

The Call of the Wild

Nobody asked but ...

We are in our twelfth year of living on the farm, but a thing happened last week that made us feel helpless for the first time. The dogs who live with us, who run free, caused the death of a yearling deer, close enough to us that we had to try to save the deer's life ... but fail. The deer had been maimed somewhere in the woods or on the road. If that happened directly due to the dogs, we have no way of knowing. While we were clearing driftwood in the creek, suddenly in a great rush the deer came hobbling out of the brush in a feeder creek, and the three dogs set upon it. These are all rescued dogs, all of mixed breed but clearly related to black labrador retrievers. They have been mostly a joy to be around. They couldn't catch a sound bodied deer, I expect, so they have mostly kept our garden free of rabbits and deer. Our son-in-law opined that the small deer had been hit by a car or truck on our country lane which runs close by our stream, and therefore, broken-legged, was no match for the dogs. Nevertheless, we fought them off while slipping around on the muddy creek bed, hip deep in Spring runoff. I went to get leashes to restrain the dogs, then led them up the hill to an old, disused kennel in the old, disused tobacco barn. I got back to Kilgorette as quickly as possible, and I found her sitting in the water hugging the deer. It became clear, however, that the deer was likely too badly wounded to survive in the wild. It's hind leg was broken in many places. Although we are both too squeamish, we knew the deer needed mercy. We went to a neighbor for help, and he readily volunteered to euthanize the unfortunate animal. Kilgorette was devastated and I was not far behind. We both suffered from the hangover after a massive adrenaline rush, and from the grief on not being able to preserve an innocent life. We are beginning to recover.

Kilgore Forelle