ntroducing ‘Animal’: Walnut

0:00

hey it's Michael today we have something

0:03

really special for you a blissful break

0:06

from the news it's a new series from nyt

0:09

audio called animal my colleague Sam

0:14

Anderson from the Times magazine

0:16

traveled the world to have encounters

0:18

with animals not to claim them or to

0:21

tame them but just to appreciate them

0:24

each episode is a journey to get closer

0:28

to a creature that Sam loves

0:30

a bonus you can listen to this series

0:33

with your kids for the next 6 weeks

0:36

we'll be running this limited series

0:37

every Sunday here on the daily feed but

0:40

if you want to hear all the episodes

0:42

right now you can search for it wherever

0:44

you get your podcast today episode one

0:50

hope you like

0:52

it let me tell you a story about a

0:58

hole a big gaping black hole in the

1:02

floor of my house

1:04

upstairs from the time when I climbed up

1:06

on a ladder to fix something in my

1:08

daughter's room and underneath me a

1:11

floorboard

1:15

cracked it opened up this freaky looking

1:18

Chasm about the size of a burrito but

1:21

like a big burrito a burrito stuffed

1:25

with pure Darkness

1:30

I'm honestly scared of this hole and I

1:33

was supposed to fix it before something

1:35

bad happened but I kept putting it

1:40

off and

1:42

then something bad

1:47

[Music]

1:51

happened what happened

1:53

was our daughter's hamster mango escaped

1:57

from her cage and she didn't just climb

2:00

under a blanket or hide in a corner she

2:03

went down into the hole into this

2:06

yawning Vortex of

2:09

Doom which means she entered the secret

2:13

infinite Maze of the inside of our very

2:16

old

2:17

house now mango was a fat little Golden

2:20

floof Ball not the kind of creature who

2:24

would survive long without fresh water

2:26

and

2:27

food we looked everywhere

2:31

occasionally we thought we heard

2:32

rustling in a closet or under a dresser

2:36

and we'd shine our lights in there

2:39

nothing 24 hours passed 48 Hours passed

2:45

we tried to go on with our normal

2:47

routines but we all felt sad and on edge

2:51

it was like the whole house had a

2:54

toothache finally on the third day we

2:58

gave up

3:00

we just had to swallow hard and accept

3:03

the fact that our sweet little mango

3:06

who'd been our daughter's 16th birthday

3:08

present who used to nibble fresh

3:11

raspberries right out of our fingers

3:14

sweet little mango had met her maker

3:17

somewhere deep in the walls and someday

3:20

there'd be a terrible smell or some Home

3:23

Improvement project would uncover her

3:25

tiny tragic

3:28

skeleton however

3:30

when I say that we gave up on Mango I

3:33

should actually say that the humans in

3:35

our house gave up on her because late on

3:39

that third night when the rest of us

3:41

were all past hope a different golden

3:45

floofy creature came to the

3:47

rescue our dog

3:51

walnut walnut is a completely ridiculous

3:55

creature a purebred long-haired

3:58

miniature doxin with thick creamy fur

4:01

like vanilla pudding and a tail so fancy

4:04

it should probably be on a tropical

4:08

fish he's spoiled and lazy and he spends

4:12

most of his time staring lovingly into

4:14

my eyes or napping in

4:18

sunbeams but during the mango crisis

4:21

while all the humans were busy

4:23

grieving Walnut suddenly took a break

4:26

from his napping and became obsessed

4:29

with a small patch of our living room

4:32

wall he just stood there staring at it

4:35

pointing his long weener dog snout and

4:38

wiggling his

4:40

nose at first we ignored him because to

4:43

be honest walnut's nose is probably too

4:46

powerful for his own good so he ends up

4:48

fixated on the tiniest

4:50

things but he kept at it for hours he

4:54

looked at the wall from one side then

4:56

from the other side he cocked his head

4:59

and made little snorting noises until

5:02

finally we got the

5:05

hint I took out my tools and

5:07

disassembled this ancient set of sliding

5:10

doors in the wall to expose a dark

5:16

cave we put an open peanut butter jar on

5:19

the floor as

5:21

bait and we all held our

5:24

breath a few minutes

5:27

later out St agged

5:31

mango she was filthy covered with the

5:35

grime of the centuries probably starving

5:38

and dehydrated but she was

5:41

alive she looked like she'd climbed out

5:44

of her own grave which basically she had

5:48

we picked her up and dusted her off and

5:50

put her back in her

5:51

cage and we all showered Walnut with

5:55

extra love and praise and snuggles and

5:58

treats

6:00

and then he went back to

6:03

[Music]

6:08

sleep we humans tend to think of

6:11

ourselves as Superior with our pants and

6:14

our phones and our

6:18

skyscrapers but I

6:20

believe I have always believed that

6:23

animals are basically

6:26

magic these creatures that are so

6:28

obviously not us but that exist right

6:32

alongside us sleeping in our beds

6:36

munching grass on the side of the road

6:38

rattling their tails fearing us loving

6:42

us biting

6:43

us they enter worlds we never see they

6:47

sense things we can't detect like how

6:50

Walnut just by being Walnut rescued

6:54

mango in his lazy snuffly way he

6:58

performed a resurrection

7:02

ction in fact Walnut himself came into

7:05

our lives as a sort of

7:08

Resurrection he was our second wiener

7:10

dog a very deliberate replacement of our

7:14

first whose name was

7:16

Mobi I'm not going to say too much about

7:18

Moby here because to be very honest I

7:21

will start weeping so hard it'll ruin

7:24

all of this nice audio

7:26

equipment but

7:28

basically Mobi was the greatest dog of

7:32

my life in the most profound nonhuman

7:35

relationship I've ever had I loved him

7:39

so deeply that I became a

7:41

vegetarian my affection for this little

7:44

dog radiated out to cover the whole rest

7:47

of the animal

7:49

kingdom and I just thought that he and I

7:51

would be together

7:53

forever but of course that didn't

7:56

happen when Mobi turned 12 he got cancer

8:01

and very suddenly died and it was a

8:04

complete

8:05

shock that first night in bed I reached

8:09

out for him just pure muscle memory and

8:12

there was nothing there and I broke down

8:16

sobbing at one point I found myself

8:18

petting a photograph of his

8:21

face I was also full of

8:24

Rage I wanted to burn down the Universe

8:28

I either wanted Mooby back back which I

8:30

knew was impossible or I wanted nothing

8:34

no dog ever

8:36

again because life seemed to be some

8:39

kind of

8:40

scam a little shell game in which every

8:44

living thing secretly carried the pain

8:47

of its own

8:48

loss and I was determined never to fall

8:51

for it

8:54

again this is when my wife Sarah went

8:57

out and brought home waln

8:59

[Music]

9:04

he was from the same breeder as Mobi and

9:07

in fact the same bloodline a descendant

9:10

of Moby's father's brother's cousin or

9:13

something and walnut was outrageously

9:16

cute big eyed fuzzy clumsy strangers

9:21

gasped when they saw him in the street

9:23

friends threatened to steal him the rest

9:26

of my family needed 0er seconds to love

9:29

one

9:31

completely but he was not

9:34

Moby he was a different color with long

9:37

fur instead of short he didn't cuddle in

9:41

bed like Moby didn't walk on his leash

9:43

like Moby he didn't make little huffing

9:45

noises while he mashed his forehead into

9:48

my

9:49

chest also Walnut barked at

9:53

everything and so for a long time I did

9:57

not love him

10:00

but day by day Walnut wore down my

10:06

defenses he molded himself to my habits

10:09

and I molded myself to his and

10:12

eventually I accepted

10:15

him then I started to love him and today

10:20

it actually hurts me to say this but I

10:23

think I love Walnut as deeply as I loved

10:27

Mobi differently but as

10:32

much which means that I have fallen yet

10:35

again like a total

10:37

sucker for the stupid trick of

10:40

life and

10:43

inevitably terrible pain is on its

10:47

way because Walnut just had a birthday

10:50

he turned 12 the age Mobi was when he

10:54

died the hair on his face has turned

10:57

white

10:58

[Music]

11:00

but the hair on my face has turned white

11:02

too I'm no longer soft and unsuspecting

11:06

and naive and not just because of

11:09

Mobi a few years ago out of nowhere my

11:13

father got a horrible illness and died

11:17

right before the global pandemic that

11:19

killed millions of other fathers and

11:22

mothers and sisters and

11:24

brothers every month now there seems to

11:26

be some new terrifying report about the

11:30

decline of the whole

11:33

planet and so every morning as I drink

11:36

my coffee I run my fingers through

11:39

walnut's luscious fur and I think about

11:42

the fact that he will soon be

11:45

gone and then I think about the fact

11:48

that I too will be

11:50

gone as well all the other living things

11:53

on this planet that I've loved and

11:55

admired they'll also be

11:58

gone because we will all eventually slip

12:01

into that great Cosmic hole in the floor

12:05

and there will be no Walnut to rescue

12:08

us and I have no idea what to do about

12:12

that

12:14

except pet my

12:16

dog which feels very

12:23

anchoring the truth is we are all

12:25

animals

12:29

we are born we grow up we grow hair we

12:33

age some of us produce other animals and

12:37

they are born they grow up they watch us

12:40

lose our

12:42

hair eventually we all

12:45

die and we do all of this surrounded by

12:48

millions of other creatures human and

12:51

nonhuman who are each doing their

12:54

version of the same

12:56

thing that trajectory is set nothing we

12:59

can do about it but instead of just

13:02

feeling sad or trying to burn down the

13:05

Universe I am choosing a different path

13:09

I've decided to go out into the world to

13:12

have a series of encounters with other

13:15

creatures animals who do not live in my

13:19

house not to claim them or tame them but

13:22

to do something much simpler to just be

13:25

near them to look into their eyes and

13:29

see what I can see right there right

13:32

there they're all over well we're all

13:34

still here to see it they're

13:37

everywhere you got one wait what happens

13:40

if I put my fingers in that bottom cage

13:42

he will probably fight you to the Bone

13:44

to the Bone all right we got a loose

13:48

Parr really close to my

13:51

head is that your blood or it's blood I

13:53

think it's mine I guess what I'm asking

13:55

is for you to improvise a song about

13:58

rescuing Pufflings searching down in the

14:01

darkness below for the puffet of my

14:09

soul something like

14:13

that from The New York Times I'm Sam

14:18

Anderson this is animal

14:23

[Music]

14:30

look at

14:31

him also I've still not fixed the hole

14:34

in the floor