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Opening extract from

The Poodle Problem

Written by

Anna Wilson

Published by

Macmillan Children's Books

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The
Poodle
Problem

Also by Anna Wilson

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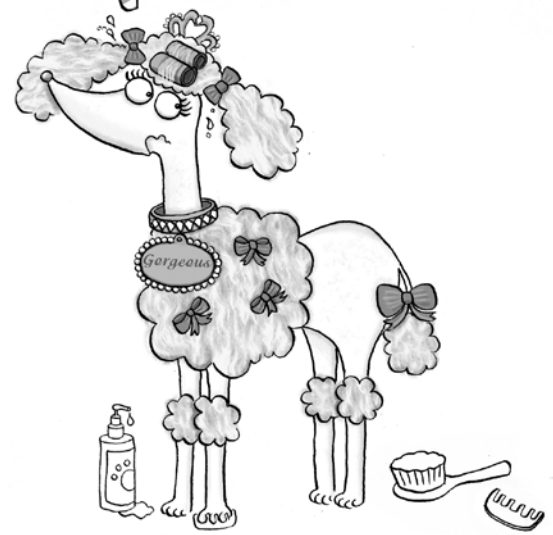
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The Poodle Problem



Anna Wilson

Illustrated by Clare Elsom

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For Rachel, Emma, Tanya and Harriet at The Courtyard Hair & Beauty, without whom the Pooch Parlour idea would never have been born





The Introductory Bit

This is the story of a small (and rather handsome) dog.



that'll be me she's talking about.

Yes. You don't need to be *quite* so conceited though, do you?

Sorry about that. As I was saying. This is the story of a small dog and how he solved a large (and rather tricky) mystery. His name is – no, I shan't tell you his name yet. That would spoil things, and we can't have that. You'll have to read on to find out what



his name is, as he doesn't appear until later. I can, however, tell you the name of the lovely lady he came to live with, because she is in this story right from the beginning, so that won't spoil anything at all. Now you'd better stop fidgeting, because we're ready to begin.



1



Welcome to Crumbly-under-Edge!

Mrs Fudge was the lovely old lady in question. She had snowy-white hair and a jolly face and her full name was Semolina Ribena Fudge, which I'm sure you'll agree is quite an awkward name, and it's true that she wasn't overly fond of it. She didn't mind the 'Fudge' bit as that had been her late husband's surname. (I say he was her 'late husband', not because he was never on time for anything, but because, sadly, he was dead by the time this story starts.)



He was a wonderful man, dears (if a little bossy at times).

Mr and Mrs Fudge had travelled the world together – and the Seven Seas. They'd fought pirates and swum with dolphins. But after many years of adventure they decided it was time to settle down. And that is how they came to buy their large, rambling house in Liquorice Drive in the country town of Crumbly-under-Edge.

Crumbly-under-Edge was a sleepy, pretty little place. It had a main street with a few shops. And it had some windy, cobbledy not-so-main streets with houses painted pleasing shades of blue and pink and green and creamy white so that, from a distance, they looked like rows of marshmallows or iced buns.The houses and shops were very well looked after.

By the time you come to meet her, dear reader, Mrs Fudge had been living in the town for years and years and eons and indeed yonks (which is a technical term for a very long time indeed). She was quite happy – however she did feel the house was rather too big for one old person. And never having



approved of waste of any kind (especially a waste of space), Mrs Fudge thought *maybe* she should open up part of her house for the purposes of running a little business. So, after much thought and planning, she came up with the idea of turning part of the ground floor of the house into a hairdressing salon called 'Chop 'n' Chat'.



There's always ladies wanting their hair done.

And how right she was about that! Chop 'n' Chat was soon a *booming* business, for not only was Mrs Fudge a marvellous hairdresser, she was also a very good listener and made the best cup of tea and the lightest fluffiest sponge cake this side of the Atlantic Ocean (I can't speak for the other side, not having been there myself at the time of writing).

So Mrs Fudge had arranged her life so that it



was just about perfect, you might say . . . There was one thing though: even though Mrs Fudge had many, many customers who kept her busy, and even though she had a particularly gorgeous fluffy grey cat called Muffles, and even though she *loved* her town and her house and her baking, Mrs Fudge could get lonely sometimes.

And this was a thought that kept her up at night occasionally and made the long winter evenings seem even longer and more wintery than they actually were. It became clear to Mrs Fudge that she had to do something about this. And so she pondered . . .



Yes, thank you, Pippa . . .

(It would be nice if people didn't *insist* on interrupting me.)

Pippa Peppercorn was a girl (obviously) who was ten and a quarter, and didn't mind who knew it. In fact, she was exceedingly proud of the quartery bit, as it meant she was well on her way to becoming eleven (which is, as everyone knows, almost fully grown-up). She had very few friends her own age, mainly because she felt that most other ten-and-a-quarter-year-olds were only interested in sleepover parties and giggling, whereas *she* had her eye firmly fixed on the future.

And, as it happened, Mrs Fudge was of the opinion that most other extremely old people were rather dull and only liked sucking toffees and saying, 'It wouldn't happen in my day.' So when Pippa walked into Chop 'n' Chat one day with a sulk that could have sunk a thousand ships and muttered, 'Teacher says I have to get my hair cut,' and Mrs Fudge smiled in an understanding way and said, 'Would you like an apricot flapjack?' a lifelong friendship was born.

Now we've got all that straight, I think we should get on with the story.



What about ME?

I've already explained: you come in later.

But–

I've got to set the scene, haven't I?

But–!

Who's telling this story?

sulks

2



Pippa Peppercorn Comes to the Rescue

In the usual run of things, you would expect that a girl of ten and a quarter would have to ask her parents' permission to take on a Saturday job. But luckily for Pippa (and for this story) we don't have to worry about all that. Pippa's parents were always busy, and when they heard that the wonderful Mrs Fudge was giving their daughter something to do at the weekend they were so over the moon that they could have written to the Association of Astronauts to tell them what the dark side of it looked like. (Dark, presumably.)

'That is a lovely idea,' said Mr Peppercorn, not looking up from his newspaper.

'Make sure Mrs Fudge gives you the recipe for her



sponge cake, won't you?' said Mrs Peppercorn, not looking up from her book.

And you won't hear much more from Pippa Peppercorn's parents, because frankly they were such a tedious pair it would bore you rigid.

Pippa found herself counting down the days, hours, minutes and seconds until that first Saturday morning arrived. And since counting every second of every day takes rather a lot of concentration Pippa missed out on a few things, such as people asking her

to partner them for table tennis or go to the cinema with them. But Pippa didn't notice. She was too busy counting.

The Saturday of Pippa's new job finally dawned. But Pippa was up well before the dawn. She was up while it was as dark as the darkest cave. And to top it all, her bedside light wasn't working, so she fell out of bed and had to fumble around for her slippers and a torch, which luckily she always kept under the bed in case of burglars. She thought that if a burglar was ever cheeky enough to come into her room in the dark, she could grab her torch, shine it in his face to bedazzle the daylights out of him and then make a run for it.

She found the torch, turned it on and got dressed. Then she crept downstairs and made herself some pancakes and fried some bacon and boiled the kettle for a cup of tea. Pippa was quite handy like that.

But even after she'd done all those things, the kitchen clock insisted that it was only seven o'clock.

'Oh, blow it!' Pippa told the clock. 'Couldn't you

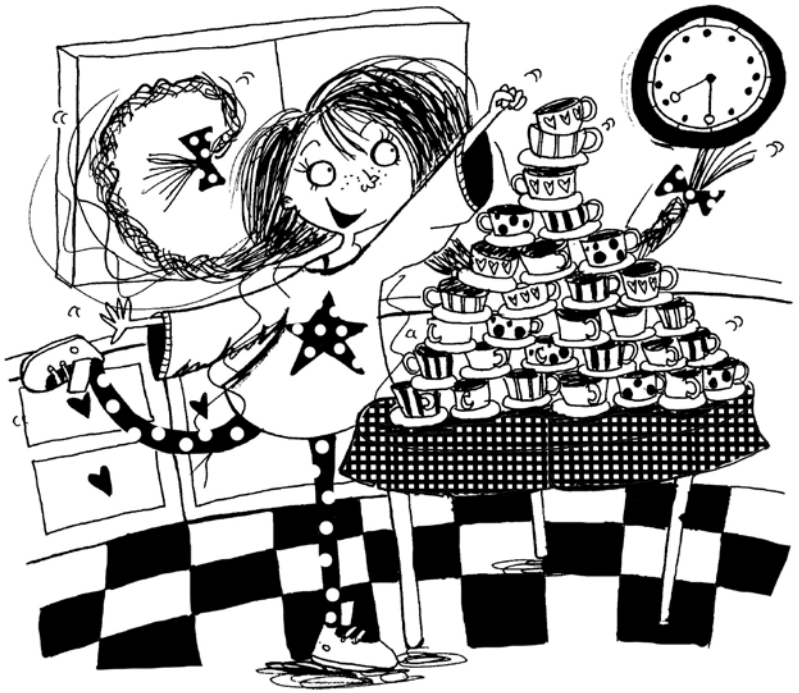
please move a little bit faster? I'm going to have to give the kitchen a good old clean now to pass the time.'

The clock unfortunately did not react to being told off, even when Pippa gave it her hardest glare, so she put her hands on her skinny hips, sighed a big loud snorty sigh and looked around her to decide where to start on her cleaning.

The kitchen was not very dirty or messy, so she decided to pass the time by rearranging things instead of cleaning them. She became so absorbed in moving chairs and jugs and plates and bowls and pots and pans that, without her noticing, the kitchen clock eventually *did* get a move on and all of a sudden (or so it seemed), it was . . .

'HALF PAST EIGHT!' Pippa shouted, punching the air in a victory salute, narrowly missing the rather beautiful pyramid she had made of all the cups and saucers in the house.

She ran to the hall, took her red duffel coat from its peg, grabbed her black woolly hat and, checking



she had her keys, let herself out into the cold autumn morning.

Mrs Fudge too was awake before the dawn had leaked around the edges of the sky. She found that the older she got, the less sleep she tended to need, and so she was often up at a time most normal people would be cosily tucked up in bed. This meant that

she had lots of extra time in her day for doing all the things she had been too busy to do when she was younger, namely baking, learning the banjo and knitting. (Sometimes she even knitted little cakes to use as cheery decorations.)

And so, even though it was incredibly early and still rather dark outside, Mrs Fudge was up and about. She had neatly brushed and combed her hair, and she was wearing a fresh dress (her favourite one, with the red and pink swirls) with a blue flowery apron over it to keep herself clean. She was humming a little song of her own devising and tidying her kitchen and baking some scones. The wind howled outside, sending flurries of leaves leaping and whirling against the windows, but Mrs Fudge's kitchen was invitingly snug and warm.

'I must make the place look extra-specially cosy and nice for young Pippa's first day,' she said, as she shined the taps on the sink.

She wasn't talking to herself, I should add. She was talking to her cat, Muffles. Muffles wasn't paying

attention though. She was licking her bottom, as cats have a habit of doing when you are talking to them. It's rude and ungracious of them, I agree, but what can you do? A cat will always lick its bottom if it possibly can.



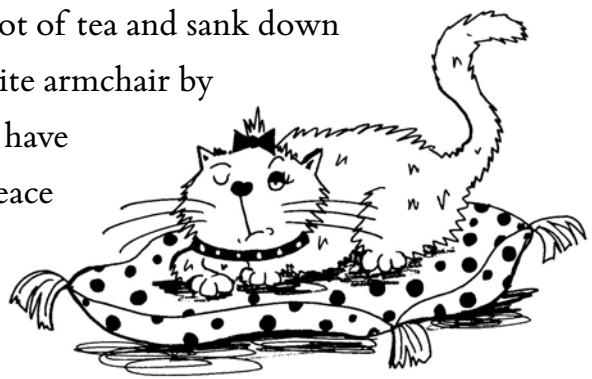
which is why DOGS are so much more sophisticated.

Mrs Fudge tutted (as indeed I will do to a CERTAIN DOG in a minute), sighed and went back to tidying the kitchen until the timer went PING! which meant the scones were ready. She fetched a stripy oven glove and bent to open the oven door. As she did so, a warm, golden crumbly smell of good fresh baking filled the room. Mrs Fudge closed her eyes, the better to appreciate the aroma, and smiled.

'Enough for all my customers this morning,' she said appreciatively, opening her eyes again and

setting the scones down on a wire rack to cool.

The sun was peeking in through the crack in the curtains by now, the wind had calmed its bad temper and the kettle had just boiled. Muffles opened one eye to check that everything was as it should be, saw that it was, and closed it again. Mrs Fudge made herself a nice pot of tea and sank down into her favourite armchair by the window to have five minutes' peace before her day began.



3



A Second Breakfast

'I wonder if I'll get to do any actual cutting of hair,' said Pippa to herself as she skipped along the rain-streaked lanes.

She kicked at a mound of soggy leaves with her red-booted foot and sent them sliding muddily across the path.

'I would LOVE to get to do some snip-snip-snippety-snipping!' she cried, jumping in a puddle and making great slashing movements with her blue-gloved fingers.

She broke into a run as she turned on to Liquorice Drive. Her incredibly long red plaits bounced jerkily on her shoulders and flapped in her face, and her black woolly hat slipped ever so slightly down over