

Tally would let off even if you fed him on roses,' said her husband, shaking his head, half in wonder. 'Shame it's a talent you can't be paid for. We'd all be millionaires. You know what I think? We should hire him out to the airforce. You could drop him in enemy territory, he'd neutralise it for three days, more or less, and then you could send in the paratroops. It'd be a new era in airborne warfare.'

'Don't light any matches, he's done it again,' said Maureen, holding her nose with her left hand, and waving her right hand back and forth across her face. 'Tally, you're a bad dog.'

Tally Ho looked up at her with one yellow eye, keeping the other one closed for the sake of economy, and thumped his tail on the floor a couple of times. He had noted the affectionate tone of her voice, and took her words for praise. He was lying on his side, a little bit bloated after gnawing on one of his oldest bones. He was only a year old, so his oldest bone was not too old, but it certainly had plenty of flavours, and all the wind-creating properties of which Tally Ho was particularly fond.

Tally was the most notorious canine dustbin in the whole neighbourhood, and people delighted in presenting him with unlikely objects and encouraging him to eat them. With apparent relish he ate paper bags, sticks, dead rats, butterflies, feathers, apple peel, eggshells, used tissues and socks. On top of that, Tally ate the same food as the rest of the family, and at this moment carried in his stomach a goodly load of yesterday's mashed potato, gravy and steak and kidney pie.

This is not to say that Tally ever raided dustbins or browsed on garbage. That would have been very much beneath his dignity, and in any case, he had never found it necessary. He had never lacked success in obtaining perfectly good food from human beings, and ate odd things in good faith, just because human beings offered them to him. He made up his own mind as to what was worth eating again, and whilst he would probably be quite happy to eat more eggshells, as long as they still had some traces of egg in them, he probably wouldn't try another feather.

'I'm going to take him to the airport,' said Jack, 'he can work off some energy, and get some of that gas out.' He went to the door and turned. Tally Ho was looking up at him expectantly, both yellow eyes open this time. His ears had pricked up at the magic word 'airport'.

'Run time,' said Jack, and Tally sprang to his feet in an instant, bouncing up and down with pleasure as if the floor was a trampoline. The caravan shook and the glasses and cutlery in the cupboard started to rattle. Tally Ho seemed to be grinning with pleasure. He was shaking his head from side to side and yelping.

'Get him out before he demolishes the whole place,' said Maureen, and Jack stood aside for Tally Ho to shoot out of the door like the cork from a bottle of champagne. He bounded out of the small garden, and did some more bouncing up and down outside the car. Jack opened the back door, said 'Hop in' and Tally Ho jumped onto the back seat. In an instant he hopped over and sat in the front seat. Jack opened the front passenger door and ordered 'Out!'

Tally looked at him coolly, and then deliberately looked away. He had suddenly gone deaf, it appeared, and had found something in the far distance that was terribly interesting.

'Tally, out!' repeated Jack, and Tally pretended to be looking at a magpie that was flying over the caravan.

Jack used to be in the Australian army, and he liked his orders to be obeyed. He didn't take it lightly when he was ignored by a subordinate. He picked Tally bodily off the seat, and deposited him in the back. 'Stay!' he said, wagging his forefinger at the dog, who looked up at him innocently as if he would never consider doing the slightest thing amiss. Jack closed the door and went round to the driver's side. He got in, opened all the windows, started the engine and called over his shoulder, 'No bomb-dropping in the car. Understood?'

Tally waited until the Land Rover had started off down the road, before springing lightly once more over onto the front passenger seat. He sat down quickly and stuck his head out of the window, into the breeze, so that he would have a good excuse for not hearing his master telling him to get in the back. Jack raised his eyebrows, shook his head and sighed. Tally Ho was an obstinate dog, without a doubt, and didn't consider himself to be anyone's subordinate, not even Jack's. It never occurred to him that he was anything less than equal, and in that respect you might say that he was rather like a cat, although he probably wouldn't have liked the comparison.

Seven kilometres away the car stopped outside the perimeter fence of Paraburdoo airport, and Tally Ho was let out. A Cessna light aircraft bounced along the runway and took off. Tally chased its shadow along the ground, and pounced on it. The shadow sped on, and Tally ran after it in delight, repeatedly pouncing, and wondering at its escape.

Jack got back into the car, and drove away. He blew the horn, and Tally pricked up his ears.