

Man's best friend

GWM seeks furry four-legged swimmer for long walks, playing with toys and unconditional love

It's official—I will never have a boyfriend. No, I haven't given up on men and decided that going straight is the answer. Nor have I fallen in with an obscure alien-loving cult that demands my celibacy as part of its plan to lure the Mothership back to Earth. It's just that there's no room in the bed.

The bed is big enough, queen size, in fact. When I first got it, I looked at the vast expanse of space and imagined hours of sweaty fun rolling around on the freshly washed sheets with whatever man I could lure into my bedroom.

Then the dog wandered in, took one look at the new bed, and jumped up on it. He bounced a few times, testing the spring in the mattress, and then plopped himself down for a nap.

He hasn't moved since. In fact, as time has gone on, he's taken over more and more of the bed for his own, until now all I get is a thin strip along the right side. At night I lie on my side in this no man's land, trying to pull enough of the quilt over me to keep warm and wondering where I went wrong.

I admit that it's probably all my fault. After all, when Roger first started getting on the bed, it crossed my mind that perhaps it wasn't such a good idea. But he was a puppy at the time, and he looked so cute curled up in a little black Labrador ball with his nose on his paws. Besides, he didn't

take up that much space, and it was sort of cozy to feel him beside me at night.

Now Roger weighs 110 pounds. And while he still sometimes sleeps curled up in a ball, more often he stretches out as much as he can. His favorite position is on his back with his head on the pillows and all four legs straight up in the air. More than once I've been rudely awakened by a paw being forced into my back as Roger decides that he would be a lot more comfortable if I moved over just a little bit.

The sand makes everything even worse. You see, Labradors like nothing better than swimming, and Roger swims daily—even in winter. Somehow, along with the water in the pond, he manages to soak up vast quantities of sand, all of which he immediately deposits on the bed when he gets home. Last week I put on new sheets. When I went to bed I slipped beneath them, thrilled at being surrounded by material that didn't smell like wet dog.

My joy lasted approximately 20 seconds. Then Roger came bounding in, leaped up onto the bed, and laid down. The next thing I knew, I felt sand trickling down through the blanket, past the sheet and onto my legs. Then came the overwhelming smell of the great outdoors. Roger let out a happy groan, rolled onto his back and started to snore, as I thought about the average life span of Labradors. I wept as I realized that I'll be at least 40 before I get my bed back.

I know what you're thinking: Why don't you just kick him off? I have tried to make him sleep on the floor. He even has his very own cedar-filled bed from L.L. Bean. Every so often, when I'm particularly tired of the sand and the dog smell, I tell him to sleep on it. He dutifully

gets down, goes to the bed, and spends 20 minutes pawing at it until he has it all fluffed up the way he wants it. Then he throws himself down on it, and I try to go to sleep.

About three minutes later the sighing begins. No one is a bigger drama queen than Roger, and he has a way of pushing out air that makes him sound like the world's most abused animal. I can feel him there on the floor, staring at me in the big warm bed while he sleeps on the cold L.L. Bean doggie pillow, and I can't stand it. He hears my resolve shatter and up he comes, settling down with a contented sigh.

us and them. But we doubt it.

Besides, we have enough trouble with the dogs in our lives. Adding other people to it would simply be too exhausting. As it is, I take Roger out five or six times a day. That doesn't include the car rides, the midnight outings to look for skunks, or the trips to the vet to find out why he's throwing up again. I don't have time to date anyone. What little free time I have I need to wash Roger's blankets and plan his birthday parties.

Last night, though, after calculating the exact length of time it's been since anyone but



ILLUSTRATION BY JAN FAUST

I'm not the only one suffering from this dog-in-the-bed relationship syndrome. My friend Diane is too. Her Dalmatian, Rudy, also sleeps on the bed. And not just on the bed. Rudy actually sleeps in the bed, right there underneath all the sheets and blankets. More than once a startled visiting girl has felt her toes being sucked, only to discover that the guilty party isn't Diane but her spotted other half. The relationship seldom proceeds any further.

Every night, while other people are going out on dates and thinking about all the fun they'll have later on in their dog-free beds, Diane and I walk Roger and Rudy around the pond. As our happy pets romp and play we wearily trudge along behind them, wondering if maybe somewhere out there are people who might not mind sleeping with big dogs between

Roger and I have shared my bed, I decided enough was enough. Marching into the bedroom, I was determined to toss Roger off the bed once and for all. But when I went in, he was curled up in a ball. His head was on the pillow, and in his paws he was holding his favorite stuffed toy, a polar bear named Bruce. I stood there for a minute, looking down at my sleeping, stinking monster. Then I got in next to him, pulled what little bit of the blanket wasn't around him over me, and turned off the light.

So maybe he's not the man of my dreams. At least I don't have to worry about who else he's sleeping with.

■ MICHAEL THOMAS FORD is the winner of the 1997 Vice Versa gay and lesbian journalism award for best humor writing.

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