

# Forget It, Sally Ann

By Judith LeRoy

Hi! I'm a Bearded Collie, almost two years old. Well, I'm two years old, give or take a few months. Come to think of it, isn't that a crazy saying ... give or take a few months? I don't know how you'd give or take something like months. Would you take January and give back July? That might be a problem when you consider the weather. Or December. If you took away Christmas, there'd be a pretty big public outcry. Right?

When I talk about things like this with my sister, Pickles, she says, "Forget it, Sally Ann," and she moves us on to another topic. I can't help but feel that she doesn't take my questions seriously. I consider myself a deep thinker because I ponder issues like these, but Pickles says, "You're in over your head, Sally Ann." In my humble opinion, then, I must be thinking very deep thoughts if I'm in over my head ... wouldn't you say?

But I'm off the track. I've gone and confused myself again. I can't remember what it was I meant to say, but I know it was relevant. Pickles says I do this a lot—confuse myself, I mean. My sister, Pickles, is also my best friend, and she sometimes calls me Silly Sally, but I really don't mind. She isn't being mean or anything. It's just, you know—teasing—a name a friend can call you that you don't worry about like you would if someone else called you that same thing. You know what I mean?

My Dad calls me a ditz sometimes, but I know he's teasing and that he loves me. I know he loves me a lot because he often tells me he does ... mostly when he kisses my nose when Mom isn't looking. He told Mom I can't help being a little ditz, after all, I'm the canine version of a human blonde. That concerns me a bit, because Dad is usually a very sensitive human being, and the blonde comment doesn't seem like a socially acceptable thing to say. I'd hate to think he's fallen for the "dumb blonde" stereotype. After all, if being called blonde is pejorative, why do so many women want to be blonde?

Actually, my breeder, Dorothy Morris called me "fawn" when she talked about puppy colors with people that came to visit our litter. I find that very curious. I know perfectly well that a fawn is a baby deer, and I'm certainly not one of those creatures. Not that I'd mind being a baby deer. They're very kind, gentle, loving creatures, or so I've been told. Maybe I have a fawn in my ancestry because everyone says I'm kind and loving and sensitive. When it comes right down to it, I'd rather be called "fawn" than "lion" ... and both are about the same color, I think. I would hate to be big and ferocious and scary like a lion. No one would want to play with me, even though I'd be very kind and gentle. I'd never chase prey for my dinner. If I were a lion, I'd be a vegan lion, and no one would be afraid of me.

I told that to Pickles, and she said my problem is that I think too much and that my mind wanders. That I have so many different, scattered thoughts they all get tangled up into one big messy jumble ... maybe like Grandma's knitting after I tried to help her make a sweater for Grandpop. He really needed a new sweater because his old one had holes in the oboes ... or was that elbows? Knees? Whatever. It's so sad that humans need sweaters and stuff to cover their poor naked bodies so they don't freeze to death. I think the Big Dog up there in heaven was playing a silly joke when he made humans coatless. Don't you think that people should be born with fur—like puppies and other mammals? And they could be all different colors like

Beardies are. Mom likes purple, so maybe she could be purple. Dad likes blue. You get the idea. Wouldn't it be lovely ... such a pretty world, just like a rainbow? But I digress. Pickles may be right about my wandering mind ... I really need to ponder that concept when I have time. It's not like a mind has legs or wheels to go roaming with ... is it?

Pickles came to visit me last weekend, because her Mom and Dad were going to the lake for a big family reunion. Her Mom was organizing the food for 50 people, and her Dad was grilling the hamburgers and hot dogs, so it would be hard for them to watch Pickles while they were doing their jobs. And Pickles would need watching. Lots of watching. There's going to be a ton of food at the reunion, and Pickles is NOT a good dog around unattended food. Pickles admits it's true. For all her virtues and her firm belief in standards, rules, and order, when it comes to food, she's a holy terror. At least that's what her Dad calls her, though I'm not sure about "holy" and "terror"—two things that seem pretty antagonistic, at least to me. What Pickles is, is a thief—plain and simple. That's how she got such a silly name, Pickles. She stole a great big dill pickle off the coffee table the first night in her new home and dragged it behind a chair to eat it. She said it tasted so gross she decided if that was the way her new owners ate all the time, she'd have to run away. Luckily, she found that wasn't the case.

Anyway, when my Mom and Dad heard about the reunion, they invited Pickles to stay at our house for the weekend, and I was thrilled.

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Pickles arrived with a suitcase full of stuff. Her Mom had packed her bed, her leash, a stuffed dragon toy, a hard rubber ball with a bell inside it, some treats for Pickles and me, and a fluffy little lamb that said, "baaaaaaa" when you squeezed it between your teeth. The first time Pickles grabbed the lamb and squeezed it hard to make it baaaaaa, it scared the beJesus out of me. I thought it was something alive and she'd killed it.

"Don't be silly, Sally Ann," Pickles said. "Bearded Collies are born to herd sheep, not to hurt them. Besides, this is just a pretend sheep." She let me hold the lamb for a while, but I didn't squeeze it. When something yells bloody murder like that stuffed lamb did, don't tell me it's enjoying the experience.

Pickles and I had a great time. I took her upstairs to show her my bedroom and we discovered that my Mom had put her bed right next to mine. We really liked that. Pickles said we could have a Pajama-less Party, but when I told her that I'd never heard of one of those, she said "Forget it." Like I said earlier, Pickles is always telling me "Forget it." Sometimes I wonder if I'm missing something.

Before dinner, Dad took us for a walk to the park. Pickles and I kept crossing in front of him and running behind him until our leads were so mixed up that we all got stuck. We were so tangled that we couldn't even move. After Dad untangled us, he got out his cell phone and called Mom to come and rescue us. He told Mom we wouldn't get to the park for a week under our own steam. I asked Pickles where the steam would come from, and she told me it was just a figure of speech. When I asked how speech figured, she said, "Just forget I said that, Sally Ann. I should have known better."

Mom arrived and drove us all to the park in the car. We went right to the fenced area that has a sign saying "Dog Park," and Pickles and I chased each other around and around until we

were dizzy and exhausted. Then we flopped down and rolled in some pigeon doo-doo in the grass before Mom yelled at us to stop.

Dad brought my tennis ball, the one I've been trying to peel to see what's inside. He tossed it around and Pickles and I chased it. It was nice to see him enjoying himself, so Pickles and I kept bringing the ball back so he could throw it again. But then he threw it so far it landed in the pond with the ducks. I wanted to get it before the ducks stole it—I've discovered that they're very crafty creatures—so I raced into the pond. I got about five steps into the water and suddenly sank. It was amazing. Ducks never sink. Why did I? Pickles told me that creatures with webbed feet can sit on the water, paddle, and not sink, but creatures without webbed feet should stay clear of ponds whenever possible. Pickles has firm convictions, and once Pickles decides something, it's pretty much decided. That's why she won't go near the lake—and that's why she didn't object when her Mom and Dad went to the family reunion without her this weekend, despite the fact it would be a veritable cornucopia for a food thief such as herself. She wants nothing to do with the lake because her Mom and Dad bought her a doggy life preserver, and now they keep trying to get her into the water to swim. She avoids bodies of water at all costs.

Why do they say 'bodies of water' I wonder? I've never noted them to have legs, arms, or faces. I asked Pickles, but she said, "Never mind, Sally Ann." Just the usual non-answer.

Anyway, after my attempted tennis ball retrieval, I understood why Pickles doesn't like water bodies. They can make you very wet, and, what's more, Dad said I smelled like pond scum when I got out. Frankly, I saw nothing wrong with the odor, and neither did Pickles, but Mom held her nose and said, "Oh, phew, Sally Ann! My car will stink to high heaven." High heaven? That's another one I would like explained. Have you ever heard of a low heaven? I thought that's where Hell was. (I know, I know, Sally Ann, just forget it.)

Then Mom looked at the sky—it was getting pretty gray—and she said she thought we should go home before we got rained on. I didn't think that was much of a problem—I was already very wet, and I'd be even wetter when I got home because when Mom says I stink, I get a bath.

I needn't have fretted about the bath, though, because the clouds opened up and we were drenched in what Grandpop calls "a skinny minute"—another one of those confusing terms that gets me in trouble because I want to know how one minute can be skinny and why it's different from another minute that's ... well, plump, maybe? But if I ask about it, you know what I hear. "Forget it, Sally Ann," or "Never mind." Argh! I think it's just that folks don't know the answers to the very astute questions I ask, but they're too proud to admit it.

We were at the far end of the park, so we had a long trek back to the car. Pickles put her muzzle in the air and opened her mouth to catch some raindrops. I did it too. The raindrops tasted interesting—a little like butterflies, I thought. Maybe because butterflies live in the air along with the raindrops? Mom and Dad watched us, and then they tipped their heads back, opened their human mouths, and caught some raindrops too. They laughed and laughed, and we all slowed down to enjoy the rain. No use hurrying, we were all sopping wet, as Dad said, "so why not enjoy it?" Mom agreed. "Why do adults give up playing, do you think? We'd all be happier if we played a little." Then Mom and Dad got all silly. Mom started humming something she called "Singin' in the Rain," and Dad even pretended to tap dance, making believe he had an umbrella. Mom laughed so hard she had to sit down on a park bench. Some people splashed

by us on their way to the car park, and they all were huddled under one umbrella. They didn't appear at all happy, and they looked at us like we were crazy. I guess maybe we were. Pickles says sometimes she thinks my whole family is somewhat demented, but she was having as good a time as I was. Sometimes being demented is fun.

We got to the car and all hopped in, "wet as ducks," Dad said. Well, of course ducks are wet. They spend most of their time in the water. That got me wondering where ducks slept. Not in the pond, surely. If a duck fell asleep on the pond, he probably wouldn't remember to keep paddling, and then wouldn't he sink? I started to ask Pickles about that, but stopped ... I knew what she'd say.

Mom put the key in the ignition and started the car, turned up the heat, and pretty soon we were all kind of cozy.

"Well, the rain washed off the pigeon poop," Mom said, looking into the backseat at me and Pickles.

"And the pond scum," Dad added.

"Guess there's no need for baths, then."

Pickles and I barked, "Yay! No baths!!" And Dad pretended to bark, too—he sounded like the old Rottweiler next door, and I had to laugh. Then Mom put her nose in the air and she howled—just like those wolves on the National Geographic channel on TV.

"Ooohee, ooahah, Oweeoooooeee!"

I'm a sucker for a good howl, so I joined her. But I tend to yip when I howl—the howls just won't come out if I don't yip.

"Yip, yip, yeeep, Oweeooooooo! Yike, yike ..." and once I start, I can't stop.

Pickles and Dad joined in the chorus. You've never heard such yiking, yipping, howling and laughing in a car in all your life.

A park security officer knocked on Mom's window.

"Everything all right in there?" he asked. Mom stopped howling, I stopped yiking, and Dad and Pickles stopped yipping. Mom told him yes, things were fine, and then her eyes sparkled so hard I thought she was going to bust out laughing. Dad had his face turned away from the guard; I knew he was smiling and trying not to laugh, too. We must have looked pretty ridiculous to any sane outside spectator. Or maybe we just looked suspicious?

The security guy said, "You folks better get home and outta' those wet clothes before you catch your death ..." I looked at Pickles and she must have known I was going to ask about "catching death" because she shook her head and said ... at least it was different ... "Don't ask, Sally Ann."

Mom calmly put the car in gear, and we drove out of the park. Then she pulled over, stopped the car, and laughed and laughed. Dad was laughing, too. "I'll bet he thought we were absolute idiots back there," he said. "Positively demented," said Pickles and put her muzzle in the air and howled again. So, we all got back into the howling spirit and finished what we were

doing before we were interrupted. And when we were all howled and laughed out, we drove home, smiling all the way.

"You know," said Mom as she pulled into our driveway, "our animals are right. Sometimes there's nothing like a good howl. It just gets all the pent-up stress out of your system."

"You're right," said Dad. "Nothing can beat a good old-fashioned howl."

When she heard the word "howl," Pickles threw her muzzle in the air and started yodeling—a little off key, I thought. I was busy pondering "penned-upstress" and wondering what kind of enclosure that was. Was it made of wire? Wood? Maybe plastic?? Then I got to wondering how a "new-fashioned" howl compared to an "old-fashioned" one and what it might sound like. "Forget it, Sally Ann," I told myself and started howling, too. Mom and Dad kept laughing.

After Mom and Dad dried us off and they changed clothes, we had dinner. I had hoped for a special extravaganza for Pickles' sake, because she had once told me she had "gourmet aspirations" ... whatever that means ... but it was just the same old kibble in our bowls. The dinner wasn't a complete bust, though. Mom and Dad put a frozen pizza in the oven like they do every Friday night, and then they carried it into the family room to eat while they watched TV. Pickles showed me how to steal the leftover crusts without Mom and Dad noticing. As I said earlier, Pickles is very talented when it comes to stealing food. She casually snitches a mouthful and then barely moves her lips while she chews and swallows it. I'm not as polished as she is, and I'm sure that Mom saw me nab a crust, but she was too polite to mention it.

Then Mom and Dad watched more TV. Pickles and I were glad when Mom left the room to make a phone call to her sister, Aunt Judy, because then Dad turned off the mushy, kissy-huggy Hallmark show and changed channels to an Alaska program on Discovery. There were great big polar bears and wolves and moose and tigers and lions and crocodiles and ...

"Uh-uh, Sally Ann," said Pickles. "Polar bears and wolves and moose do not live in the same environment as tigers and lions and crocodiles. They do not cohabit."

I was hiding behind Dad's chair by then, because I have a huge dread of tigers and crocodiles. Actually, my real problem is television. Sometimes I can't separate what I see on TV from the real world. I'll watch something and believe it really happened. Movies like "Shrek" are hard for me. I keep waiting for Donkey, Puss, and Fiona to come walking into my living room and I'm always disappointed when they don't.

Mom finished her phone call and invited us out in the back yard to "do our business" before going to bed. It had stopped raining, but the grass was still wet. Pickles doesn't like wet paws if she can avoid them, so she didn't take long, and before I knew it, she was standing on the back porch waiting for me. I tried and tried, but I just didn't have to pee. Mom, who was standing with Pickles said, "Oh come on, Sally Ann. The mosquitos are biting and I want to go inside. Find a good spot. Hurry up."

No go. That just added to the pressure. I sniffed here and there, hoping my bladder would speak to me, but it didn't. Pickles jumped off the porch and trotted over, generously violating her wet paws dictum.

"I'm trying, but I just can't!" I said.

"I know, I couldn't either. Just do what I did. Pretend."

"Pretend?"

"Yeah, if you squat down and make a face like you're concentrating, they think you're peeing, and they let you back in the house. You have to know how to manage these things, Sally Ann."

Oh gosh, I thought. I'm never going to be as smart as Pickles, am I? But if I hang around her long enough, I might pick up some tricks to make my life easier.

I squatted and puckered up my face, but Pickles said, "Don't overdo it, Sally Ann. Pees and poops are casual things ... bodily functions. They're activities that don't take a lot of deliberation or great effort."

"Like agility does," I said.

"Or obedience. Or weightlifting, for humans," said Pickles.

After we finished our make-believe pees, Pickles pretended a poop just to show me how it's done. Then we scampered to the porch.

"Good dogs!" said Mom. "Come on in and get your Good-Night Milk-Bones."

Wow, I thought. Wow. It's so easy to fool a human. Who knew?

We chomped our Milk-Bones, got a drink of water to wash them down, and headed off to bed. It was fun having a bed partner, so to speak, even if we weren't sharing the same bed. Pickles and I giggled awhile—Mom wouldn't demand silence until the lights went out, and that might not even happen if she and Dad fell asleep with the TV on—which has been known to happen.

Then Pickles got serious and said, "I really had a good time howling with your Mom and Dad. My Mom and Dad would never think of doing that—my Granddad says they're 'stick in the muds.'"

I could feel my brow crinkling. Pickles' Mom and Dad were "sticks in the mud?" I visualized that, and I had to disagree. They've always looked like real people to me. Pickles saw my furrowing brow and said quickly, "All I meant was that your Mom and Dad are really a lot of fun in a weird sort of way—you know ... like they're good at expressing their inner child."

"Wow! Mom and Dad have inner children? Where?"

"Just a figure of speech, Sally Ann."

Another one?? It seems like they're all over the place these days, doesn't it?

Pickles talked on. She said she marveled at the great diversity in human behavior. “My folks wouldn’t have a TV set in the bedroom. Wouldn’t think of it. But they’ve got one in the kitchen to watch the weather and the news in the morning,” she said. “Your folks don’t have one in the kitchen, I noticed.”

“That’s because kitchens are for eating in, Pickles. And cooking. Where does your Mom cook, and where do your Mom and Dad eat if they use the kitchen to watch TV in?”

Pickles brow puckered. “You are SO literal, Sally Ann.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? ‘Litter-all’ ... I’m messy?”

Pickles frowned a bit, sighed and said, “Only in your mind, Sally Ann. Only in your mind.” She shut her eyes then, but I persisted. “If your folks don’t have a TV in their bedroom, what do they watch before they turn the lights out?”

Pickles opened one eye. “They read, Sally Ann. They read books. And Dad has a big pile of them on the floor next to the bed. Sometimes, if he gets up to go to the bathroom, he stumbles over them. If he stubs his toe, which happens quite a bit, he yells, “Drat!” And Mom wakes up and says, ‘If you put the books on your nightstand, you wouldn’t have that problem ...’ and then she falls back to sleep.”

“Drat?” I asked. “He thinks he fell over a big mouse?” Pickles’ owners are DEFINITELY unusual.

“Forget it, Sally Ann.”

We went to sleep. I woke up after a while, though. I guess I was excited because Pickles was there, or I was thirsty from all our talking. I got up and went into the bathroom where Mom puts a water bowl down for me. When I got back, Pickles’ eyes were open, and she was yawning. “You certainly are a loud drinker, Sally Ann. I heard you lapping all the way from here.” She got up. “Ever notice when one dog takes a drink, all the others get thirsty?” I was awed, once again, at how smart Pickles was. She was right. I yawned.

“It’s true about yawning, too,” said Pickles and yawned. “Yawns are contagious.” I was overwhelmed with Pickle’s genius. She was right again! I yawned again.

But now we were both wide awake.

“What’s in that closet over there? Clothes??” Pickles asked.

The blue-hued nightlight Mom keeps plugged into the wall socket “so Sally Ann can see the way to the bathroom when she wants a drink”—even though dogs’ eyes are better in the dark than humans and I didn’t need a light—glowed enough for me to notice that the closet door wasn’t completely closed.

“No. Mom calls it a storage closet. It’s got shelves from the floor up to the ceiling for human junk, and it’s smaller than the one they keep their clothes in.” I thought about that for a while ... humans needing closets to keep their clothes in. “Aren’t you glad we don’t have to wear clothes?” I asked Pickles. “I’d have a dreadful time figuring out what to wear every morning. It’s such a time waster. And think of what a bra for a girl dog would look like. Pretty weird!”

Pickles rolled her eyes. “You’re weird, Sally Ann.”

I walked over to the closet and nudged open the door. There were shelves and shelves of human junk. Pickles squeezed in beside me. "Oh, look at the stuffed toy. It's just like blue bunny at our breeder's house. Except the head is coming off." The white stuffing protruded from a long slit in bunny's neck. Bunny gazed sunnily at us, not at all dismayed by his altered state.

"Yeah, that happened when I was just a pup. Dad and I were playing. I had ahold of the bunny's legs and Dad grabbed his ears and bingo! We heard a big rip. Mom said, 'The bunny lost his head,' and Dad laughed, which I thought was pretty weird, because losing one's head is NOT funny. But then, even weirder, he said, 'clever double entendre, Janice.' I looked around but I couldn't see any doubles anywhere, and I hadn't a clue what an entendre might be. Some sort of exotic animal, maybe?

Pickles explained, "people refer to 'having lost their head' when they do something atypical, and your Mom also used that phrase about bunny's head being ripped off, so that's what was doubled—two meanings for the same words, and ..."

"Whatever," I said, my thoughts spinning. "Mom's been meaning to sew it back together, but I guess she forgot."

Pickles moved on. "What's this?" she asked, lifting her nose to nudge a smallish tan box next to the bunny.

"Oh, that's Jimmy's. Jimmy is Mom's nephew. He comes to visit for a week every Christmas. Last time he was here he brought a BB gun and that little box full of BBs. Mom was really upset. She called her brother and told him that a BB gun was a totally inappropriate toy for a seven-year old boy who had no regard for wildlife and who aimed at every bird and squirrel in the backyard. Her brother said, 'Jimmy's such a bad shot, he couldn't hit an elephant!' Mom didn't listen, though. She said, 'He even aimed it at Sally Ann yesterday, and I won't allow that kind of behavior!' So, Mom took the gun and the BBs away. Jimmy's mother called Mom that same afternoon and told her she agreed with Mom, and she'd appreciate it if Mom just kept the damn BB gun since her husband, Mom's brother, was being irresponsible and 'Jimmy was just going to shoot his eye out.'"

"Wow. I'll bet Jimmy's dad was mad about that."

"Not for long. He discovered that Jimmy, who wasn't very good at aiming, was very good at swimming. Jimmy's Dad has what Mom calls 'aspirations of grandeur' and dreams about having an Olympic athlete son, and swimming seemed the better sport since Jimmy showed some aptitude. After his Dad discovered that, he didn't give a hoot about the BB gun. Isn't that an interesting saying, Pickles? 'Give a hoot about?' I thought only owls hooted. Horns toot, though, and so do trains. And sometimes when Grandpop passes gas, Grandma calls it a toot. Mom calls them freddies, and Dad calls them farts. Same thing, same sound, same smell, different words, Pickles. How do humans expect us to learn the English language when they keep getting us so confused?"

Pickles looked at me and said, "Bite your tongue, Pickles!" I really don't know why she said that. I bit my tongue once when I was chewing on a Nylabone and it really hurt. I don't chew Nylabones anymore.

Pickles said, "I don't think I've ever seen a BB. What does a BB look like?"



“Oh, BBs are teeny-tiny, shiny little balls. Jimmy dropped a couple and I looked at them. Here, I’ll show you one.”

I reached my head up to the shelf where the BBs sat and got my teeth on the corner of the little box. I gently pulled at it and then, suddenly, the box flew off the shelf. The Scotch tape that held the box together must have been old, because it had lost its stickiness. Before I got the box anywhere near the floor, the top came off. Pickles and I watched about a zillion BBs bust gleefully out of the box. They arched, they soared, they cascaded, and then they rolled into all four corners of the bedroom. As they hit the wood floor, there was a sound like the pitter-pat of a spring rain, only instead of echoing above on our tin roof, the sound arose from under our feet.

I dropped what was left of the box on the floor, and more BBs bubbled out. “Oh, oh!” I said when my jaws got unencumbered. Pickles and I surveyed the glittering floor.

“Oh, feces!” muttered Pickles.

I wondered what the heck she was talking about. Feces was another word for BBs? I’d have to remember that. I’d learned so much from Pickles already this weekend.

I looked at the floor. It looked rather like a fairy wonderland, I thought. Some of the BBs sparkled silvery-white in the moonlight from the windows, and others glimmered a pretty blue in the fainter glow of the nightlight.

“What should we do, Pickles?” I hoped maybe she would use that enormous brain of hers to save our hairy butts.

“My Dad said that he’d read somewhere that ‘discretion is the better part of valor’ and ‘the best defense is a good offense.’ I think that those might apply here, but I’m not sure how.” Pickles frowned. “We were very bad, I think. Well, if you call making a big mess very bad. But it’s not like anybody’s dead or anything. I don’t really know what we should do. Maybe we should tell your Mom and Dad, but it would be very unkind to wake them up and disturb their sleep ...” We studied the scene.

It really was very pretty, I thought. “It makes the bedroom look like it’s wearing holiday decorations, Pickles. Maybe Mom and Pop will think it’s Christmassy.”

“Sally Ann, it’s July. I don’t think that idea will fly.”

Ideas fly?

Pickles looked at my puzzled face and hastily said, “To clean up these BBs we’d need thumbs and a broom. We have neither. I really don’t know what we can do.”

If Pickles didn’t know what to do, nobody would. As I’ve told you before, Pickles is really smart, and she has a conscience too, except when it comes to stealing food and pretend pooping. I could see she was wrestling with her conscience right now.

“Maybe we should sleep on it,” I suggested.

“Great idea, Sally Ann.” Pickles sounded relieved. We carefully rolled and waddled back to our sheepskin beds. I heard Pickles grunt when she lay down and then I heard the smacking sound of a dog gnawing at its paw. I knew just how she felt. I had some of those damn BBs between my pads, too. I suspected nothing but time and grooming would get them out.

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It must have been a couple of hours later when the commotion started. It was the time of night Dad often got up to go to the bathroom.

"What the Sam Hill is going on here?" Dad bellowed. "There are little rocks in my slippers!"

"Who's Sam Hill and how did he get in here?" I asked Pickles. She didn't tell me to "Forget it," because her eyes were wide, and she looked a little nervous.

Mom reached over and turned on her nightstand light. Thousands of little sparkles lit up the floor as the light glanced off the BBs. It was really quite beautiful in an animated cartoon-ish kind of way. Or maybe "third dimensional," Pickles remarked later.

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"The brooms just aren't doing it, Wayne," said Mom.

"No," agreed Dad, raking his hand through his already standing-on-end hair. "If you push the broom a little too hard, the little devils squirt halfway across the room. And then they scoot into the cracks between the wooden floorboards and sit there and leer at me." I think Dad was taking those BBs too personally. I really don't think a BB has a face to leer with.

"I'll get the vacuum cleaner," Mom volunteered, and she trundled downstairs to get the tool from Hell—the vacuum cleaner had scared the pants off me when I was a puppy. Or it would have, had I worn pants. I was afraid it would suck me in, along with the dirt and my hair, and I'd get stuck in that little attached bag and how would I ever get out? Every now and then the dreaded thought returns so I hide behind a chair while Mom wheels the vacuum sweeper around the house. I whispered that to Pickles, and she said, "But you're way too big to squeeze through that tiny opening. It's not possible." I hadn't thought of that.

Mom lumbered up the stairs with the heavy Hoover, plugged it in and started sucking up whatever there was to be sucked up. Turns out the BBs had a mind of their own, though.

"It's only picking up a few of the BBs," she told Dad. "It's like they're too heavy for the suction."

"I'll get the shop vac from the garage," he said. "It's got more power and can pick up literally anything."

There's that "literal" word again. I definitely need to improve my vocabulary. I'm missing a lot.

Dad put on his bathrobe and hurried down the stairs.

Mom turned the vacuum on again and tried to pick up more BBs. Dad was gone such a long time I almost fell back to sleep. Then I heard the doorbell ring. Mom didn't hear it though, because the vacuum cleaner was being way too noisy. "Should I tell her?" I asked Pickles. "Bark or something?"

"Maybe we should just let sleeping dogs lie. If she knows we're awake, she'll probably start complaining about the terrible thing we did, and she'll get all worked up again. It's for her

own good, Sally Ann. Sometimes you need to protect your owners from their own human nature. My suggestion is to shut our eyes and close our mouths.”

I did what Pickles recommended.

“Where on earth is Wayne,” Mom groaned and turned off the vacuum cleaner. She sat down on the bed. “It’s like the BBs are multiplying in front of my eyes. Spontaneous generation. Like fruit flies. I know that’s impossible.” She looked at me and Pickles, tucked in our little beds. “How can you two sleep through all this racket? Did all this mischief wear you out? It had to be the two of you. Those darn BBs couldn’t roll out on their own, could they??” Pickles was right. Mom was getting worked up just like Pickles said she would. I kept my eyes closed. I’m sure Pickles did too.

I suspected we’d hear about this in the morning. I shut my eyes even tighter to put off the moment of reckoning, but I didn’t keep my eyes shut very long. Either did Pickles. There was a sudden sharp tinkling sound as the glass on the window across the room suddenly sprouted spider-web cracks all over. Pickles and I lunged up and started barking as we skidded on the BBs to the window. Mom leaped up and peered out the cracked glass.

We heard Dad shout, “What the Hell is going on up there? I locked myself out, and I’ve been ringing the doorbell and pounding for ages. It’s a wonder the neighborhood watch hasn’t been called out.”

Oh, oh. He spoke too soon. Pickles and I put our paws on the windowsill and saw a white car with flashing blue lights stop in front of our house. Mom grabbed her robe and skated out of the bedroom to identify the marauder. She probably was afraid she’d have to bail him out of jail in the morning—or so Pickles said.

Twenty minutes later, Mom, Dad, and the shop vac trundled their way up the stairs. Pickles and I were back in our beds, but we left soon enough when Dad turned on that ear-splitting shop vac. Next to Mom’s puny cleaning tool, that sucker is a colossus.

Another twenty minutes later, we heard the shop vac turn off. Dad said, “That’s about as good a job as it can do.”

Mom sighed. “We might still be picking up stray BBs ten years from now.”

Pickles and I peeked in from the doorway. We could still see some sparkles—mostly next to the baseboards and in the deepest crevices between wood floor planks. Mom was looking at them too, and she, too, elected to ignore them. Dad stared at the two of us. He opened his mouth to say something, and Mom told him, “It’s 5am. Don’t start. They’re just dogs. They don’t know it’s their fault and we’ll just confuse them by getting angry with them. Let’s just try to get a little more sleep.”

Dad reluctantly agreed. “I’ll carry the shop vac, the vacuum cleaner, and all the brooms and dustpans downstairs in the morning. What am I saying? It IS the morning.” He sat on the side of the bed and lay down, not even taking off his robe and slippers. His eyes closed. “I still have BBs in my slippers,” he observed. Mom shrugged and shut her eyes.

Pickles and I tiptoed back to our little sheepskin beds. “Your Mom’s been reading those old dog training books that say people should scold their dogs only when they catch them doing something bad, because dogs have no concept of time ... those old training books tell humans

that, to a dog, there's no such thing as before and after," said Pickles. No one had ever explained the concept of time so clearly, and once again I admired Pickles' intelligence.

"I feel guilty about it sometimes," said Pickles, "for taking advantage of a human's better nature by letting them believe that kind of balderdash. We'll have to be really good tomorrow to make up for what we did tonight."

I pondered that awhile and I agreed, although I still planned to steal some toast at breakfast in the morning, just to hone my thievery skills while Pickles was there to critique them ... and because I've always wanted to try the blueberry jam Mom puts on her toast in the morning. The color is so pretty it must taste amazing.

We all got up again at 8am.

Mom and Dad sat bleary-eyed at the breakfast table clutching their coffee cups. It was easier to steal the toast than I thought it would be, because Mom and Dad were just too tired to care. Dad said, "Remind me to call Smith's Windows Monday morning so they can replace the glass."

"Did you have to throw the rock so hard?" Mom asked.

"I threw six different rocks before I even managed to hit the window," Dad said. "I was cold. And it had started to rain again ... in case you hadn't noticed." He sounded a bit whiny.

The phone rang.

"Oh hi, Liz. No, it's not too early to call." Silence. "Glad to hear all is going well at the lake." Silence. "I know you miss Pickles, but don't worry about a thing. The girls are having a good time. Been good as gold." Silence. Dad looked at her, stunned. He looked at us and shook his head wonderingly. Then Mom said, "5 o'clock is just fine. Don't hurry. Enjoy yourselves. Say hi to James."

She hung up and looked at Dad, who rolled his eyes and said, "The girls have been good as gold?"

There's another question. Good as gold? Why not "Good as chicken liver?" That'd be more to my liking.

Pickles knew my mind was wandering, and she shook her head. "Uh, uh, Sally Ann." After a night of interrupted sleep, we were exhausted, too.

"I was too tired to tell her the whole gruesome story. Besides," said Mom, "Pickles' Mom and Dad have agreed to dog sit Sally Ann when we go to your nephew's wedding next month in Chicago. They might chicken out if they heard about last night."

Chicken out? I looked at Pickles and she shook her head again. At least she changed her usual admonitions of 'Forget it' or 'Never mind.' Instead, she said, "Don't go there, Sally Ann."

Mom looked at me and frowned. She slowly rose from her chair and said, "Sally Ann, we need to wipe that blueberry jam off your beard before it gets all over the furniture." She got a paper towel, dampened it, and vigorously rubbed at the blueberry stain, which, instead of disappearing, spread itself to cover most of my muzzle and chin.

“That’s another thing about stealing,” Pickles said, studying my now blue beard. She flopped on her side and closed her eyes. Then she said, “A good thief always hides the evidence.”

I have no idea what she was talking about.