**The Bully**

**The missus calls me Maximilian the Magnificent, but** I was the runt of the litter and my small size gives me problems in life.

It’s a well-known fact that humans don’t have a clock in their heads. Today I was dancing around in frustration when it was time for breakfast but the missus was slow, pulling on her tatty old dressing-gown, blundering out of the bedroom and setting off down the stairs, not looking where she was going. And what happens? She trips over her dressing-gown cord, loses her footing and . . . bump! Bump! Ends up on the floor of the hall.

I touch her cheek with my paw. She groans and her eyelids flicker.

Her foot looks odd. Bent and swollen.

Her smartphone rings, half in and half out of her pocket. I dab at the buttons and a voice says, ‘Who’s that?’ I jump back, alarmed, but the missus reacts automatically, saying she’s had an accident and needs help.

She’s shivering a bit so I snuggle up to her to keep her warm and then . . . chaos! First one neighbour arrives and then another, including the bossy boots from down the road. I retreat to the top of the cupboard in the hall while they fuss around and finally some men with a wheelchair come and take the missus away. She asks someone to look after me and they say they will.

The house is quiet.

Too quiet. The neighbour doesn’t return. She’s forgotten me, hasn’t she? My bowls in the kitchen are empty. No food, no water.

Will I starve to death? No, of course not. I am Maximilian the Resourceful. I go out through the cat-flap and visit a couple of neighbours to see if someone will take pity on me. I scrounge a bit of this and a bit of that, and finish by lapping water from our own bird bath.

When night comes, I curl up on our bed and wait for the missus to return. It’s a long night. I miss her. In the morning I hear the key turn in the lock and rush down the stairs only to meet with a sound to strike terror into the boldest of hearts. I can happily co-exist with well-brought-up dogs, but the snarl of the bad-tempered Bully terrifies the whole neighbourhood.

He spots me and lunges forward. I leap for my life to the top of the cupboard. I can feel my heart going like the clappers. He snarls and gnashes his teeth. He jumps up and down, trying to reach me. Bossy Boots, his carer, fetches the broom from the kitchen and swipes me off the cupboard. I tumble to the floor and shoot straight out through the cat flap with Bully’s teeth snapping at my tail.

I’m half way up the tallest tree in the garden before Bossy Boots opens the kitchen door so that Bully can hunt me down. He snuffles around the garden but eventually gives up and goes back inside . . . when Bossy Boots locks the cat flap behind him.

I’ve been evicted from my own home!

From my perch in the tree I watch ambulance men bring the missus back in a wheelchair. She looks tired. I want to drop down into her lap and comfort her, poor dear, but she seems hardly awake. She’s wearing a strange white boot and needs help getting to her armchair. Bossy Boots fusses around her, with Bully snuffling at her heels.

Bossy Boots lets him out into the garden for a run. It’s unnerving seeing him in my space though he doesn’t spot me. He stinks. He could do with a power shower. Preferably after he’s been put to sleep. Purr-manently.

And then, Ugh! He defiles my lawn with his motions. I’ve never understood why dogs don’t have the sense to bury their offerings.

Bossy Boots calls to the Bully, giving him a great dollop of meat in MY BOWL! She doesn’t leave any food out for me.

I consider my options. Is this where I leave home to seek my fortune elsewhere? But no, I can’t leave the missus. She needs me.

There’s a garden shed nearby whose door doesn’t close properly. I’ll take shelter there tonight and occupy myself keeping the mouse population down. Perhaps the missus will be herself again tomorrow?

In the morning I climb up to my perch in the tree and watch Bossy Boots and Bully arrive. Opening the kitchen door, she busies herself making breakfast. I see the missus slowly making her way down the stairs and into the sitting-room. She opens the French windows and calls out, ‘Max? Where are you, Max?’

I drop down from the tree and creep up the garden. Perhaps I can reach the missus before the Bully catches me.

Oh no! He’s seen me! He erupts from the house, followed by Bossy Boots brandishing a broom. She swipes at me and misses. I veer off to the right and she tries to follow . . . she treads in something brown and sticky in the grass . . . and Oops! Over she goes, on top of the Bully. He turns on her and snap! He bites the hand that feeds him.

She screams loud enough to scare all the birds in the neighbourhood.

There is a lot of blood.

The missus uses her phone to call for help.

When they’ve been taken away, I sit on the missus’ knee, purring.

I am Maximilian the Magnificent, I battle with Bullies and Survive Setbacks.