thought you'd really hit the jackpot. Unfortunately for you I got the last chuckle; I took you on a walk that evening and laughed with mom about your swaying, oversized tummy the whole way.

You're both smart and stubborn—really quite the devious combination. You used to love to play this “cute” game where you'd challenge the security of our fence. You would jump. You would dig. You would squeeze. You would show that fence who's boss. Good job Shadow—you found just about the only doggy pastime that requires hundreds of dollars in security measures and hours of worry about whether or not you'd come home safely. I remember one night when you had escaped I couldn't sleep not knowing if you were okay. At ten o'clock that night you pranced up to my window with part of a cactus stuck to your chin. “What have you gotten up to my crazy girl?” I said as I threw open the door and hugged you, procrastinating anger with the fluttering of relief.

Even now, though I've left Arizona for USC, you still make me smile every day. About a month ago mom and dad called me in a panic: “We think Shadow has arthritis in her hips. We're going to take her to the vet later today.” My eyes watered up with the thought of you growing old and unhealthy. I soon found out that you were in fact diagnosed with a custom disease: “Wall-thritis.” Shadow, you're now twelve years old. Why do you still insist on trying to jump our seven-foot fence to the point where you're too sore to even walk the next day? My crazy girl.

I hope you're doing well at home. Although I ask mom and dad about how you're doing almost every single day, I still miss you very much. But, I know you're enjoying your daily walks and getting spoiled with plenty of treats. You take the phrase "daddy's girl" to a whole different level: you know that your playful bark and happy tail will be followed by the question, "Do you want a treat pretty girl?" I can't wait to see you again in June—try not to do anything too crazy until I get back and can laugh with you. Thank you for being my loving shadow and my best friend for so many years. I'm so thankful for the years of happy memories I've gotten to share with you, and I can't wait for the memories to come. You've taught me a new way to live, love, and laugh, and for that I am forever grateful.

Love,

Your two-legged sister