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Mercy

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Mercy

From the time that Liz and I adopted him, Finn has been preternaturally attuned to the needs of others.

With my rough and tumble grandson he is always ready to rumble. With my granddaughter, who is sometimes uneasy with him, he calms down. When a little more than a year after we got him Liz lay dying of lung cancer, Finn would lie in the bed next to her most of every day, gently nuzzling her knee with his nose. She was clearly comforted by his compassionate presence.



With me, depending on his read of the situation, he is calm and steady or wild and mischievous, always mindful of the human he is dealing with and my current level of tolerance.

His judgment is immaculate. His empathic qualities have left an impression on nearly all of those who have met him in his four plus years of life. His magnetic capacity to win people over is simply remarkable. By now I have come to take this beautiful and highly nuanced disposition for granted.

Nowhere was my faith in Finn's innate kindness more evident than last week, on January 9, as he and I spent a day together in our home-away-from-home in Truro, Massachusetts, near the tip of Cape Cod. On that day I was sitting at a round table by a large sliding glass door that leads out to a deck. The day was quiet and still. The sky was gray and the calm air had warmed up some from the arctic freeze that had gripped the East Coast the previous day.

Then, breaking the quiet, I heard a sudden thump. Finn heard it too and rushed to the sliding door looking out towards the deck. He was looking down at the weathered planks on the other side of the window. I looked down too. There, motionless, lay a small gray bird. Seduced by its own reflection, it had crashed into the window.

With eager intent Finn scratched at the glass of the slider with his right front paw, signaling his wish to go out and attend to this fallen creature. Following his directive I slid the door open and he went out to the deck.

I watched him there for a minute or so, circling around the bird and inspecting and sniffing its motionless body. For a moment he stepped away, considering what to do next. Again he approached the bird and sniffed.

Then, with great care, he took the bird gently in his mouth and carried it down the stairs to the land beyond the deck. Just as gently, he placed its inanimate body onto the ground. After doing this he started to rub his nose along the breast of the bird, attentively administering doggie CPR with the cold nose at the end of his snout. He did this for a minute or so. Then stepped away.

I was floored by the whole situation, by the sight of Finn seeming to place hope against hope to reanimate this wretched fledgling from its slumber. If, somehow, it turned out that the bird had not been killed by the impact, but was simply stunned and could be revived, the tale of Finn's instinctual heroism would be canonized in the folklore of my life. A true miracle.

Again, Finn began to rub the bird with his nose and proceeded with this for a minute or so before stepping away from his pitiable ward once more.

His visits and administrations to the bird continued for additional minutes, punctuated by periods of retreat.

Then, perhaps ten minutes after the thump that had occasioned these events, he returned to the bird once more. Slowly, he lifted the bird by its head holding it tenderly between his incisors.

Then in an instant, and with great gusto, he took the rest of the bird into his mouth and summarily ate it, giving it a quick crunching chew and swallowing it whole: feathers, beak, bones and all.

Good dog, Finn! Good dog!

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