

Golden

*published in the January, 2012 edition of
Charleston (SC) Style Magazine*

I love being at the shore. My job today is counting waves. A retired gentleman of almost seventy years, I count only the waves I like. Over the last hour or so I noted three and then took a break. I like a little conversation on my breaks, but I'm not getting much of a reaction from the dog this morning. She has become immune to my chatter. Perhaps I'll find diversion elsewhere.

Ears flopped forward, Maggie lies sleeping next to me in a cleft between the dunes near Folly Beach, where a path allows humans to approach the great thundering god of the sea. Soaking up the sun on this late winter day, her hair fluffs from time to time as the breeze blows over us. The Golden Retriever's profusion of fur gets shed constantly on my rugs at home, but she never runs out of the stuff, her own personal miracle of loaves and fishes. While the wind playfully caresses her golden coat, it finds little to work with on my balding noggin.

Down on the beach at the water line comes a small black dog pulling a bundled-up young woman at the end of a leash. I get ready for an eruption of territorial madness when Maggie realizes strangers are among us. She sleeps soundly, but her nose and those ears never fully shut down. They're always in low gear.

The sound of a tiny dog yipping carries over the pounding surf up the sand to our aerie and Maggie opens one eye. I can tell she's thinking about behaving, but both of us know she won't. A moment later, an explosion of sand showers me as Maggie launches into the air and bolts toward the beach, wildly barking as if Martians had just landed and it's her job to save the state of South Carolina.

I prepared for this, of course, by tying a long rope around my ankle, leaving both hands free to turn the pages of my book in the wind. But a seventy pound bolt of lightning is not something you want attached to your leg, not now when she's already halfway to the water with my old shoe flying along at the end of the rope. Taking off my other loafer, I head down the sand in my socks.

Maggie's favorite quarry is humans, because she believes she's one of us. She just runs faster. A turtle could play catch better than Maggie, but she is convinced she's special anyway. When our granddaughters come to visit, Maggie runs and plays right along side the girls. At night she nuzzles her way under the covers with them and in the morning she's first at the breakfast table, where you can count on her asking for seconds of everything, please.

When I arrive at the water, the young woman is down on her knees, playfully wrestling with Maggie. I'm relieved the girl is not a skittish lass who might run off into the surf, dragging her little fellow underwater at the end of his tether. She's very sweet, as young women usually are to older gentlemen. It's taken a few years to get used to how the opposite sex relates to me as I get older. Sweet it is, I guess, from here on out.

The girl continues her walk along the shoreline. I haul Maggie back up the sand to our perch, where I reward her with a small treat from my coat pocket. That's the third young woman Maggie has introduced me to this week. Good dog. I wonder when bikini season starts.

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