

You Reap What You Sow ...

By Judith LeRoy

"That's it, Leo! You're out of here! And take your damn ball with you!!!"

Then I'm unceremoniously pushed off the bed, hauled out of the bedroom, and slam! The door closes behind Her.

I plop my brown furry body down next to the door with the fond hope that my deep, woeful respirations ... breathe in, breathe out ... will rattle the wood and keep Her awake. Maybe then Her conscience will twinge, and She'll reflect on the enormous wrong She's done me. Who'd have thought that standing on Her chest at 4:30 in the morning and dropping my tennis ball on Her face would cause so much angst?

Yes, it's true that I get in more trouble than the other Bearded Collies in this household. But Packer is Mr. Goody-Two-Shoes ("How far should I jump, ma'am?" "Is this what you had in mind???"), and Madoc—well, Madoc is about 100 years old and just too ancient to create turmoil. They still call him Mad Dawg sometimes because when he was young, he was so wired that his eyes would occasionally twirl in non-concentric circles. But that was his youth. Now he spends most of his time regally resting, uttering words of wisdom and, of late, proverbs, to confirm his reputation as elder Bearded sage ... trying to instill awe and respect in us younger canine minions, I presume.

These days, Madoc is likely to wake up from a sound sleep, lift his head and mutter, "*A stitch in time saves nine!*" Then he'll put his head down between his paws, shut his eyes, and Packer and I are left to contemplate what in God's name that has to do with life as a Bearded Collie in a modern American household.

And Madoc's adage about "*The road to hell*" being "*paved with good intentions*" positively confounds me, although Packer says that I'm living proof of it. Madoc always shakes his head sagaciously and looks at me when he says it. And after Madoc talks about this enigmatic road to hell, he finishes with, "*The more things change, the more they stay the same.*"

"In other words," says Packer, looking at me, "plan to be in trouble for the next 10 years or so."

But I'm not really bad. I just don't believe in lying around—"Letting the grass grow under my feet" in Madoc-speak. I'm busy ... active! It's true that those activities occasionally have unfortunate outcomes—sometimes for others, but just as often for me. Take yesterday, for example. It's no wonder I couldn't sleep last night.

Yesterday started out like all other days. Well, not quite all other days, because She Who Loves and Feeds Us, our Mistress (call name Judy), had a conference in a neighboring city. She asked her sister, Jane, to dog sit for the day. We love it when "Sis" sits—we get away with murder. Even Mr. Goody-Two-Shoes has been known to hop off the straight and narrow when Jane is in charge.

Our only problem with Sis is that she believes what our Mistress Judy says—Not what she does. Dinner time is a good example. Judy says, “Three-quarters of a cup of kibble for each of them,” and Sis fastidiously levels off the three-quarters measuring cup. Judy, on the other hand, blithely scoops a generous, heaping helping in a teacup without blinking an eye.

“And no treats!” Judy tells her. So, when Sis is nibbling and we’re begging, she sorrowfully says, “I’m sorry, boys, but your Mother says I can’t share!” What blatant hypocrisy! Our Mistress never eats more than half her lunch because she’s feeding our ravening maws as we jostle for bites under the table. When Sis comes over, we get many affectionate pats and platitudes, but we’ll be hungry puppies by nightfall.

Sis was in charge today, and along about 11am, my tummy was really growling. I needed sustenance that a chew bone just can’t provide.

I sauntered into the kitchen, put my paws on the table and did a little browsing. Madoc, dozing on the floor under the table, opened one eye and said, “*The grass is always greener ...*” Well, that’s true, Madoc. And the greenest grass always manages to be above canine eye level. I’ve found that it’s always more rewarding to search tables and counters for palatable food stuffs than to sniff about on floors for the occasional stale bread crumb.

Hmm. Here’s a pack of gum. I disregard it because gum is scary stuff. After you get that paper off, it smells like paradise, but you chew and chew and chew, and nothing happens. And then it can fall out, and if it gets on your paws and you try to get it back in your mouth, it gets tangled in your hair and sticks there. And then Judy says, “Oh, Lord, Leo! How am I ever going to get that out?” And then I’m confronted by ice cubes, grooming brushes, powder, and other instruments of torture. Nope, no gum.

What else? Vitamin pills. No, they taste yucky. Tried ‘em already. A bowl of fruit?

Madoc opened the other eye and said, “*An apple a day keeps the veterinarian away!*”

Thanks, Madoc, but previous experience has taught me that my digestive tract doesn’t like apples. I tried them as a youngster and spent the next day in the bathtub having what our Mistress calls my “tail feathers” sponged. And I didn’t even need Packer to tell me that I stunk.

Oh! What’s this! Way far back is—oh lucky day! An unopened package of Oreo cookies! Oh wow! Nirvana!!

Madoc watched me and uttered, “*The proof of the pudding is in the eating.*” Then he rested his head on the floor and closed his eyes again. I could hardly wait to sink my teeth into this particular proof of pudding.

I need to explain Oreo cookies to dogs who don’t have access to people food and people who live in a place where Oreos aren’t a staple of life. Oreos aren’t just any cookie. They have three parts — two flat, brownish-black, circular crunchy, chocolate-y pieces with this absolutely yummy, wonderful, melt-in-your-mouth, deliciously sweet white frosting between them—the frosting holds the whole cookie together. I love that marvelous frosting in the middle. I think intelligent humans do too, because I’ve seen them take an Oreo, pull it apart and lick the frosting just like I do. It’s easier for humans, though, because they have thumbs to do the complicated detail work. It’s harder with paws.

The Oreos. I strain and stretch, but they're just too far back to reach. OK, it's time to get serious. "*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*,"—Madoc's right about that! But I want those cookies in my mouth, forget about hands and bushes.

I looked over my shoulder. Sis was busy on the phone, telling a friend about her new shoes. I'm so glad dogs don't wear shoes, but I also realize that if humans didn't wear them, puppies would have fewer things to chew. I particularly liked the strappy parts of sandals or the shoelaces on sneakers. Actually, I still do.

Packer was lying at Sis's feet, fawning and dozing, alternately. Madoc had flipped over onto his back, and his eyes were both shut as he practiced some new proverbs. "*A loaded wagon makes no noise*." "*A rolling stone gathers no moss*." "*A man standing on a toilet is one high on pot*." Oh, good grief, Madoc!!

Sis's attention was obviously elsewhere so, in Madoc's vernacular, there was "*No time like the present*." I jumped really high and landed with all four paws on the table. I grabbed the Oreos, leaped off and rushed out the dog door. I got to the middle of the backyard before I carefully ripped the paper off the top of the bag. Carefully, because I didn't want all the cookies to fall out—I wanted to save some for later, after Sis didn't give me enough dinner and I needed dessert.

I took one out and looked at it. It was so, so beautiful. Madoc's "*One picture is worth a thousand words*," filled my mind. Soon that picture would fill my belly, too. I ate one fast, black parts and white filling, and then I took my time eating a second one, separating the pieces, licking off the yummy white frosting, then crunching down the chocolate-y frosting covers. Yum!!

Suddenly, an uproar in the house. Packer was yapping his fool head off and Madoc's sonorous, sleepy woofs split the silence. I heard the rushing noise of a truck as it stopped in front of our house! Oh, wow! The Little Brown Truck!! That wonderful, bark-worthy United Parcel Service truck was stopping at our door!! There's rarely anything in UPS packages for us Beardies except at Christmas when Grandmom sends us rawhides and stuffed toys, but the occasion to cause a ruckus is reason enough to indulge.

But I couldn't leave my Oreos!! I couldn't take them into the house—Sis would see them and take them away. Or, even worse, Packer and Madoc might see them, and I'd have to share. What could I do???? I ricocheted around the yard until I reached the bushes behind the vegetable garden. Yes, the very place! I carefully tucked the Oreos deep under one of the bushes, near the fence. Then I galloped into the house to greet the Little Brown Truck delivery man.

The UPS man did his job well, pretending to be scared of us. He had Sis sign her name and gave her a big box. We barked and twirled and leaped and barked some more. Then we stopped so he would relent and give us each a friendly pat before he left. He'd long since figured out that Madoc's proverb, "*Barking dogs seldom bite*," is particularly true around us Beardies.

Ritual over, Madoc toddled back to the family room to drift off again, uttering, over his shoulder, "*Don't put all your eggs in one basket!*"—prophetic words, it turned out, although I didn't realize it at the time. Sis walked into the study, back to the phone. Packer followed her.

I don't have to tell you where I—Leo, cat burglar extraordinaire—headed.

I dashed through the backyard and plowed under the bush and ... no Oreos!! The whole package was gone!! Wait a minute, here. I wasn't away more than 10 minutes!! Madoc's proverb, "*You never know what you've got until it's gone*," echoed in my ears. No, that's not true. I knew exactly what I had, and I wanted it back!

I'm not a dog for nothing. I put my nose to the ground and thought like a bloodhound. I followed the lingering smell of Oreo cookies—and something else. There was another heady aroma mixed with the scintillating scent of Oreos, and I sort of recognized it. I got to a bush about 25 feet away and remembered precisely and specifically what that mystery odor was all about. There, crouching under the bush, clutching my precious package of Oreos, was a lousy opossum.

For those of you who have never seen a North American opossum, let me tell you that they are truly ugly little fellows. They're about a foot long, with ratty pink tails that seem to be another foot long. I've seen this guy before—he's slow moving and not too bright. He's got a sparse, dingy gray coat, beady eyes, a mouse-like nose and HE HAD MY OREOS!

I decided to be diplomatic. As Madoc would say, "*You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar*."

"Hi there, 'Possum! How are you today?"

"Mmph, runder am finn."

He had a mouthful of Oreo cookie, and he wasn't enunciating clearly.

I went right to the heart of the matter. Time to show some strength, here.

"Mr. 'Possum, you may not know this, but those are my Oreos. I hid them under the bush, intending to come back later, but events intervened, and ..."

"Eat dog poop and die!" said Mr. Friendly 'Possum, after a large swallow of Oreo.

Stunned, I try another tactic. "I'm willing to share."

"What's to share, mop-face? I've got the Oreos and I'm going to eat every damn one of them right before your hairy eyeballs. Wanna make something of it?"

Ooh! This guy's pugnacious! But he's only a foot long, for heaven's sake. How tough can he be? It's time to stop messing around and go dominant.

"Enough of this crap, rat-face! Those are my cookies and I want them now!!"

I barked these fighting words at the small creature, remembering Madoc's proverb —"*You can't make an omelet without cracking eggs*." I was ready to break more than an eggshell over this opossum's head.

But then his lips parted, and he displayed some shiny, sharp, little white teeth—true, they'd be a lot whiter if he hadn't been cramming chocolate-y Oreo cookies down his little gullet. He let out something between a growl and a hiss and swelled up so that he looked at least two

feet long. His tail stood up straight in the air—just like I’ve been taught never, ever, to do in a show ring! Who knew an opossum could do that?

Hmm. What should I do now? I don’t like violence and I really hate pain. I could just feel those little sharp teeth digging into my ears—oh, no! Not my tender ears! I quivered at the thought.

Bad move. The pugnacious ‘possum took this as a sign of weakness, which of course it was. He got another Oreo out of the package and started chomping it.

“Mmff, surgte phewy!” he snarled at me.

Madoc and Shakespeare are right. “*A coward dies a thousand deaths*,” and I was slowly expiring as this rotten creature made fast work of my Oreos. This was downright embarrassing. I needed reinforcement. How about Packer?? I’d give him a cookie or two for his assistance.

As Madoc says, “*It takes two to tango*,” and Packer can really tango. He may be a Goody-Two-Shoes, but he’s a damn tough Goody-Two-Shoes. I saw him bark off a wild pig when we lived in Arizona, and once he scared away a mountain lion. Whenever the coyotes came around our chain link fence, he scattered them mighty fast. He should be able to handle this mangy marsupial.

I hustled into the study.

“Hey, Pack! What’s hangin’?”

I was trying to sound cool and unconcerned. If I got all wound up and Packer realized it, his Oreo price would escalate. Packer may be a Goody-Two-Shoes, but he’s also a really smart Goody-Two-Shoes.

Packer eyed me suspiciously.

“What do you want, Shrimp?”

Can I help it if I only measure a normal 21 ½ inches from floor to withers, and he’s a gigantic 23? No. And I won’t even go there. “*Good things come in small packages*,” or so Madoc says. Besides, I knew Packer was playing with my mind. Like I said, Packer is one smart cookie. He usually knows when something’s up, and he was trying to put me at a disadvantage.

I mulled over my response, trying to out-think Packer—a complete waste of time. Get right to the heart of the matter while there are still some Oreos left, I told myself.

“Packer, it’s like this. I snatched a package of Oreo cookies off the table and took them outside. I hid them under a bush. The ‘possum that hangs around the woods next door got into our backyard and found them. He’s got them and won’t give them back.”

“There were Oreos on the table? I don’t think so. They’d never leave Oreos lying around like that. It’s just too much temptation in a three-dog household!”

Packer dismissively put his head between his paws and shut his eyes. I’ll admit it, I lost it. I got hysterical. My voice rose to a shrill howl.

"Oreos, Packer! A whole package. Honest to God. Would I lie about Oreos? No!! The 'possum's got 'em! Help me get them back and I'll give you half!!"

Packer lifted his eyebrows—my agitated state must have lent credibility to my appeal. Packer scowled at me, obviously thinking hard with that scary-smart brain of his. Then he shook his head. He'd made a decision.

"That opossum is one mean dude, especially when he's on a sugar high. If he's been eating Oreos, I'm not going to mess with him."

This, from a dog who's turned away charging javelinas and howling coyotes? Then he said, "Anyway, Sis gave me half her chocolate chip cookie, and that's enough chocolate for a dog in a day."

Oh swell! Here I am, working my ass off stealing for a living, and Packer's getting hand-outs from a person who has sworn never to give dogs treats or sweets. Just dandy!

And things were about to get a lot worse.

"Leo!" came a voice from the kitchen. "Where are all those Oreos? Leo, where are you, Leo?"

Yeah, sure. Par for the course. Whenever something's wrong, they come looking for Leo. I heard fast moving feet coming toward me. Sis found me.

"Oh Leo! You have Oreo crumbs in your beard! You ate all that chocolate? You might die!!!"

Die from eating Oreos? Give me a break, Toots. Maybe a pound of dark chocolate would be lethal for some stupid dog, but I wouldn't eat anything that tasted that ugly.

"Vamoose! Scram!! Outta my way!" I yelled—rude, I know. But these were tough times. The opossum had my cookies, and I had to save them.

She didn't listen. Instead, she grabbed my collar, snapped on my lead, and off we went in the car to the vet. I sat on the back seat, a black cloud of despair descending. In my mind's eye, my precious Oreos were being crunched, chomped, swallowed, and digested by that lousy rotten rodent-ish marsupial!!

The vet's office was teeming with dogs, cats, ferrets—even a miniature horse, whose owner was telling a harried receptionist that her pony weighed less than some dogs in the waiting room, so why should Prancer be considered a barnyard animal and have to wait outside? I usually enjoy vet visits. I get to talk with canines from all stations in life, and I've met some really crazy characters. But my heart wasn't into socializing today. My only hope was that after the vet told Sis that Oreos wouldn't kill me, I could get back in time to rescue a cookie or two.

The vet assistant ushered us into the examining room, and the vet bustled in looking concerned—he knows I get into trouble—until he heard the story.

“And I’ll just die if I’ve killed my sister’s dog!” Sis finished her recital of the facts, as she imagined them.

The vet rolled his eyes and assured Sis that I was not in mortal danger.

“Didn’t your sister ever tell you about Leo and chocolate? This is the very same dog that ate almost half a pound of Hershey milk chocolate kisses when he was less than a year old. The only ill-effect was an aluminum foil-covered backyard because Leo didn’t unwrap the kisses before he ate them!”

I remembered. Actually, what I remembered was that the ensuing tinselled pieces of dog poop were mighty scratchy in passage. Ugly! Never again!! I peel them before eating them, now.

But then the vet said, “Leo is due for his rabies shot next month. Since you’re here, why don’t we just do it now and save your sister a trip.”

A shot!! Oh, no! I told you I hate pain. An hour ago, I couldn’t face a modest-sized marsupial’s incisors to save a precious package of Oreos, but now I have to suffer that ugly rabies needle that seems twice as long as the damned ‘possum’s tail!”

There was no recourse, of course. I hid my head, shut my eyes, and waited for the worst. I only squeaked a little when the needle plunged through my skin. Yuck! I lost my Oreos and ended up with an unexpected rabies shot. What else can go wrong?

I’ll tell you what else. The vet started talking like Madoc! As he scratched my chest and ruffled my ears, he said, “Stay out of trouble, Leo, and you’ll save yourself from emergency medical trips. Remember, ‘*You reap what you sow ...*’”

As we left the vet’s office, the receptionist took Sis’s credit card and offered me one of those cardboard-tasting “healthy” dog biscuits. I turned up my nose and the receptionist said, “Don’t like these cookies, Leo? Too bad. It’s all we’ve got—take it or leave it. ‘*Beggars can’t be choosers.*’”

Oh my God. Proverbs from her, too? Madoc’s more contagious than bird flu.

As if things weren’t bad enough, Madoc’s voice assaulted my brain. “*You can’t win them all.*” I wasn’t expecting to win them all, Madoc. I was just hoping to win one single lousy Oreo battle! “*When the world hands you lemons,*” Madoc’s voice continued, “*make lemonade.*” I don’t want lemonade, Madoc!! I want Oreos!

“Arghhhh ... oee ... owwwww!” is what I said. Very loudly.

The receptionist, Sis, and all the other creatures in the waiting room looked at me nervously—like I had suddenly gone bonkers. And I just might. It was possible that I’d go absolutely, totally, stark raving nuts if Sis didn’t take me home to save my vanishing cookie supply. Right now!

But it was a painfully slow ride home. Sis was clearly relieved because she’d saved me for yet another day and another fray and gotten me my rabies shot to boot. When she walked me through the front door, Packer was drowsing on the sofa. “*The warrior, home from the wars,*” he muttered. Good Lord, Packer’s beginning to sound just like Madoc. God help me!

And Madoc, he was lying about two feet from the dog door, sound asleep. I morosely walked past him, prepared to survey the carnage in the back yard. After all this time, there was little hope that the 'possum had left even an Oreo cookie crumb for me.

But, what's this? The distinctive smell of Oreos was wafting above the slumbering Madoc. I leaned a little closer. Yes, there was no question about it. Oreos. Pungent, delicious, delectable Oreos. I stared at Madoc. I nudged him. No response. I nudged him a little harder. Madoc opened his eyes.

"MY Oreos?" I said indignantly. "You ate my Oreos???? An old codger who stands on four paws only when it's time to eat or poop? An old fart like YOU got my Oreos?"

Madoc yawned and grinned. "*Still water runs deep,*" he murmured. He yawned again. "Yeah, I ate 'em. My friend Petey 'Possum gave them to me. There were too many for him to finish."

Madoc burped an Oreo-flavored belch, put his head down and closed his eyes. "*Make hay while the sun shines,*" he advised.

Petey? Madoc and the opossum are on a first-name basis? The 'possum GAVE Madoc my Oreos? I looked at Packer in open-muzzled bewilderment. Packer offered no sympathy.

"Well, Sport, it was pretty stupid to let Petey Possum steal your cookies in the first place, wasn't it? After you and Sis left, Madoc went outside to pee, and his friend Petey gave him the rest of the cookies because they were giving him a stomachache."

"Mad Dawg and the 'possum are friends?" I couldn't believe my long brown ears.

"Sure. Madoc and Petey hang around together every morning while you're off playing with your tennis balls. Petey teaches Madoc proverbs—you know those stupid sayings he's always spouting off—and Madoc brings him a couple of pieces of his morning kibble in payment. You didn't think Madoc made up all of those proverbs by himself, did you? This is the very same dog that couldn't learn "*Come!*" in three years of obedience training."

Packer frowned. "Or maybe he was just plain too smart to learn. I never quite figured it out."

It's very true that smartness can be miscalculated. Hadn't I just this afternoon called a crafty, Oreo-stealing, proverb-citing 'possum stupid?

I was speechless. Barkless. I walked over to Madoc and stared at him. He lifted that old brown head and winked an eye—the other one was rakishly covered by hair that had escaped his ponytail. I had clearly underestimated him, too, hadn't I?

"*Every dog has his day!*" chuckled the old sage. "Who says '*You can't teach an old dog new tricks?*'" he wondered aloud. "Sometimes, '*Life is just a bowl of cherries.*'"

Or Oreos. He burped again. Maybe wisdom DOES come with age.

So that was my miserable yesterday. Is it any wonder that I'm sleepless and frustrated this dismal gray morning? I think of Packer, curled up beside our Mistress, and Madoc, lying on the floor next to the window with a gentle breeze rustling his long hair. And here I am, cast out of my own bedroom ... my little sleeping rug in the master bath unoccupied and lonely ... my hairy body pressed close enough to rattle the bedroom door in a feeble attempt to guilt my Mistress (or my less resolute Master) into letting me back in. Pathetic, right?

"Be more positive," I lecture myself. "*Tomorrow is another day.*" "*Seize the Day, Carpe Diem.*" "*A cat always lands on its feet.*" I try to stifle the Madoc-speak that's churning through my brain.

Eventually, my head droops until it's resting on the tennis ball that's still lying between my paws. Before I drift off, I ponder what I learned yesterday. My stomach rumbles hungrily as I think about my poor, lost Oreos. "*You can't have your cake and eat it,*" must be true for Oreos, too. As my eyes finally close, I realize the crucial lesson of the day was, "*Don't count your chickens before they're hatched.*"

Especially when an opossum and a wise old Beardie are lurking around your henhouse.