

Poor Alfie

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Last night, still feeling crummy from a virus that started last Thursday, I went up to bed early with a box of Kleenex and a bottle of Tylenol. Martin was downstairs, reading; and Alfie had gone outside for a final pee before bedtime.

Suddenly, from someplace behind the house, we heard the most godawful, terrifying cries from the dog. Clearly Afie, but sounds we had never heard before.

I raced downstairs. Martin was already outside with a flashlight and a big stick (actually, a handsome hand-carved walking stick that had been a gift from a friend). I fumbled around looking for shoes and a second flashlight, then joined Martin and we started searching when the cries came again...and then, after a moment, from behind the barn, came Alfie, stumbling and whimpering but alive. I think we had both pictured him grasped by the throat by a slaving coyote.

He had tangled with a porcupine. This was a first for him, and for us; and it has left me wondering why on earth such an encounter is generally portrayed as humorous, in cartoons or in children's books. This was not at all funny. The dog was in a lot of pain, and then of course had to undergo a lot MORE pain as one by one (we counted till 30, then quit counting) we wrenched those barbed quills out of him. He bled a lot. But bless his heart, he lay there, trembling but unmoving, and watched us with frightened but very trusting eyes as we tended him.

Today he is limping, and so I am taking him to the vet this afternoon just to be checked out.

Two things stand out in my mind as I write this. One: Martin and I out there in the night with a stick, fully prepared to do battle with something: coyote, or even bear. And we *would* have; that's the amazing thing. I think we would have taken on a full-sized bear with rocks and sticks and our bare hands, if that's what we had found, and if it had had Alfie in its jaws.

But second: the look in the dog's eyes. It was the better part of an hour, I think, that we tended him, again and again hurting him, making him bleed; and he never flinched or whimpered or tried to flee. He lay motionless except for his shudders, and he watched us ... and he knew we were helping him, and he let us continue.

Good boy. Good boy. That's what we kept saying to him throughout the ordeal. And it was true.



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