



## OUTNUMBERED

*Our Richard has a new addition to his family – of the four-legged variety. He tells us more*

**O**UR FAMILY has recently been joined by Nia, a cross between a German Shepherd and a golden retriever. In spite of this blend, Nia looks just like a Labrador and has the temperament to go with it. She has already charmed her way into the hearts of the family, but not so the eight cats.

Here is how the new arrival has been greeted in the words of Runty, one of the cats, and Nia.

**MY NAME IS RUNTY.** I have been appointed the spokesman for my brothers, my sisters, my uncle and my mother. You see we own this family in Norfolk who, in return for us agreeing to live in their house, are obligated to pay for all our food and look after all necessities. They provide nice comfortable places to lie on, feed us the very best available food and allow us to sleep whenever we want to.

I was called Runty because I was considered the runt of the litter when I was born. My humans tell me that I caused a great deal of trouble when part way through I decided I did not want to be born and that stopped my sisters and brothers in the birth canal. My mother had to be rushed to the vets for an emergency Caesarean operation at great expense and at a weekend. We all survived but we were so charming that my humans decided not to send us away to live with other humans.

We were a very happy family and we had our humans wrapped round our little paws. It is not that we made no contribution. We would regularly bring in little gifts. We liked to make the gifts special, enhancing their appeal. We would leave them mice with no heads or with their entrails oozing out. We also felt that if we caught birds our humans would like it if they were already shredded, with their feathers removed. We liked to spread the feathers far and wide. I could never really understand why the humans did not show more gratitude for our extreme efforts to please them.

As Christmas approached, we were all looking forward to the annual ceremony of climbing the Christmas tree and pulling the baubles off it.

Then, unannounced (and without consulting us) one day, the humans came home with a creature. My mother said it was a God but she is dyslexic and I think she meant to say that it was a dog. We are mainly indoor cats and do not see many other living things except for the small ones that we bring in as presents.

Well, imagine our horror when this long black thing bounded into the house wagging its tail and panting. It had these big jaws

that looked as though they would eat us alive. It had a big tail that swished from side to side and it kept rushing up to us and sniffing us.

I put out a general alarm 'tabletop tabletop tabletop'. We all had to find high places so that this new black creature could not reach us. One of my brothers (who is not as fat as I am) took up residence on top of the kitchen dresser and another disappeared behind the Aga and would only come out and feeding time.

Oh my god it was a nightmare.

**MY NAME IS NIA.** For the first 18 months of my life I was being trained to be a guide dog for blind people. Unfortunately during training a very unpleasant human being deliberately rode his bicycle at me. I have been told by other guide dogs that this is not unusual. There are human beings who will not only try to hurt guide dogs but also set other dogs on them when they are helping blind people.

To be honest I was freaked out by what happened to me. It really unnerved me and one day I found I was not being trained to be a guide dog any more. I felt very sad.

Then these nice people came to see me. I wanted to please them so I took them my toy and gave it to them. They smiled at me a lot and I was taken to Norfolk. They talked to me all the way home. I did not understand what they were saying but the words sounded kind. I do not think that they will ride bicycles at me.

I was shown into this house. I was given my own bed and more toys. All of a sudden I noticed these furry creatures with big staring eyes. There were lots of them and they arched their backs and hissed at me. I wanted to chase them away but my new humans told me not to. The humans were friendly to these creatures as well as to me and told me that they lived here as well. That seemed strange because whenever I tried to sniff their bottoms in a sociable way they swiped me on the nose.

Well, Christmas came and went and I have decided that I like my new people; and these cat things and I have reached an uneasy peace. They seem to be in charge of the human beings (and of me too now) and we will have to do as we are told by them.

I am still a little puzzled because I cannot work out which of my humans is blind. Whenever they take me out on a lead I try to look after them just in case they are all blind and cannot see the obstacles in front of them. My guess is that the blind one is the one with grey hair who keeps being called 'our Richard.'





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