



Thunder, by Julie Palmquist

A sudden passing: Thunder

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On the morning of October 30, I discovered a tragedy as I conducted my morning rounds. Thunder, a spirited five-year-old male whom I had seen healthy and vigorous just the afternoon before, was lying down, unresponsive, at the back of his enclosure. Though he eventually got up, very shaky but willing to take a bite of food, he soon lay back down, exhausted. Before the vet could arrive and while I was checking on him, Thunder drew his last breath.

In the four years I had worked here, we had not had a wolf die of anything other than diseases related to old age. Usually I was prepared for the death of an elderly wolf, one that had been in failing health for some time. Even the more sudden deaths of vital organ failure were easier to accept with the thought that the wolf had lived a long, fulfilling life. Thunder's youth made his sudden passing bewildering and heartbreaking. A full necropsy showed no heart failure, no infectious disease, no indications of liver or other organ failure. The only alternatives were therefore the cause our vet suspected: either a burst aneurysm in his brain, or a massive stroke.

Part of a pack of three which came to us from a private facility in California, Thunder was a large, handsome male who had grown from being an omega in his original pack to exuberantly lording it over the two sisters he now lived with. Grey and Brita deferred to him, especially over the food which he was so often greedy for, but the three were a close-knit clan and were often seen resting amiably together. We were very lucky that Brita and Grey had each other when Thunder died, as they appear to have adjusted much better and quicker to life without their packmate than do wolves who are left alone with the loss of a mate.

Thunder was buried near a beautiful oak tree in Wolf Haven's new cemetery, which is more accessible to the public. Staff members put special tokens in and on his grave, and I came across a raven feather just before he was buried. According to the beliefs of many cultures from around the world, the raven helps to guide spirits to the beyond. As I placed the feather on his body, I fancied that its former wearer helped Thunder find his way home. You are missed, big fellah. 🐾