

Puppy Sitting For *Nampties*



Jody Klairé

Foreword

Where do I start? I know... Blame Liz McMullen... Yup, that's a great place. Liz had an incredible idea of making a project filled with laughter in honour of our dear friend Sandra Moran.

It's incredibly hard to explain how cool, smart and warm Sandra was. When Liz tickled my grey cells, I knew I had to call in some French recruits because I was fortunate to work with Sandra on *La Vie en Bleu* during my time at the GCLS Writing Academy. It was so much fun to work with a friend and mentor I cherished.

She made me smile so I have packed this with as much ridiculousness as I could find. If you've owned a Golden Retriever, you may just nod and remember those "good ol' times" whereas if you haven't, you'll shake your head in disbelief.

A big thank you goes to Liz, Adrian who kindly edited, to Em and Mum for chuckling through our shared experience... And to Fergus, for not only posing for the cover, but providing real-life research.

I'm hoping if you like it, you may click on to the GCLS and Sandra's fund to spare a few pennies but, if you can't, find someone who needs some cheer and grin at them... Then tell them you're grinning because once upon a time, a woman running around Kansas just so happen to meet a Welsh woman on wheels...

Chapter One



The gentle breeze tickled over my skin as I turned my head to the warm spring sunshine. At least until Berne wandered into my line of sight. I sighed. Berne. She was everything a French woman should be and more. She walked like a sprinter. Her confident stride made it impossible to ignore her. She was the gentle hum underneath my skin, the laughter in my heart, the thudding heat in my –

“Pip!”

I jumped and dropped the watering can in my hand. It clattered onto the floor, right onto my foot.

Ow.

Rebecca chuckled, bending over at the waist as her shoulders shook.

“Are you trying to give me a heart attack?” I muttered, doing a half-hop, half-limp around in a circle. Why that was supposed to stop my foot hurting I didn’t know, but I didn’t care.

Ow.

“Thought your batteries had run out,” Rebecca said with a snigger. Her luminous hair was even brighter in the sun. We were in France, a place of culture, refinement, romance and she was in Union Jack board shorts; an English rugby shirt; flip-flops and yes, socks. I didn’t know where I’d found her.

“You’ve got me doing all the hard work, so it shouldn’t surprise you.” I stared at the patch of mud that was meant to become a garden or flowerbed or something posh like they had on all the home improvement programs we loved.

So far, it just looked like I’d made a soggy molehill.

“If you weren’t drooling over the gorgeous Mademoiselle Chamonix, you would have seen that I was turning over the rose garden.” She thumbed in the direction of the one spot of shade. It was only shady because it still had scaffolding over it that neither of us had quite both-

ered to take down yet. We'd only been in the house for, what, seven months? Had it been that long?

"It's *Madame* Chamonix," I shot at her, picking up my watering can. I sloshed it her way, intending to spray her from the spout, only the water jumped up and hit me smack in the face. I dropped it and it clonked onto the ground, soaking my knees too.

Right. Lovely.

"She's not married...yet," Rebecca said with a wink.

"It doesn't matter, cloth-head. *Mademoiselle* is not description of her. *Mademoiselle* is a child and she is a woman." I smiled – She was very gorgeous woman chatting away on her mobile phone.

Her gaze lighted on me, dipped to my top, and a smile spread across her lips. Another French trait: turning me into a gibbering idiot with one look.

"Pip. Will you concentrate?" Rebecca slapped my arm with her gardening gloves. "Babs will be 'round later and I want to get this sorted." She grinned, her usual cocky grin. "I'm hoping she'll scrub my back."

I tried to block out that picture. "You're immature and disgusting."

"Because you're not thinking about –"

I slammed my hand over Rebecca's mouth. "Thank you."

Rebecca wiggled her eyebrows and I rolled my eyes. It escaped me how Rebecca had wooed Babs. The "Little English Lemon Slice," as Babs called her, had all the subtlety of my gardening skills.

Talking of gardening, I looked down at my soggy patch of mud. Well, it *had* been soggy. The sun had already started to suck up the moisture. I was no muscle-woman but even my shovel was clanging in protest when it hit the dust.

"Come on, Pip. We both know full well that, when you look at Berne, you're not thinking about her stonemasonry skills." Rebecca snorted.

"I was merely concerned that she was okay...because she looks tense." I nodded. That sounded like a fantastic reason. Yes, I was concerned. Wasn't I the conscientious girlfriend?

"That right?" Rebecca put her hands on her hips. She was milk bottle white, a redhead – under the bright blond – and she had more freckles since we'd moved to France. As the white often went pink, she wore sunblock like she was off to play cricket.

"Yes. Can't you see how worried she looks?" I asked.

We looked over at Berne who chuckled, babbling on in French to whoever was amusing her.

"Yeah, really tense." Rebecca's irritating cocky tone made me scowl.

"If you're making a rose garden, *where* are the roses?" I raised my eyebrows, trying to lean on my fork thing, which slid in the dirt and clattered out of my hand.

"Pip, you can't look mad in pink Wellies." She shook her head. "It's just wrong."

I looked down at my rubber boots. They were the only ones left in the shop. Back home in Britain, Wellington boots, or Wellies, were appropriate wear for outdoor things. We had a lot of mud. Not so much in the south of France.

"Well, I am. Where are your roses, Whitely?" I put my hands on my hips. I knew I looked more camp than threatening but I didn't care, pink Wellies or not.

"I've planted them." She smiled a smug smile. "Just thought I'd ask you if you needed any help between drooling."

"I was *not* drooling."

"Were too." She wiggled her unruly eyebrows.

"Was not!"

"*Ça va?*" Berne's smooth alto next to my ear made me jump. I yelped like the girl I was.

"Pip's just saying how concerned she was that you looked so tense." Rebecca chuckled like a smutty builder. "So very, very tense."

I tried to flick out my foot to hit her, and my Wellie flew off and smacked into the pot of flowers I was *supposed* to be making a bed for.

Rebecca chuckled louder.

"It was a happy call," Berne purred at me, nuzzling in, wrapping her arms around my waist. I loved the way she dropped her Hs when she spoke English. "Monsieur Coin wishes us to take care of a little friend."

Rebecca's eyebrows shot up. "Oh no."

I was with Rebecca. Visions of a nightmare five-year-old brat attacking me with a plastic sword rattled through my memory. He was doing history in school and I assumed they were up to one of England and France's many battles. "Berne, if you mean his grandson I—"

"*Non,*" She kissed me. Her eyes twinkling. "It is his puppy."

Oh. I could cope with that. My ex-fiancé's dog was a slinky Doberman called Jeffery. Jeffery was so placid, so calm and sweet. A bit like my ex-fiancé really. I needed to call Doug. I needed to see how he was.

Rebecca watched me wobble on one foot with a sneaky smile.

"What kind of puppy?"

She glanced at my Wellie.

"Don't you dare." I wagged my finger, hoping Berne would come to the rescue and help. It was hard standing on one foot, and my sock would get dirty if I put my foot down. If I had any other clean socks, that wouldn't be so bad, but I hadn't quite plumbed in the washing machine yet.

"What?" Rebecca gave me an innocent look as she walked over to my Wellie. "You think we can't handle a puppy?"

I scowled. "Unhand my Wellie, Woman."

She winked. "What, this one?" She picked it up along with the watering can.

Berne chuckled. "He is no problem." She didn't sound too sure about that. "I will need to help Monsieur Coin. You will only have to watch him for a little while, *Oui?*"

"Sounds like fun." Rebecca poured the water into my Wellie.

I growled and flicked up my other foot, shooting my Wellie at her. It didn't even reach her. It was a pathetic attempt even for me.

Rebecca's eyes twinkled. "What do you know, two for one." She grinned at Berne who I could feel laughing behind me. "What breed is it?"

"Whitely, don't you dare. I need those Wellies." I couldn't run at her. I could feel water seeping through my socks and wet feet meant one thing for me: I needed to pee. Rebecca knew it too.

"A golden retriever," Berne said between muffled chuckles.

"What's the matter, Pip?" Rebecca shot at me, pouring the water into the dry boot. Scum. That's what she was, scum. "You look a little intense yourself."

"I'm confiscating your chocolate." I said, nodding. I didn't know how I was going to do this because it was in the fridge and never lasted more than a day or two with the both of us.

"That's mean, Pip." Rebecca's eyes widened in shock. Chocolate was a serious subject. "How could you?"

"You know I get cranky when I need to pee." I hopped about in my

socks. "And I really need to pee."

I dashed forward, wincing as all the stones and bits dug into my socks. I'd have to wash them now. Great, I'd have to scrub them in the bath again.

"Golden retrievers are the really cute ones, aren't they?" I shot over my shoulder. "They're like surfer dudes, right?"

I pulled the door handle. It was locked. Why had I locked it? I was in a tiny French village not a city. Who was going to rob me? Monsieur Coin who was more wrinkled than my ironing pile; or maybe the boules team would go on a spree? They'd rattle down to the house, frames and walking sticks in hand, to raid our extensive collection of shampoo bottles nicked from hotels we'd stayed in.

"Er...oui." Berne didn't sound too convinced. I assumed it was due to me hopping up and down trying to fish out my key. "For sure, when they are older, they are very calm sometimes."

Rebecca didn't seem to hear her. She was holding up the backdoor key with a smug grin on her face. "Looking for something?"

"If you don't give it here, I'll tell Babs you seduced...um...that woman in the bakery shop." I danced from foot to foot.

"Babs wouldn't believe you." She narrowed her eyes in challenge.

Like I'd tell Babs anything of the sort. She was a five-foot-nothing French dynamo. Yes, passionate and not a woman to get jealous unless you wanted a run in with the Flying Frenchwoman, as I liked to call her.

"Oh, wouldn't she, my little English Lemon-curd?" Said in my best impression of Babs.

"It's Lemon Slice, Pip. Get it right." She sighed and handed me the key. I snatched it and unlocked the door. "She wouldn't. Babs trusts me...right?"

I shoved open the door and flashed a grin over my shoulder.

"Definitely. The woman in the bakery is older than your grandmother."

Rebecca put her hands on her hips. "Sly, Pip." She turned to Berne. "We can handle a puppy. It's easy, right?"

Berne chuckled. It was an odd chuckle. I wasn't sure what was off about it, but I didn't care. Not only did I want to pee, but now I fancied a chocolate sandwich. I smiled. Dogs couldn't eat chocolate, so I'd have to clear the house of it.

Hard job but I was up for it.

Puppy sitting, I liked it already.

Chapter Two



I had a bone to pick with Berne Chamonix. Suave, gorgeous, sophisticated and a told a load of porky-pies. I lay on the couch, staring up at the ceiling and tried to catch my breath. Puppy? Puppy? Monsieur Coin's crazed lion was *not* a puppy.

"Oh, he is so cute. He is only fifteen months," Berne had purred to me. "He is no trouble at all. All you have to do is take care of him overnight. I will be with Monsieur Coin at his nephew's house, *oui*?"

Oui? Oui. I'd give her flipping *oui*.

We'd only had him an hour and it felt like three months. He thought he was a lion. He sprinted around the house at top speed, hurtling from room to room, barking away. Rebecca had rolled out of bed with a "face on" as she thudded down the stairs. She was normally an early riser, but having the company of a certain Babs must have robbed her of some sleep. Funny that.

"Why is it barking?" She'd asked me.

Why, I wasn't sure. Did I look like I spoke dog?

We'd then spent twenty minutes trying to catch the lunatic enough to calm him down. What kind of dog didn't want to say hello, have a cuddle, or eat the food Monsieur Coin had left us for him? Dogs loved treats, right?

Er, no. Not the dried biscuit things in the box anyway.

Twenty minutes had turned to an hour, and I'd never been sporty enough to be on a football team, but now I knew what goalies felt like. I'd thrown myself around more times than was decent. I had a carpet burn on my knee, which was odd as we had no carpet, and my flip-flop had been chewed to pieces.

"Any luck?" I called out, wondering how many calories I was burning. Not so much for weight watching but more along the lines of "how many chocolate bars could I stuff myself with to cheer myself up?"

“He’s got her knickers!” Rebecca’s disgusted shout made me wince. Oh no.

I lifted my head in time to see a flash of gold hurdle the armrest. Two paws hit my stomach, two flattened my shoulders, and pair knickers whipped past overhead.

“It is fine,” Babs said with a chuckle. “I will get a new pair. Do not worry so much.”

“It’s not fine,” Rebecca snapped as I rolled off the couch to try to help. “He can’t just take your things.”

“You tell him,” I said, not having a clue how a miniature lion could know his boundaries.

The mutt in question – okay, not a mutt but a fine pedigree with umpteen champions blah, blah, blah, whatever, he was a mutt – the mutt flopped down, eyeing us, chewing on his prize.

He had taste, I’d give him that. Babs’s underwear was designer and lacy. Better than mine, which was holey and looked like something my mother would wear. All my really nice briefs were in the wash. I should really wash something.

“Give it.” Rebecca stood over him, hands on her hips, full “redhead” on. She flexed her hand at him.

He ripped the knickers in two, giving her a “You’re not the boss of me” look. It was a dog. Dogs weren’t meant to have “looks.” Jeffery, Doug’s dog, had a tired look, a “please cuddle me” look, and a hungry look. Other than that, he just had the same docile expression.

Talking of Doug. “I’ll ring Fletcher. He’ll know what to do.”

Rebecca glared at me. “We are *not* calling Doug. We can cope with a puppy.” For some reason, she had tears in her pyjama bottoms. I’d seen her designer rips in her jeans, but now she just looked like she’d been marooned on an island.

Babs wandered into the room and took a seat. “Very well, show us how you can be the boss, *non?*”

Rebecca nodded. “Alright.” She rolled up her sleeves.

I stared at Babs. Her laughter twinkled in her eyes.

“You knew, didn’t you?” I muttered at her, hoping Rebecca didn’t hear.

Babs’ eyes twinkled more.

Nice to know whose side was she was on.

“Now, Barnaby, hand me the underwear.” Rebecca scowled down

at the puppy who scowled back at her and bared his teeth, feather-duster tail wagging.

He lifted his bottom in the air ready to pounce.

"Oh, now you've done it." I winced, grabbing a pillow for cover. No wonder he was angry. Who called their dog Barnaby?

Barnaby launched, bounced off Rebecca's midriff, and bolted around the room in a circle at super speed. He clipped my leg, and I dived onto the couch to save myself, knocking it over and crashing to the floor as Barnaby charged at Rebecca.

She crouched to catch him. He ran straight at her. She cringed but held her ground. He shot through her legs, hurtling into the laundry room. Rebecca was on her backside, I was sprawled on the floor and I could hear Babs howling with laughter somewhere behind me.

"I'm ringing Doug," I grunted, fishing out my phone.

Rebecca signalled her agreement with a load of expletives. "Come here you little sh--"

"Babe?" Doug sounded jolly. I smiled at his tone. He'd know what to do.

"Fletcher, help."

"What's the matter, are you alright?" Doug's tone flipped into panic.

"Fine. Well, not fine. We're trying to look after a puppy for a neighbour." I shook my head. I'd pinch Berne. I was officially pouting. "It's a fifteen-month-old golden retriever."

"Right?" Doug sounded relieved and like he was laughing. *Why* was he laughing?

"It's wild."

He chuckled. "It's a golden retriever, what do you expect?"

I scowled. Nice to know that now. "How do we calm it down?"

"Has it had a free-run?" he asked like I'd have a clue what that was.

"A what?"

"A free-run, a walk off the lead," he said as Rebecca hurled more abuse at Barnaby, who burst out of the laundry room with her crocodile shoes. He looked like he was grinning. Could dogs grin?

"I don't think we've got a lead." I glanced at the stuff Monsieur Coin had dropped off. "Or a Taser gun."

Doug laughed. "Let him out in the garden then. He probably needs the toilet."

That made sense. I could work with that. I was loopy when I needed a pee too. I clambered to my feet, dodging Rebecca as she tried to rugby tackle Barnaby. He trotted over her attempt as she clattered into the overturned couch.

I pulled open the door.

"Just make sure it's secure," Doug said. "Or he'll be in the river."

"What?"

Gold flashed past me, Rebecca after him. I blinked at Babs, who howled so much she had tears rolling down her cheeks. I turned to watch Barnaby hit the brook with a leap. Not the clear water, no, but the stinking mud at the side.

"How do we get him back?" I muttered and *how* did we get the stinky muck off him?

Doug laughed that good-natured laugh again. "I'll text you some things. Should help."

He didn't sound convinced about that, but I couldn't really argue.

"Thank you."

I pocketed my phone and hurried out into the garden. Rebecca was trying to catch hold of Barnaby.

He lured her close.

She dived at him.

He dodged out of the way.

Rebecca plonked, head first, into the mud.

"Barnaby, come." I said in my best "I know what I'm doing, honest" tone.

He sounded like he was laughing at me as he hurtled past over to the rose garden.

"Barnaby, now come away, there's a good boy." Stick with gentle. Berne had said that golden retrievers wanted to please you. They were biddable and loyal.

Barnaby looked over his shoulder at me, grinned, tongue flopping out, and started digging.

"Barnaby!" Now I sounded like my mother. I could have done with my mother. She could scare a fully-grown man at ten paces.

Barnaby flung the dirt out of the way then peed on Rebecca's rose bush.

"Right, that's it." Rebecca stomped over, covered head-to-toe in muck.

Babs popped her head out of the door and buckled at the waist, tears dripping off her nose.

“You’re having it, you little scumbag,” Rebecca grunted at him. Barnaby turned around as if readying himself for another round. Rebecca lunged for him.

He darted out of the way.

She sidestepped and gripped hold of his collar, wrestling him to the floor.

Hurray!

My mobile beeped and I pulled it out. Doug:

Don't let him off the lead if you're not sure if he'll come back.

Make sure your garden is secure.

Goldies love water. You need to spot it before he does.

Be calm, friendly but assertive. He needs to know you are in charge.

If he barks or plays up, turn around and ignore him until he quietens down.

“Good boy” and “No” are the only two things a puppy needs from you.

If all else fails, try cheese.

I ignored the first three. Not funny.

“Doug says to let him know you’re in charge.” I looked up. Rebecca was on her back, Barnaby on her, nibbling at her and pouncing about as she held on.

She kept hold of his collar. Monsieur Saint-Clerc, our postman, whistled the same song he always whistled. Barnaby launched into a sprint. Rebecca was yanked off the ground and clattered onto her knees. She tried to hold on, scrabbling along on all fours as he kept going.

Barnaby broke free and bounded off.

I cringed, sure he would take out the fence, but he skidded to a halt and barked. Monsieur Saint-Clerc stopped whistling. No doubt, he was making a run for it.

“You can’t get to him,” I told him.

Barnaby turned to me.

Uh oh.

“Turn around and ignore him,” I muttered to myself, re-reading Doug’s text. Okay, I could do that. I turned as he got to me.

Two paws hit me in the back.

I flew forward into the dirt, my mobile clattering out of my hands.

Barnaby picked it up and bolted off.

Right. Well. That worked, didn't it?

Rebecca pulled herself to her feet, pyjamas ripped, her t-shirt on the wonk, and covered in mud.

"Doug says ignore him," I wheezed.

Babs held onto the doorjamb for support as she gripped her side.

Rebecca turned and folded her arms when Barnaby reached her. He leapt up and down, pouncing around her. He dropped the phone and barked, darting about. Rebecca turned her nose up.

Ooh, ooh, it was working, it was —

Barnaby looked like he narrowed his eyes.

Uh oh.

He launched, clamped onto her backside, and darted back.

Rebecca yelped and spun around. "You little —"

Babs' howl of laughter drowned out her rant. She had her phone out like she was videoing the whole thing.

"Just say no," I called, crawling to my knees. "No and good boy...or something." Would have helped if I'd had the phone.

"I'll give him no," she snapped.

I summoned up my best stern face. "No!"

Barnaby darted around Rebecca again.

He glanced at me, cocked his head, then gripped hold of her trouser leg, yanking at it. Rebecca's leg went from under her, and she clattered down onto her backside again.

She wrestled to hold onto her bottoms as Barnaby tried to yank them off her.

I hurried to my phone.

Slobber. Nice.

I found the text. Cheese. Cheese? I didn't have any cheese. "Do you have cheese?" I asked Babs.

She waved a hand, her laughter silent. "It hurts," she wheezed. "It hurts to laugh this much." Her laughter took over again.

I turned and saw Barnaby flop down onto the grass, Rebecca's pyjamas in his mouth. She lay on the grass in her boxers and threw her hands in the air.

"Ça va?" I spun around at the sound of Berne's voice. She raised her eyebrows as she took in the scene. "You wish for him to have a mud pack?" I could hear the chuckle no matter how hard she tried disguising it with her hand.

“Chamonix, the little sh—”

“I think we freak him out,” I mumbled as Monsieur Coin wandered out of the house behind Berne. His laughter twinkled in his eyes.

“He is playful, *non*?” he said, shaking his head.

“Weren’t you meant to be away overnight?” I asked. I’d never been so happy to see her.

“*Oui*, only Monsieur Coin’s nephew, he decides to try to fix the problem himself.” Berne shrugged. “I think his wife tell him to help.”

Three cheers for whoever the wife was. “So you’re taking him back?” It sounded like I was begging.

He nodded, catching sight of Rebecca in her underwear and hiding his eyes. “I will...er...put his things in the car.”

“I will clean him up for you,” Berne said. I looked forward to seeing this. “Did you try to call him, *oui*?”

Rebecca and I both glared at her.

Babs howled with laughter again. “I have it all on video.”

“*Alors*,” Berne said, rubbing at her neck. “I did not think he would be so...unresponsive, *non*?”

“Uh huh?” I put my hands on my hip and wagged my phone at her. “You’re telling me you can do better?”

Berne cocked her head.

Take that as a yes.

“Fine.” Rebecca clambered to her feet and limped over. “Knock yourself out, Chamonix.”

Berne eyed us both then shrugged. She clicked her fingers. Barnaby left the bottoms, trotted over, and sat in front over her with an adoring look on his face.

Oh, that was just perfect.

“Does he only talk orders from French people, or what?” Rebecca folded her tattooed arms, scowling.

Berne shrugged and opened up her hand. Cheese.

Rebecca and I exchanged a glance then walked in silence into the kitchen. She limped over to the chair, and I hobbled to the fridge, pulling out two large bars of chocolate. Babs was still laughing, Berne led a compliant Barnaby into the shower room, and I wandered over to Rebecca, handing her a bar.

“They need a book or something,” she muttered, staring into space. “Puppy sitting for the desperate.”

I nodded. "They need a whole other book for golden retrievers," I mumbled as Berne towelled down Barnaby.

He gave her a paw, lay down, rolled over, and fetched his own lead.

"Yeah," Rebecca said. "It's called let someone else do it."

I tapped my bar to hers and we broke into the chocolate. I'd definitely earned enough for a whole bar, maybe two.

Barnaby licked us both on the knees, giving Babs a high five, and trotted out, tail in the air.

Yeah, it was definitely worth two bars.





The Sandra Moran Scholarship Fund

Sandra was a two-time Goldie winner and was a writer, scholar, mentor and educator. She had a warm personality and a smile for everyone. If she wasn't running around Kansas (literally) then she often dedicated her time to helping teach, promote and help her fellow authors.

She very much believed in helping. The Sandra Moran Scholarship is awarded each year to one student of the GCLS Writing Academy. The Scholarship covers tuition for the one year program.

For further information email: sandra_moran_scholarship@goldencrown.org

If you'd like to donate:

<https://goldencrown.site-ym.com/donations/donate.asp?id=13835>