

Finding Angel

We had just had our second dog, Duke, put to sleep a few months earlier. He had been a Maltese, just like our earlier Sammy. I had put my foot down. No more dogs, I told my wife. There was just too much grief involved in losing them. But that's an easier vow to make than to keep if you love dogs.

So Yvonne and I had begun to talk about what kind of dog to get in the unlikely event that I ever changed my mind. As usual, she said it would have to be small and white just like the other two. I insisted that it would have to be female.

Understand, I have nothing against male dogs, although I still get the willies when I recall taking Sammy to the vet to be neutered. The operation is bad enough, but the real shock was having the vet summon us from the waiting room by attaching our last name to the dog's first name. You see, Sam had been my father's name, and there was something definitely unnerving about having "Sam Prelutsky" summoned to be neutered. It was like something out of a Greek tragedy or a French farce.

In any case, the reason that I indicated a preference for a female dog was because both Sammy and Duke seemed to have a streak of cat in their personalities. It wasn't that they'd hiss or scratch or hide under the sofa. They just struck me as slightly aloof. Duke, in particular, had a way of ignoring you if you came home after several hours away, as if to let you know that if you could get along without him, he was only too happy to return the favor. He would actually turn his back on me.

Admittedly, I had no way of knowing if this was a trait common to all Maltese dogs, but I had a hunch that a female would be more understanding and more affectionate.

But, as I say, I had made up my mind that I would never again put myself in a position where I would have to put a dog out

of its misery, no matter how painlessly I knew it could be done. Painless, that is, for the dog, but not nearly so painless for me.

Once again, man plans and God laughs. One day, my wife and I were leaving the house, and a woman I didn't recognize was across the street. As we made our way to my car, she crossed quickly and headed us off. I looked around for something I could use as a weapon. This is, after all, Los Angeles.

"Have you lost a white dog," she asked.

"We did," I replied, "but I suspect not in the way you mean."

She explained that she'd found a dog wandering around without a collar. She'd been putting up notices all over the neighborhood and checking with the pound, but no luck. She said it was a friendly dog, but she worked fulltime and would feel guilty keeping it locked up all day.

My wife asked her what the dog looked like. It was small and white.

I asked its gender. It was female.

Yvonne and I looked at each other. I suggested we follow the woman home and check out the animal. She lived about six blocks away, proving she really had gone all out to find the dog's owner.

Needless to say, we took the dog home with us.

When my wife asked what we should name her, I never even hesitated: "Angel. What else?"

One day, while walking her, a neighbor from up the street came rushing outside and asked me if this had been a lost dog. I acknowledged she had been, and wondered what had prompted the question, fearing it was her dog and she wanted her back.

“Well, just about every weekend, my husband and I go out on our boat. This one Saturday morning, when we came outside, I saw a little dog walking up the middle of the street. After giving her some water, I told my husband he should go out on the boat himself because I wanted to keep the dog. He insisted I go with him. He said if the dog was still around when we got home Sunday night, I could keep her. Naturally, by the time we got back, she was nowhere around. I’m just so relieved to see she’s found a good home.”

I was also relieved. I was afraid I was going to have to lie and say we had found Angel, sure, but on the other side of the hill. No way this could possibly be her dog.

Now, normally, I’m not what you’d call a religious guy. But when you realize the odds of Angel, a small, white, female dog, winding up with us – considering the fact that the woman who found her worked fulltime and couldn’t keep her; the fact that this other woman had to go boating; the fact that we came out of our house at the exact moment that the first woman was standing where she could spot us; even the fact that little Angel had somehow been able to survive for some length of time on the street – it’s difficult not to see our coming together as anything less than kismet, if not an actual miracle.

The only drawback is that Angel clearly spent so much time fending for herself that on our walks, she insists on nibbling on grass, leaves, twigs and just about any other plant life she comes across. Old habits clearly die hard.

No matter how often I tell her those days are over and she’ll never have to scavenge again, I don’t think she entirely believes me. I suspect she heard a rumor that I had once in a weak moment sworn off dogs.

Angel has now been with us close to a year, and I think it’s safe to say that she is the second greatest dog in the world. Second only to your own, of course.

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