

## Golden

I love being at the shore. My job today is counting waves. The nice thing is I don't have to count them all. Over the last hour or so I counted three and then took a break. I have the dog double check my numbers and she agrees, or at least she doesn't argue with my total. I'm not getting much of a reaction from her, but that's not unusual. She's by now immune to my chatter.

Maggie lies in the sun up against a tuft of dune grass soaking up the rays, a perfect picture of contentment. Her golden coat of hair lifts from time to time as the sea breeze blows over us and ruffles up her ears. On me, the wind finds little to play with as it stirs what's left of the hair given me by my mother so long ago.

Today the temperature is only in the fifties, but we're cozily tucked into the warm cleft of the dune. Down on the beach at the water line comes a small black dog pulling its bundled-up owner along at the end of a leash. I wonder if the young woman wears a tiny bikini on warmer days. Seeing nubile young ladies on the sand dressed in parkas seems a small price to pay for coming to the Carolinas in February when most of the world is elsewhere. At my age, it's worth it. Probably.

I get ready for a canine outburst to erupt when Maggie realizes strangers are on the beach. I'm surprised the dog isn't the first to notice, but when Maggie closes her eyes, she means it. However, that nose and those ears never get turned off.

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

I prepared for this, of course, by tying a long rope around my ankle, leaving both hands free to read my book in the wind. But a ninety pound bolt of lightning is not something you want attached to your leg, especially since she's now halfway to the beach, with

my comfortable old shoe flying along behind at the end of the rope. Taking off my other loafer, I head down the dune in my socks.

The favorite quarry of a Golden Retriever is people. Other dogs are a close second. Whoever started this breed must have mixed in a big heart with the long hair and liquid brown eyes. They are family dogs, to be sure. When our granddaughters come to visit, Maggie convinces herself she is one of them and runs and plays right along side the girls. At night she nuzzles her way under the covers with them and in the morning is first at the breakfast table where she can be counted upon to ask for seconds of everything, please.

Ever alert and ready to bark at anything that moves, Goldens are excellent "announce" dogs, but not protective watch dogs. If indeed there are Russians coming ashore down the beach, Maggie will sell her soul to them for a dog biscuit or just a pat on the head.

The woman is down on her knees and playfully wrestling with Maggie when I arrive at the water. I'm relieved she's not a skittish lass who might have run off into the surf, dragging her little fellow underwater at the end of his tether. The tiny runt is yipping up a storm and nipping at Maggie. I'm reminded of why I sometimes unkindly refer to these little breeds as drop-kick dogs.

We speak for a few moments and the girl is quite sweet, as young women usually are to older gentlemen. It took a few years for me to get used to how the opposite sex related to me as I got older. But there's nothing to be done about it. Sweet it is, from here on out.

I haul Maggie back up the sand to our perch, where I return to my book and keep a watchful eye out for Russians. The girl continues her walk up the shoreline to the breakwater. I begin to wonder if she's wearing a bikini under her parka. And I can always hope when she comes back down the beach the temperature will have gone up to 80.

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