

The Newness of Things

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Last night I left Alfie in his crate and went off for a couple of hours to a chamber music concert. It is one of the fine things in this area, in summer, the Sebago Long Lake Music Festival every Tuesday night, and last night's concert was no exception except that it was SOOO HOT that I suffered for the performers on the stage during a Mozart string quintet; between each movement they each had to wipe their faces and necks. And the theater, Deertrees Theater, a historic and quite wonderful place in the woods (Harrison, Maine) gave out bottles of water to each member of the audience as we entered.

When I got home, it was still very hot (I had left two separate fans blowing on the puppy's crate); there was a half a moon, and when I took him out on the lawn to pee, Alfie experienced shadows for the first time: his and mine, quite long across the moonlit lawn.

It reminded me of a passage in my book GOSSAMER when the protagonist, Littlest, experiences the same thing:

They tiptoed across. Littlest noticed her own shadow in the moonlight. "My goodness!" she said. "I didn't know we had shadows!"

"Of course we do. All creatures have shadows. It's a phenomenon created by light."

A phenomenon created by light. What a fine phrase, Littlest thought. She twirled suddenly on the rug and watched her shadow dance.

Alfie didn't dance. But he growled and charged and then stopped, startled, when his shadow moved and charged in return. It was fun to watch. I was struck as I am so often by the capacity for wonder in the young, as they discover each new thing.

I seem to recall that there is another passage about shadows across a lawn in my way-back (1980) book AUTUMN STREET (and if people ask, as they sometimes do, which of my own books is my favorite, AUTUMN STREET is the one I usually name). I don't have that book with me here in Maine so I can't check the passage but I think it describes (from a child's viewpoint) the shadows of tall bushes looking like furred creatures reaching their paws across the lawn.

They had predicted close to 100 degrees here today, before the heat wave ends tonight, so I was dreading one more day of misery; but this morning it is raining (and for Alfie that was one more new and startling thing when I took him out: (lots of head-shaking and eye-blinking) RAIN! so perhaps the heat will end sooner than expected.

One of the next new things that Alfe will encounter is the underground invisible (electric) fence. it is there to keep him safe, of course; but I dread the preliminary training which involves what the invisible fence company euphemistically calls "corrections." It is electric shocks, folks, make no mistake about that! But it works. Bandit never crossed that border, nor does my son's golden retriever, Tillie. It is just that like so many learning experiences, it is painful.

Tags: Untagged