

When the Time Comes

This is not a book about dogs. It's not a book about cats or **other** pets but it is a book about devotion, about grief, and about love that outlives breath. It's about the moments no one prepares you for, the soft decline, the impossible decision, and the quiet house afterward.

Before we go any further, I feel compelled to share two truths. First: I am no stranger to death, nor the solemn passage of life as it wanes. I know and have known the shadow it casts, and the quiet responsibility it places upon those who remain.

I've lived through that moment. More than once, and although very unpleasant to experience, it is sometimes a necessity of dignity of life to do something that is not so easy to do, but a requirement by moral standards to do what is right.

Second: I have, by circumstance rather than design, found myself in moments where I was called upon to act, not in haste, nor defiance of law, but in reverence for the dignity that every living creature deserves.

These decisions were not taken lightly. They were shaped by necessity and carried out with the deepest respect.

In each instance, the aim was not merely to end pain, but to honor life, to return it, with humility, to the earth from which it came.

For I have always believed that our companions, those loyal animals given to us by Providence, are not ours to dominate, but to steward. And when their time comes, it is not cruelty to let them go with grace. It is mercy. It is love. And it is a sacred trust.

I've carried the weight of euthanasia like a stone in my chest—made choices not because I wanted to, but because love sometimes requires us to be brave in the hardest ways.

I have knelt beside flesh and fur, I once ran my hands through joyfully and whispered thank you through tears. I have held on too long, and I have let go too soon. I know the silence that follows.

And I know, too, the life that comes after—the healing, the memories, the small ways they remain with us.

When Maya came into my life, it was during one of those quiet, aching seasons. I had just said goodbye to my Rottweilers; a brother and sister bonded in life and loss. Cancer had taken them both, and with them, a part of me.

Maya was different, smaller, softer, and unexpected. She didn't replace what I lost. She helped me carry it.

This book is for those standing on that same threshold. For those watching their best friend age. For those already grieving. For those wondering when it's time, and whether they'll ever be okay again.

There are no photos on these pages, because this isn't about breeds or appearances. It's about the bond, the kind that transcends words and survives the last goodbye.

It's about the companionship of furry paws and quiet loyalty. It's about the hardest choice a loving person can make.

If you've ever loved an animal like family, this book is for you. Let's walk this road together.

To begin this journey, the journey of letting go with grace, we must first understand the depth of what we're being asked to release.

It is not simply a pet.

It is a partner.

A keeper of secrets.

A soul whose life has been entwined with our own.

That truth revealed itself to me one night in the high desert of New Mexico. I was driving alone, somewhere between distant towns, beneath a moon that looked more like memory than light.

Just after midnight, I came upon something on the shoulder of the interstate, a form barely visible, yet unmistakably alive.

It was a coyote. Hit, broken, bleeding into the dust and asphalt. One leg torn away, ribs exposed, breathing shallow but steady. The desert around us was hushed, as if holding its breath. I stopped, left the engine running, and approached slowly.

It didn't growl. It didn't run.

It looked at me, not as predator or prey, but with the same raw surrender I had seen in the eyes of dying dogs I once held in my arms.

I was no stranger to death, injury, or pain. I endured the war as a medic overseas in Southeast Asia. I am not comfortable recounting the rigors or hell of war, but I am seasoned enough to make decisions regarding life and death.

I took my jacket off and wrapped the coyote gently in it. Lifting it with care, I laid its body in the backseat of my Jeep. As I drove, the coyote moaned softly, small, agonized sounds that filled the cab like ghosts of suffering. Blood soaked through the fabric.

Its leg, completely dismembered, dangled grotesquely, swinging with every turn of the wheel. I pulled over again.

This time, I rewrapped the body more tightly, tucking the detached leg inside the fold of my jacket.

I rolled the fabric with precision and tied it with the sleeves. I didn't know what I would do once I got home. Home was still ten miles away, but I knew I could not leave him. Not there, not like that, abandoned on the roadside beneath the cold stare of the stars.

I could not save him. But I could ease his suffering. That night, with only the desert and the stars as witnesses, I made a decision no one should make lightly. Not because I was indifferent to death, but because I understood its weight.

That coyote, wild and wounded, deserved not to suffer alone on a forgotten stretch of highway.

We bury our pain in quiet places. Sometimes in memory, sometimes in the soil. And though the law of man may draw lines, the law of compassion often moves deeper.

That night, I offered dignity to a creature of God. It was not my pet, not my companion, but it was a life.

And life, especially in its final moments, deserves reverence.

Twenty minutes after midnight, I arrived home. Carefully, I lifted the coyote—still wrapped in my blood-soaked jacket—and laid him on the ground just outside the Jeep.

The silence was deep, heavy, almost sacred. I stepped inside the house and gently woke my oldest boy. There was no hesitation in his eyes, just quiet understanding as I asked him to help me bury the animal.

We walked out into the cold desert air together. As he approached the Jeep and saw the form, he looked at me with a mixture of concern and disbelief. "Dad," he asked softly, "he's not dead yet?"

I nodded solemnly. "No, son. Not yet. But we can't let him suffer any longer. We have to take care of him, give him a rightful burial. I'm going to wrap him in a clean sheet, cover his head so we don't have to see his eyes, and then I'll take the shotgun and finish the job."

He was twelve years old—old enough to grasp the weight of mercy, but young enough to be shaken by it.

He didn't argue.

He didn't speak.

He simply stood there, still and silent, as the night wrapped around us both. That silence became its own kind of prayer.

The ground was hard from the winter air, stiff and unyielding beneath our shovels. Together, my son and I dug a hole deep enough to cradle the broken creature with reverence.

When it was ready, we laid the coyote gently inside, still wrapped in the clean sheet. And then, like a winter blast cutting through the hush of the desert, a single shot rang out in the middle of the night—final, merciful, and heartbreakingly necessary.

Do not ask if there were other options. We lived in a remote area of reservation, twenty-five miles from the nearest town, hours from any kind of veterinary care.

There was no place to bring the animal, no hands to offer aid, no sanctuary but our own humble patch of land. To prolong his pain would have been cruelty. To act was the only humane path available.

And in that moment, under the weight of the stars and the stillness of planet Earth, I knew what it meant to truly honor life, not just in its living, but in how we let it go.

This book is not here to offer judgment, nor to declare a single “right” way through one of life’s most difficult choices. Instead, it is meant to be a companion, an honest, compassionate guide through the emotional landscape of euthanasia.

Whether you are facing the decision now, still grieving a past loss, or simply preparing for what may come, my intent is not to instruct from a place of certainty but to walk beside you in empathy.

Every bond between human and animal is unique, and so too is the path each of us must take. What I offer here is not a prescription, but a perspective, one shaped by love, sorrow, and the hope that understanding can ease the weight of goodbye.