

## STORY



# Nally McNally's giant dog

**Cathy Beer** recounts how Miss Plumket finds herself out of her depth and, once again, calls on the help of her old friend, Mrs Medicott.

**'Oh dear me...'** sighed Miss Plumket. 'Why on earth did I say yes?'

She was feeling very nervous. An old friend Nally MacNally had asked her to look after his dog for the day, and although she knew it was a very small Jack Russell who normally would be no trouble, she had been dithering because she had no experience with dogs.

'Why don't you ask your sister to look after him?' she had suggested. 'Oh no, I can't do that,' Nally had replied emphatically, 'Sally and I have not been on speaking terms for over two years. We had a terrible quarrel!' But maybe Nally McNally hadn't realized that Miss Plumket had no experience with dogs at all.

**The day came, and the doorbell rang.** 'Here we are, Miss P, and here is Archibald. As you can see, he is very excited to spend the day with you'.

And there, jumping up to greet her, was not a small Jack Russel, but an incredibly large sort of Lurcher. Miss Plumket turned a rather interesting shade of off-white or more like jasmine white with a hint of green – and held on to the bannister.

'Oh, Nally,' she said faintly, 'I thought you had a small dog'.

'Oh Miss P,' he sighed, taking out a large handkerchief and wiping his nose with it dramatically, even though his nose was quite dry, 'poor Tinkerbelle died last year. I couldn't live without a dog in the house, so I got

Archibald. He is very different isn't he? He was a sweet little thing as a puppy; I didn't realize he was going to grow so big and only 18 months old! Just fancy that! You can call him Archie for short. You need to walk him at least two hours in the morning; the afternoon walk can be a bit shorter. I'll be back to fetch him early evening but do feel free to take him for as many walks as you like – Archie is full of beans and never gets tired. Well, I must dash now or I'll miss my train. Here is a sack with his food, his normal lead and his extending lead, his toys, his treats, his medication for thyroid which you have to wrap in a piece of best fillet steak – here's the steak – and here are all the instructions. Bye now, see you later'.



**Miss P weakly raised her trembling arm** to wave goodbye and shut the door. She staggered to the kitchen and flopped onto a chair. She was left with Archibald peering at her, noisily sniffing her knees and thumping his tail on the floor with excitement.

There was only one thing to do. It was what she always did when she was in a panic: phone Mrs Medicott.

Miss Plumket was definitely a panicker (though there probably isn't such a word), but it was unusual for Mrs Medicott to panic. However when Miss Plumket explained the pickle she had got herself into, she couldn't help noticing that there was a slight difference in Mrs Medicott's voice. It was just a little higher than usual, just a little shriller and had an odd squeak to it. This did not help. 'Now don't panic Miss Plumket!' Mrs Medicott screeched down the phone, 'no need to panic!'

Miss Plumket was so relieved to see Mrs Medicott arrive on the next bus. She was a bit wet as it was drizzling.

'Oh my giddy aunt!' she exclaimed, wiping her hair and aghast to see how big the dog was. Then she pulled herself together and said to her friend, 'Well, if this giant thing needs two hours' walk, plus one in the afternoon, plus maybe more, we had better get going before lunch'. Unlike Miss Plumket, Mrs Medicott was very practical in a crisis.

**They looked in the sack and found the extending lead** and also a ball, and off they went in the drizzle to the village green, where Miss Plumket knew many owners walked their



Illustration: ©Duncan Harper

dogs. They always let their dogs off the lead on the green because it was safe. But Miss Plumket and Mrs Medicott decided that Archie should definitely be kept on the lead – they didn't want to risk losing him. When they arrived they were surprised to see so many dogs on such a miserable day: Labradors, Poodles, Labradoodles, Cocker Spaniels, Cockerpoos, Great Danes, Dalmations, Terriers, Chihuahuas and a little scruffy beige thing that looked like a moth eaten rag with its pink tongue lolling out of its mouth.

Although she was a large lady, one thing that Miss Plumket did have was very strong muscles, having been a ballet dancer in her youth. She rolled the ball

surprisingly vigorously across the grass, which was more like mud after several days of rain. To have chosen the extending lead for Archie had been a bad move. Archie lived up to his name and lurched forward and galloped at top speed to catch the ball. The lead extended to its very limit and suddenly stopped, at which point Miss Plumket was violently jerked, slipped and fell flat in the mud and let go of the lead. Mrs Medicott rushed to help her up, but Miss Plumket was very heavy. 'No, no, don't bother about me,' gasped Miss Plumket, her face spattered with mud, 'for heaven's sake get Archie before he escapes!' So Mrs Medicott started shouting 'Archie! ARCHIE! ARCHIBALD!' as loud as she could.

**Meanwhile a terrible thing was happening.** All the dogs on the green had gone after the ball. In an instant there was pandemonium: a deafening barking and yelping rugby scrum in fast motion like a pile of rugs in a spin dryer and no one could recognise their dog. Cries of 'Woody! Woody! Come here Woody!' 'Susie! Susie!' 'Charlie!' 'Pansy! Come back AT ONCE Pansy!' 'PANSY!!' 'Hector!' 'Baxter!' 'Molly!' 'Boris! NO Boris! Naughty! Heel!' and many whistles were being blown. Nothing had any effect. All the owners began to panic, in fear of their dogs' lives...

Then one of the dogs, the one like a moth eaten rag, suddenly noticed something more interesting than the ball, lying in the mud, and went to investigate. Miss Plumket felt something licking her ear. Another dog joined in and one by one they all went to lick Miss Plumket. Archie, his lead trailing in the mud, wandered over to look down at her in rather a bored fashion. Mrs Medicott grabbed his lead and then all the owners rushed over and were reunited with their dogs that were covered in mud but full of the joy of the moment. After the owners had made sure their dogs were not hurt, they made sure Miss Plumket was not hurt and two strong men helped her up. One of them sat her down on a bench and offered her a cup of tea from his flask. Miss Plumket began to recover from her ordeal, and no one blamed her for having caused such a terrible canine drama – all the dogs were right as rain, though the little scruffy one did look a bit scruffier.

Mrs Medicott and Miss Plumket decided that it was best to go home and have a cup of tea.

**No sooner had they shut the door,** put the kettle on and given Archie a bowl of water, when all three of them fell fast asleep.

## STORY

Suddenly they were woken by a very strange sound. It seemed to be coming from the sack. Miss Plumket didn't dare investigate, so Mrs Medlicott boldly put her hand in the sack. They both got the fright of their lives – out jumped the ragged dog!

'Oh no! He must have followed us home!' exclaimed Miss Plumket. He was such a friendly little bouncy thing but he stood still to let Mrs Medlicott feel his scruffy neck to see if he had a collar with a name tag or phone number. There was indeed a name, but no phone number. His name was Elvis.

'What can we do with him?' cried Miss Plumket. I really have no experience with dogs and now there are two in the house! She was becoming hysterical. Archie on the other hand was delighted with Elvis and they took to each other like long lost friends.

'Well, said Mrs Medlicott, the only thing to do is to take Archie and Elvis back to the green and see if his owner is looking for him.' So that's what they did.

**But the owners and dogs were different ones** and no owner was calling for Elvis. So after the walk they had to take him back home.

Archie was very pleased and let Elvis have some of his best fillet steak with the thyroid tablet wrapped inside before Miss Plumket could stop him. Elvis spat out the thyroid tablet in disgust. Just when Mrs Medlicott had found the phone number to ring the RSPCA to report the lost dog, Nally McNally arrived.

'Well, hello Mrs P, I see you got help with Archie!' he said grinning at Mrs Medlicott. 'I've had a great day. And I'm sure you and Archie did too.' Mrs Medlicott pursed her lips. 'We did not have a great day, Nally,' said Miss Plumket, 'and look what followed us home. The whole day has been a headache. Now we have to find the owner of this stray dog.' Nally McNally looked at the dog and laughed. It looks like a moth eaten rag! Does it have a name?' 'Elvis' said Mrs Medlicott. Would you believe it – calling a thing like that Elvis?'

Nally McNally stopped laughing and looked hard

at Elvis. 'Oh my word, ELVIS!' he exclaimed. 'That's my sister Sally's dog! It must be more than two years old now but I recognize it just the same, it was a wee pup when Sally got it, it looked just like one of those little cloths for doing the washing up. I expect she'll be wondering where on earth he is!'

Then Nally McNally hesitated. He remembered he and Sally had had a quarrel and they were no longer on speaking terms. He hummed and sighed and removed his cap to stroke his bald head and put on his cap again and rubbed his chin.

'Well I supposed I'd better take Elvis back to my sister,' he said finally and cleared his throat. He put Elvis and Archie together on the same lead, picked up the sack and set off for Sally McNally's house which was only about half an hour's walk. It was already dusk.

Illustration: @DuncanHarper



**He rang the bell, feeling quite nervous,** though he wasn't normally a nervous man at all.

Sally opened the door and as soon as she saw Elvis she burst into tears with relief. 'Oh Elvis, Elvis,' she cried, sobbing into the raggiest bit of his neck, 'I thought you were lost,

oh Elvis!' Then she looked at the man who had brought Elvis back. 'Nally? Is that you?' She peered into the semi darkness. 'Yes, Sally, it's me, Elvis was lost and I've brought him back to you.'

Sally McNally didn't know what to say, and there was a long silence. Then she said 'Nally McNally, I'm sorry for what happened.' 'So am I,' said her brother. 'What was it that actually happened?' 'I can't remember' said Nally. 'Well, said Sally, if we can't remember what we quarrelled about we have certainly wasted two years.' She opened the door wide. 'Come in Nally and have tea with me.'

So Sally and Nally McNally had tea together that day – the first of many teas to come – and while Elvis and Archie settled down at their feet, Sally was thinking that Elvis wasn't the most important one to be found that day. 🍷