Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

I'm Going Away Without My Dog and My Guilt Is Bigger Than My Suitcase

How to Arrange Pet Care, Explain Their Routine, and Travel with Less Worry Without Calling the Pet Sitter Every Two Hours



We've got a problem. But relax. It can be solved—
and we'll even have something to laugh about.

I'm Going Away Without My Dog and My Guilt Is Bigger Than My Suitcase

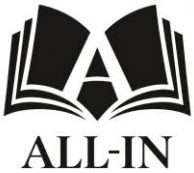
How to Arrange Pet Care, Explain Their Routine, and Travel with Less Worry Without Calling the Pet Sitter Every Two Hours

Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

ISBN: 978-83-8483-828-0

ALL-IN Rafał Płonkowski



CONTENTS

INTRO 5

Chapter 1 - The Guilt That Comes Along Even When Your Dog Doesn't 11

Chapter 2 - What Your Dog Is Actually Experiencing While You're Away 20

Chapter 3 - Choosing a Pet Sitter: Why Loving Dogs Is Not a Qualification 30

Chapter 4 - The Dog Manual: How to Explain Everything Without Writing a Small Encyclopedia 39

Chapter 5 - The Dress Rehearsal: Preparing Your Dog for a Trip They Never Booked 49

Chapter 6 - Departure Day: Leaving the House Without Staging a National Emergency 58

Chapter 7 - The Pet Sitter Has Your Dog, Not a Twenty-Four-Hour Customer Service Department 68

Chapter 8 - The Camera Can See Your Dog, but It Can't Tell You Everything 77

Chapter 9 - The Other End of the Lead: Making Walks Safe When You're Not Holding It 87

Chapter 10 - When the Plan Falls Apart: Emergency Care Without Emergency Improvisation 96

Chapter 11 - Food Bowls, Tablets, and Other Opportunities for Unnecessary Improvisation 106

Chapter 12 - Someone Else's House, Someone Else's Cat, and the Rules Nobody Told Your Dog 116

Chapter 13 - The Five-Star Dog Hotel: How to Look Beyond the Luxury Marketing.....126

Chapter 14 - Two Weeks Without Your Dog: When the Care Plan Has to Survive Real Life 136

Chapter 15 - The Dog Who Needs Extra Care: When Ordinary Pet Sitting Isn't Enough.....147

Chapter 16 - When the Pet Sitter Gets It Wrong: Fixing the Problem Without Declaring a National Crisis.....158

Chapter 17 - Nobody Can Look After My Dog: When the Perfect Plan Meets an Empty Calendar.....170

Chapter 18 - Welcome Home: Your Dog Doesn't Have to Prove How Much He Missed You.....180

Chapter 19 - The Next Trip Should Be Easier: Keeping a Good Care Arrangement Without Running a Dog-Care Department 192

Chapter 20 - I'm Going Away Without My Dog, and This Time I'm Actually Going on Holiday..... 203

INTRO

On the evening before your trip, you find yourself standing in the kitchen, carefully labeling individual portions of dog food. Monday breakfast. Monday dinner. Tuesday breakfast. Tuesday dinner. Each bag receives a handwritten label, even though the pet sitter is a fully functioning adult who has successfully navigated decades of life without accidentally eating Thursday's dinner on Tuesday morning. Your dog watches from the doorway, mildly interested in the growing collection of food and completely unaware that you are preparing for an emotional crisis. You've arranged reliable care, discussed the schedule, and left emergency numbers. Nevertheless, you're considering writing a note explaining that your dog sometimes needs a little encouragement before going outside when it's raining. Perhaps a motivational speech. Possibly a signed statement confirming that you still love him.

Welcome to the peculiar world of going away without your dog, where a perfectly ordinary holiday can transform a sensible adult into the director of an international pet-care operation. You've managed complicated projects, handled family emergencies, and booked an entire trip without assistance. Yet the prospect of leaving your dog with another responsible human being makes you question your judgment, your character, and possibly your eligibility to own a suitcase. The dog, meanwhile, has discovered a crumb underneath the kitchen table and considers the evening an overwhelming success.

The difficulty isn't necessarily that something is wrong with your arrangements. Sometimes the problem is that you

care so much about getting everything right that nothing ever feels sufficiently prepared. You check the instructions again, imagine an unlikely complication, add another paragraph, and briefly feel better. Then another possibility occurs to you. What if your dog refuses breakfast? What if the sitter doesn't recognize his usual expression of mild disappointment? What if he spends the entire afternoon staring through the window, composing heartbreaking poetry about your absence? Before long, you've made the sitter responsible not only for your dog's welfare but also for providing continuous reassurance that you're a decent person.

Of course, your concern has a legitimate foundation. Dogs depend on us for their safety, health, food, exercise, and much of their social environment. Arranging care isn't like asking a neighbor to water a houseplant, although some houseplants are surprisingly demanding and appear to die out of spite. You're placing a living animal in somebody else's hands, and the consequences of poor decisions can be serious. Choosing an unsuitable sitter, overlooking medical needs, or failing to explain important behaviors can create genuine problems. Responsible preparation matters. But responsibility doesn't require you to personally supervise every second of your dog's existence, especially when someone capable has agreed to take over the necessary duties.

One reason separation feels difficult is that your everyday knowledge of your dog has become almost invisible to you. You know which noises make him nervous, how he behaves when tired, and whether his unusually enthusiastic interest in the garden means he needs a bathroom break or has discovered another fascinating hole. You respond to these

details without much conscious thought. Handing over responsibility suddenly makes you realize how many tiny decisions you make every day. That realization can be unsettling. It may seem impossible to explain everything to another person, so you begin trying to transfer your entire relationship into a document. Unfortunately, a pet sitter needs workable instructions, not access to the complete archives of your emotional life together.

There's another complication: your dog cannot tell you in words whether he's comfortable with the arrangement. You must rely on what you know about his behavior, his history, and his responses to people and environments. Sometimes those observations offer reassuring evidence. Sometimes they indicate that the proposed care needs adjusting. But we humans are skilled at confusing observations with stories. A dog resting quietly near the hallway might be perfectly comfortable, while his owner imagines him keeping a lonely vigil for a beloved family member. Equally, a dog showing persistent signs of distress shouldn't be dismissed as merely dramatic. Learning to distinguish what you're actually seeing from what you're afraid might be happening is essential to making better decisions.

This book is for people who want to travel without pretending that their dogs don't matter. Perhaps you're planning a family holiday, attending a wedding, visiting relatives, or taking a work trip that simply won't accommodate a four-legged companion. You might have a friendly, adaptable dog who has stayed with other people before, yet you still feel uneasy leaving. Or you may be responsible for an older animal, a dog with medical needs, or one that finds unfamiliar situations genuinely challenging. Your options might also be limited by money, time, distance,

or the availability of trustworthy people. There is no magical arrangement that suits every household, and pretending otherwise would be about as useful as offering a nervous dog a motivational podcast.

What you can develop is a practical way to decide which arrangements are appropriate, prepare the people involved, and recognize when something needs to change. That means understanding the difference between a sitter who genuinely has the necessary time and skills and somebody who merely promises, "Don't worry, I love dogs." It means making essential routines understandable without issuing instructions for the precise angle at which the water bowl must face the kitchen cabinets. It also means agreeing on sensible communication, preparing for foreseeable difficulties, and knowing when professional veterinary or behavioral advice is necessary rather than improvising from a distance.

Your own behavior during the trip matters too. A brief update from the sitter can be useful and reassuring. Repeatedly requesting confirmation that nothing has changed since the previous confirmation may become a different activity entirely. It's possible to spend an expensive afternoon in a beautiful place while mentally remaining inside your dog's living room. You check your phone, receive a reassuring message, relax for three minutes, and begin wondering whether the next message is overdue. The objective isn't to stop caring or forbid yourself from asking questions. It's to establish which information actually helps protect your dog and which checks merely provide temporary relief from uncertainty.

A responsible arrangement must also work for the person providing care. Pet sitters have their own schedules,

physical limitations, responsibilities, and emergencies. Your dog's welfare depends partly on giving them realistic instructions, appropriate authority, and room to carry out their duties. If you expect someone to reproduce your exact habits while responding instantly to every message, even an excellent sitter may struggle. Trust isn't blind optimism, however. It grows from checking competence, agreeing on responsibilities, and responding proportionately when circumstances change. Sometimes that means adjusting the arrangements. Occasionally, it means acknowledging that the trip itself must change because safe care isn't available.

You won't finish this book with a promise that your dog will never miss you, that every sitter will perform flawlessly, or that your own feelings will disappear as soon as you leave home. Those promises would be convenient, but neither dogs nor humans come with such guarantees. Instead, you'll be better equipped to recognize real needs, make informed arrangements, respond to genuine problems, and allow yourself to enjoy a trip without constantly seeking permission from your conscience.

And perhaps, on your next departure morning, you'll check that everything important has been arranged, say goodbye in a way that suits your dog, and leave. You may still feel a little sadness. You may look forward to seeing him again. But you won't need to interpret those feelings as proof that something is wrong.

Your dog can be properly cared for while you're somewhere else. You can love him enormously and still have a life that includes travel. And when you return, he may greet you with spectacular enthusiasm or pause to investigate whether you've brought anything edible.

Either way, you can finally unpack something that doesn't belong in your luggage: the belief that being a good dog owner means never leaving.

Chapter 1 - The Guilt That Comes Along Even When Your Dog Doesn't

There is a particular kind of guilt reserved for people who own dogs. It doesn't announce itself when you forget to buy milk or leave the laundry sitting in the washing machine overnight. It waits until you do something perfectly reasonable, such as accepting an invitation to spend a weekend away. Then it enters the room wearing the expression of a disappointed headteacher and asks whether you've considered how your decision will affect the innocent creature currently asleep beside the radiator. Within minutes, an ordinary travel arrangement has become a moral investigation. You haven't even booked your accommodation, yet you're already wondering whether enjoying yourself without your dog constitutes a failure of character. The dog, incidentally, has no objection to your travel plans because nobody has told him about them. He is busy dreaming, occasionally twitching a paw, and contributing absolutely nothing to the debate about your personal ethics.

The feeling can be especially confusing because it grows out of something genuinely valuable: your commitment to caring for another living creature. Your dog depends on people for food, shelter, medical attention, safety, and opportunities to behave like a dog. You cannot simply announce that you're going away and expect him to make alternative arrangements through an online booking platform. Someone must take responsibility for his needs. That obligation is real, and treating it seriously is part of being a good owner. The difficulty begins when

responsibility quietly expands into a much larger requirement. You start believing that providing good care means personally providing every moment of it, and that allowing somebody else to take over is somehow morally inferior. Suddenly, love has acquired an attendance policy.

This is worth examining because feelings of guilt are not reliable certificates of wrongdoing. Sometimes guilt alerts us to a decision that conflicts with our values. Sometimes it appears when we haven't done anything wrong at all, simply because we're making a choice that feels uncomfortable. The sensation can be equally convincing in both situations. Your stomach tightens, your thoughts become preoccupied, and you feel an urgent need to correct something, even if you cannot identify what requires correcting. If your dog has no appropriate care arranged, that discomfort may be pointing toward an important practical problem. If his care is safe, suitable, and properly organized, the same discomfort may be telling you that separation matters emotionally. Those are different situations, and confusing them creates unnecessary suffering.

When responsibility becomes an impossible standard

Imagine that you applied the strictest version of your pet-related guilt to every decision. You could never leave your dog with someone else, because nobody would do everything exactly as you do. You couldn't take a long working day, because your dog might prefer your company. You couldn't go to a restaurant where pets aren't allowed, attend a family celebration in another city, or spend a few days recovering from the demands of ordinary life. Any moment spent elsewhere could be interpreted as a lost opportunity to demonstrate devotion. Eventually, the only acceptable lifestyle would involve permanent residence

within sight of your dog's bed. Even that might not be sufficient if you occasionally closed the bathroom door. Some dogs already regard bathroom privacy as an outrageous human invention.

Fortunately, responsible care doesn't require constant personal presence. It requires making suitable arrangements for your dog's actual needs. Those arrangements will differ according to his health, behavior, age, and circumstances, but the principle remains the same. You are responsible for ensuring that somebody competent can look after him when you cannot. The person holding the lead or preparing dinner does not have to be you on every occasion. A reliable substitute doesn't diminish the relationship you have built with your dog, just as a trusted relative caring for a child doesn't erase the parents' importance. The comparison has limits because children and dogs have different needs, but the underlying distinction is useful: arranging responsible care is itself an expression of responsibility.

Yet guilt often demands something more theatrical. It wants visible sacrifice. If you cancel the trip, stay home, and watch your friends send photographs from the seaside, guilt briefly considers your performance satisfactory. You've proved that your dog comes first, even though nobody has established whether he required you to cancel anything. This can create a peculiar system of moral accounting in which discomfort earns points and enjoyment creates debt. The more you give up, the more devoted you appear, at least to the imaginary examiner inside your head. But suffering isn't automatically evidence of good care. A miserable owner sitting at home with an inadequately exercised dog is not necessarily providing better care than a relaxed owner who has organized suitable support during a short trip.

Other people's opinions can make this standard even harder to resist. A friend casually mentions that they would never leave their dog in a kennel. Someone online declares that holidays are family experiences and every family member should be included. Another person tells a moving story about a dog who struggled during separation. These statements may reflect sincere beliefs or genuine experiences, but none establishes what is appropriate for your particular animal. Different dogs cope differently with unfamiliar environments, journeys, and substitute caregivers. A busy holiday destination may be delightful for one dog and exhausting for another. Leaving a dog in familiar surroundings with appropriate company may sometimes be the kinder choice. The question deserves assessment, not a competition to see whose devotion sounds most impressive at dinner.

The stories guilt likes to tell

Guilt rarely restricts itself to practical concerns. It also writes stories about what your dog must be thinking. Perhaps he believes you've abandoned him. Perhaps he wonders what he did wrong. Perhaps he'll lie beside the front door, remembering happier days while a single tear falls onto his favorite toy. It's an emotionally compelling scene, and if somebody added orchestral music, it could probably raise money for a very worthy cause. The trouble is that you don't actually know your dog is experiencing those thoughts. Dogs can form strong attachments and some experience serious separation-related distress. That reality deserves attention. But imagining a human narrative of betrayal isn't the same as observing a dog's behavior.

An uncomfortable feeling becomes particularly persuasive when you treat it as evidence. You imagine your

dog being unhappy, feel guilty about that imagined unhappiness, and then conclude that the intensity of your guilt proves he will suffer. Nothing new has been learned about the animal. Your mind has simply completed a circle and awarded itself a certificate. To interrupt this process, distinguish what you know from what you fear. If your dog has previously struggled when left with a particular caregiver, that is relevant information. If he settles comfortably with someone familiar, that matters too. If the only evidence is that you would miss him terribly, you've learned something about your feelings, not necessarily about his future experience.

This distinction becomes clearer when you write a concern in ordinary language. Suppose the thought is, "I'm being selfish by going away." Ask what specific obligation might be neglected. Does your dog require medication the sitter cannot administer? Is the proposed environment unsafe? Have you failed to account for a known behavioral difficulty? These questions can lead to useful action. If you cannot identify a care-related problem, the accusation of selfishness may be an emotional judgment rather than a practical warning. You don't have to argue yourself into feeling delighted about leaving. You only need to avoid treating every painful feeling as an instruction to abandon the trip.

There is a second trap in trying to prove that you care: compensating excessively before you leave. You might buy unnecessary toys, offer extra treats, change household rules, or organize such an elaborate final day together that your dog arrives at the sitter's home exhausted and confused. These gestures can feel comforting to you, but they don't necessarily improve the arrangements. A sudden

change in food may even cause digestive problems, while unfamiliar excitement can make an already challenging transition harder. Affection isn't the problem. The question is whether a particular action serves your dog's needs or your urgent desire to pay off an imaginary emotional debt.

What useful guilt can actually do

Not all discomfort needs to be dismissed. Occasionally, the nagging feeling that something hasn't been handled properly deserves investigation. The trick is to give it a limited, practical job. If you're uncertain about your dog's care, identify the missing fact or decision and address it. Perhaps the sitter hasn't confirmed the arrival time. Perhaps you've never observed how your dog behaves with that person. Perhaps an existing medical condition requires advice from your veterinarian before a prolonged absence. These are matters that can be checked, clarified, or resolved. Once you've taken appropriate action, there is no benefit in repeating the investigation merely because the original feeling hasn't disappeared.

Consider a couple preparing for a short break. One partner feels comfortable with the arrangements, while the other insists on calling the sitter again. The disagreement can quickly turn personal: one person accuses the other of not caring enough, and the other accuses the first of being irrational. Neither accusation helps the dog. A better conversation asks what information is genuinely missing. If they discover that nobody has established whether the sitter can manage the dog's evening medication, they have identified an important omission. If all essential arrangements are already confirmed, they can acknowledge that the partners experience separation differently without

requiring one person to adopt the other's emotional response.

Such conversations matter because guilt can easily turn into control over other people. You feel anxious, so you ask the sitter to reassure you. The reassurance helps briefly, then you request more detail. Soon the sitter is spending an increasing amount of time managing your emotions alongside caring for your dog. That isn't necessarily what they agreed to do, and it can distract from their responsibilities. Clear expectations and appropriate updates are valuable, especially when a dog has particular health needs. Repeatedly demanding proof of affection, however, is not a substitute for choosing someone competent. The sitter cannot remove every trace of uncertainty from your mind, however many photographs they provide.

Money adds another layer of complexity. Perhaps the most suitable care is expensive, or the person your dog knows best is unavailable. You may feel guilty because you cannot afford the arrangement you would ideally prefer. But limited resources aren't a character defect. They are a practical constraint that deserves honest consideration. You can compare suitable options, adjust the dates, shorten the trip, or seek other reliable arrangements. What matters is whether the chosen care meets your dog's essential needs. If it doesn't, you may have to change your plans. If it does, paying less than the most luxurious advertised price does not make you a less loving owner.

For some people, separation carries additional emotional weight because of previous experiences. Perhaps a former sitter failed to follow important instructions, or your dog became ill while you were away. A later trip may awaken memories of helplessness even when the present

circumstances are different. Those experiences shouldn't be brushed aside. They can identify safeguards worth strengthening, such as choosing a different caregiver or improving emergency arrangements. But an earlier problem doesn't automatically predict every future outcome. If a distressing event continues to dominate your decisions despite careful preparation, talking with a qualified mental health professional may also be useful. The purpose isn't to eliminate affection for your dog, but to help you live with uncertainty without being overwhelmed by it.

Permission to have more than one important thing in your life

You are allowed to value your dog and your relationships, career, rest, curiosity, and independence. Those commitments sometimes compete for time, and no responsible person can satisfy every preference simultaneously. Going away doesn't automatically mean your dog has been demoted to a less important position in your life. It means you have another legitimate reason to be somewhere else for a while, and you need to make responsible arrangements during that absence. Your reasons may be joyful, necessary, or complicated. You might be attending an important event rather than enjoying a holiday. You might need respite after a demanding period. You don't have to establish that your journey is sufficiently heroic to justify leaving your dog with a capable caregiver.

The most revealing question is often not "Do I feel guilty?" but "Have I acted responsibly with the information and resources available to me?" The first question may remain unanswered because emotions don't always cooperate with evidence. The second invites a considered judgment. You can acknowledge uncertainty, recognize limitations, and

decide whether the arrangements are adequate. You can revise them when important facts change. And when nothing meaningful has changed, you can allow the decision to stand rather than reopening it every time you remember how much you love your dog.

Before your next departure, you may still experience that familiar tightness in your chest. You might miss your dog's peculiar morning habits or wish he could understand when you'll return. None of this needs to become a fresh accusation against yourself. You can be sad about leaving while remaining confident that his needs have been taken seriously. You can ask for an appropriate update without demanding constant evidence that the universe is behaving correctly. You can enjoy your journey without pretending your dog doesn't exist.

Guilt may insist on traveling with you anyway. It can be remarkably persistent, especially when it has spent years convincing you that worry is an essential part of love. But you don't have to let it choose the itinerary. Once you've made responsible arrangements, the feeling can remain a feeling rather than becoming your personal travel manager. You have enough to organize already, and unlike your dog, guilt has never once contributed to the household by enthusiastically cleaning a dropped piece of food from the kitchen floor.

Chapter 2 - What Your Dog Is Actually Experiencing While You're Away

Your dog knows that the sound of a particular cupboard opening often means dinner is approaching. He can identify the unmistakable rustle of a treat packet through a closed door, yet may appear temporarily unfamiliar with his own name when you're asking him to leave an interesting patch of grass. He notices repeated patterns in your movements and can develop expectations about what happens next. This is an impressive talent, although his practical application of it sometimes raises questions about his commitment to household cooperation. Understanding that ability is important when you're planning to travel, because dogs don't need to understand holiday bookings to notice that something unusual is happening around them.

Suppose you normally leave for work wearing certain shoes, taking a familiar bag, and following a fairly predictable morning routine. Your dog may learn that these events often precede your departure. When you prepare for a longer journey, the sequence might change. You move unfamiliar luggage, organize possessions, and perhaps behave differently because you're rushed or anxious. Your dog may become interested, excited, uncertain, or unsettled. His response will depend on previous experiences, temperament, environment, and other circumstances. He isn't necessarily contemplating the duration of your trip. He is responding to things he can perceive and associations he has learned. That distinction matters because it changes how you evaluate his behavior.

Dogs can form meaningful attachments to people, and some experience significant distress associated with separation. Others manage changes of caregiver or temporary absences relatively comfortably. Even dogs within the same household may respond differently. It would be misleading to describe every dog as completely indifferent to an owner's departure, just as it would be misleading to assume every dog experiences it as abandonment. Neither comforting certainty nor dramatic certainty tells us much about the individual animal sitting in front of us. We need to examine how that dog behaves under relevant conditions, recognizing that behavior offers useful clues without revealing every detail of an internal emotional experience.

The difference between behavior and interpretation

Imagine watching a short video of a dog sitting beside a front door. If you already believe the dog is heartbroken, the scene provides apparent confirmation. If somebody tells you he's waiting for his evening walk, you may interpret the same image differently. The posture alone doesn't establish either explanation. What happened before the recording? How long did the dog remain there? Was he relaxed, attentive, restless, or showing other signs of distress? What did he do afterward? A brief observation becomes more informative when combined with context and repeated patterns. The difficulty is that humans enjoy explanations so much that we often invent them before we've finished observing.

This tendency isn't entirely unhelpful. Trying to understand what another creature may be experiencing is part of attentive care. But interpreting canine behavior through a human story can also lead us astray. A dog might

move away from a familiar person because he's uncomfortable, wants to rest, or is interested in something else. Calling him "offended" may be amusing in casual conversation, but it doesn't identify the reason for his behavior. Similarly, describing a dog as "jealous" or "stubborn" may conceal details that would help us respond more effectively. The words aren't always entirely meaningless, but they're often too broad to guide practical decisions.

Try replacing an interpretation with a description. Instead of saying, "She gets upset whenever someone unfamiliar visits," describe what she does. Perhaps she moves behind a chair, avoids approaching, remains tense, and doesn't readily settle. Another dog might bark repeatedly, rush toward the entrance, and struggle to disengage. Both reactions may indicate difficulty, but the arrangements that help one dog might be unsuitable for the other. Specific observations enable a caregiver to recognize familiar patterns and notice meaningful changes. General labels encourage guessing, particularly when the person providing care doesn't know the animal well.

A useful way to begin is to examine your dog's behavior during ordinary life rather than waiting for an important trip. What happens when you leave briefly for a routine errand? Does he settle, move between resting places, or remain highly active? How does he respond when a familiar person visits without you present? Does he eat normally, accept everyday care, and rest comfortably? You don't need to conduct a scientific experiment or record every movement. Simply notice patterns that are relevant to the kind of care you're considering. If your dog shows significant distress during ordinary departures, don't deliberately extend his