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Glenna M. Andrade

Roger Williams University, gandrade8474@outlook.com

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Sleeping With The Dog

by Glenna Andrade

You know the old adage about letting sleeping dogs lie? This has taken on added meaning in my house. My Cocker Spaniel, Bogey, is the real landlord of "my" bed.

I suppose I should've listened to my mother long ago about not allowing a dog on a bed, but she was worried about sensible things like fleas in the blanket or dirt on the sheets. I was young then, but even now I am suckered in by my dog's companionship. In fact, he's so fickle, I feel honored when he curls up with me. He flops on my bed only during the February freeze. Come July, he's snoozing on the cool floor, blocking the fan.

Each winter night, it's the same. It begins innocently enough. The minute I enter the bedroom, he's already snagged the best spot: the one and only comfortable place in my king-sized bed. He looks so angelic, I feel guilty about disturbing him. His small body sighs in innocent slumber. His floppy ears sweep across my pillow like wings. You'd never guess at the other maneuvers he's plotted for the night.

Quietly, I sneak under the sheets, hug up my breath, and nestle in as kindly as if he were my sick child. I doze off and on, all night repeating to myself: *Don't disturb the dog.*

Hours later I'm still awake, though I've wished myself to six different Caribbean beaches where the sand molds to my body perfectly. My actual comfort is about as real as dream clouds... only when I snuggle into "my" spot can I really sleep.

I lean against him, hoping he'll take the hint to shove over. I press against him and rest, nudge harder and doze, push again and nod off. He doesn't get the hint. This sleeping 30 pound dog has the stability of a 300 pound anchor. Drowsy, I put up with almost anything -- fur in the mouth, a moist nose at the neck, or Mighty Dog breath.

Sometimes he shifts and resettles himself in the exact spot where my legs belong. Okay, I think, *don't disturb the dog.* Instead, I'll just hunch up in the fetal position. When I get cramped, my muscles twitch, and he mutters as if to say: "Hey, you, this is my bed." So I freeze my position and hope he'll get too hot and depart. But later, he hasn't, and I awake as cramped as a clove hitch in hemp rope.

Gingerly, I stretch my legs. His small body feels as big as a beached cruise ship, and he's snoring like its engine. Okay, I'll just move my legs gently to each side. Spraddle-legged, I soon find I can't turn over, but I cue myself, *don't disturb the dog.*

Later I wake again to discover his weight has increased to 3000 pounds across my ankles. I have no toes. My back and knees ache, and my joints are stiff as frozen mackerel.

Don't disturb the dog! I remind myself to take aspirin in the morning.

But he thinks nothing of disturbing me. Wild, sudden whimpers wake me. I'm startled by his brisk bark at a dream rabbit or by the long growl at some ghostly bloodhound. He whines shrilly at night kitties; all the while he's sound asleep. Then he sits up straight and passes along the neighborhood dogs' howls, like batons to runners, and I imagine pranksters, or prowlers, or perverts, or a mob of mad axe-murderers.

But don't disturb the dog!

And if it's not his noise, then it's his action. His midnight desperate digging at the bedspread to get comfortable, claws uprooting the quilt's threads in short snaps. Or his thunderpaws while he circles round and round to nest up the covers. The hard thump when he resettles sends tidal waves through the mattress, though it's not a waterbed. *Sometimes, I think, it was easier sleeping with my ex-husband.*

But I never disturb the dog. At night, he is in command. He knows it too. He knows the pull he has. My sheet shrinks to the size of a handkerchief corner. The blanket bellyflops to the rug like some giant manta ray. The pillow, when I can find it, reminds me first of low tide and then I remember Bogey needs a bath. Still, I don't disturb the dog.

In the morning, I discover that I'm clinging to the edge of the mattress as if it were a life raft with sharks below. But the dog has spent the remainder of the night -- short as it was for me -- curled up alone on the downstairs couch. Traitor dog! I am stiff and weary, and he's settled comfortably. With the whole day to sleep late, he's taking his pre-nap snooze.

I often wonder, *aren't I supposed to be the boss around here?*

Lately I've come to identify other people whose dogs sleep with them. You know them because they're grouchy every morning. They mope around all day. They retire early at night, just after the ritual of letting the dog out and waiting hours until he returns.

I read somewhere recently that dogs sleep a total of thirteen hours a day, and I'll vouch for it. And that's in addition to sleeping all night too. What else do dogs do but laze around all the time? Have you ever wondered what they do on their vacation? I know what I do on mine. I go away on a long trip to a far away beach, leaving the dog behind to command my empty bed, just so I can get some real sleep.

Glenna Andrade, an English teacher, has been working on Bogey's vocabulary skills. He responds to many words and questions and can even say "I love you."

Glenna may be reached at: 74 Linda Avenue
Portsmouth, RI 02871