

THE
LITTLE DOG



STORIES

Welcome to the Little Dog stories!

There are four Little Dog stories, starring Little Fella the puppy:

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Little Fella and the Smugglers' Path page 16

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The stories are written by Ian Boughton, who has asserted his right to be regarded as the creator of this work.

The pictures on the cover and in the stories *Very Hot Day* and *Smugglers' Path* are by Martin Doman. The illustrations in *Tiny Paws* are by the author and inspired by photographs from unknown sources. The illustrations in *Two-Fifteen* are images inspired from tourist guides and promotional pictures of the Bure Valley Railway; the author is grateful to the management of the BVR for their assistance in this, but we have no way of identifying who took any original pictures.

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I have been asked if these stories are inspired by a real dog. The answer is – yes. Little Fella really does exist. But I'm not going to tell you any more about him, or where in Britain he lives, other than what you can read in these, the first four of his adventure stories. We do very much hope you enjoy them.

I very respectfully dedicate these stories to Trudi, Binkie, and in memory of Louie.

- **Ian B, December 2021**

BOOK ONE

**Little Fella
and the
Very Hot Day**

**Story by
Ian Boughton**

**Illustrations by
Martin Doman**

First published May 2020



It was a very hot day as Little Fella the puppy lay under the dinner table. It was cooler under there – and anyway, when he was taken for lunch at the pub, he preferred to sit where he could watch all the humans.

He wrinkled his tiny nose as he heard the waiter come to ask his mistress for her lunch order. He hoped it would not be curry – curry was bad news, because it was unlikely that anything tasty would be passed under the table to a hungry little dog. Fish was bad news, too – Little Fella didn't like fish. But a nice steak, now that was something!

His mistress liked her steak medium rare, which was hot but not cooked right through – quite red in the middle, not dark and hard, and that was just how Little Fella liked it, too. Oh yes, any self-respecting little dog would expect to be passed a nice piece of steak at a pub lunch... and if he wandered over and wagged his long curly tail at the diners at other tables, who knows what other treats might be passed to him? His mistress would always call him back, and apologise for him being a nuisance to other people... but Little Fella knew they would always say no, he was not a nuisance at all, but a lovely little dog, and they would often make sure they passed him a treat.

Little Fella is not a 'posh' dog. He is not the kind of dog who would be entered for Crufts, the big dog show - they are 'pure' dogs who are bred from dogs of their own kind, given silly and pompous-sounding names, and never get their paws dirty scrabbling in the garden.

Little Fella, however, is a mixture. His dad is a Lhasa Apso – these are shaggy, hairy, but quite small dogs who originally came from Tibet, in the far east, north of China. Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world, is in Tibet... not far from the town of Lhasa.

They are usually about 28cm high at the shoulders, with dark brown eyes and a black nose, and a coat which is heavy, straight, hard, and very dense, but neither rough nor silky... it flops over their eyes, and they have a furry beard and moustache. Their tails curl proudly over their backs.

The Lhasa Apsos have a proud history – they were once watchdogs kept by Tibetan Buddhist monks, and are alert dogs with a very keen sense of hearing- their name in Tibetan means ‘bearded lion dog’. They are friendly and loyal – but if they sense danger, then they will bark loudly, and everyone will know that they have something to say.

They are dogs which like to have a viewpoint – they want to sit somewhere where they can see everything that is going on, and in a café, Little Fella liked to sit on the lap of his humans and watch all the other people.

While his father is a Lhasa Apso, Little Fella could be just as proud of the other side of his heritage - his mother is a Jack Russell terrier, one of the finest small dogs in the world. It has always been said of ‘Jackies’ that they are big dogs in a tiny body – they are brave and loyal.

Little Fella turned out to be a bit of both. He inherited the long fur of his father, and the black-and-white colour of his mother, and so he grew up as a cuddly puppy with big furry

paws – his humans always say that he looks like a tiny panda, and occasionally, his mistress refers to him as ‘panda-paws’.

When he is taken for a walk or taken to a café or pub, there are always other humans who want to come up and talk to him.

Rather surprisingly, he can jump high, and can jump fast.

Little Fella’s mistress always said that a dog’s character came from its family... that is, its human family.

Everybody makes assumptions about what certain dogs are like – bull terriers are dangerous, Chihuahuas are delicate, Dalmatians are friendly but pretty dim, and so on.

She reckoned that if a dog lives with a family which is friendly, loving and playful, feeds the dog a good variety of food and treats, some real meat and not just mushy doggydins from a tin, and the right amount of biscuits and chews, and generally considers the dog to be part of the family, then the result is a well-adjusted, friendly dog.

But if a dog goes to a family that treats it as part of the furniture, or as a toy, and doesn’t spend time with it or play with it or think carefully about what food it gets – well, that dog is going to be bad-tempered and unpredictable. No wonder it will bite.

Rather like bringing up human children, she would say. And once she laughed to herself hearing something which another human had once said: ‘ugly people have ugly dogs...’



*As the humans stood chatting in the car park,
Little Fella could feel the warmth of the sun through his fur.*

It was even hotter outside as Little Fella and his mistress left the pub after lunch. As the humans stood chatting in the car park, he could feel the warmth of the sun through his fur. Dogs do not like heat – dogs prefer to be in the shade, because they aren't able to cool down as well as humans – they can suffer from heat stroke and dehydration much faster than people do.

As the puppy looked round for a nice piece of shade to sit in, he stopped. He listened. He put his head on one side, as

dogs do when they are concentrating. He wasn't descended from Tibetan watchdogs for nothing.

What is that he can hear? It sounds like somebody crying... no, it isn't a human. What is it? Is it an animal? Maybe it is. Is it a dog? It is! Yes, it's a dog... and it is crying. It's whining.

Little Fella wrinkles up his little nose. There's something wrong here. This isn't the usual sound of a dog whining because it can't get what it wants, it can't get a treat or a run in the park... no, this is the sound of a dog in trouble. This is a dog in distress. Whatever can be happening?

He looked around. He could see no dog being walked by its humans. All he could see was cars, lines and lines of parked cars. Where is the sound coming from? It's not in this line of cars, no... the next line, maybe?

Little Fella strains at his lead – the humans pull him back and keep talking. But he will not be restrained. He pulls and pulls. “Whatever is it?” asks his mistress. “Something is really upsetting him,” says the person with her.

His mistress relaxes the lead slightly – but not too much, in a car park, and allows the puppy to walk. He walks up the nearest line of parked cars, sniffing and listening. He leads the two humans down the next line; he can still hear the whining and whimpering, but now it seems to be getting fainter... he must hurry.

Pulling on his lead, he almost runs down the line of parked cars and then... yes, he can hear it better now! Yes, it's a

faint whimper! Is it this car? No... and it's not the next one, either.

It's this one! Yes, this is it!



Little Fella goes to the door of the car and, standing almost upright on his back legs, reaches as far as he can – he can almost reach the door handle, but he's only a small dog. He shouts, He barks. He looks round at his humans and absolutely howls.

Woof, woof, shouts Little Fella. Yap, yap, woof, woof!

Now people everywhere are turning to watch and stare – what's all the noise? What on earth is that little dog making such a fuss about? Why doesn't its owner keep it under control?

His mistress and her companion are close behind him at the car – now they can hear it too. There is a dog in this car – and on a very hot day, someone has left the car with no windows open! This is dangerous – dogs die in hot cars. There is no air for them to breathe, and a dog can die within minutes.

“Hey!” shouted the companion. “There’s a dog in this car!”

Suddenly, everything is commotion. People are rushing towards the car from every direction.

“What is it?” “Someone’s left a dog in that car – it’s dying”

“Open the door!”

“I can’t – it’s locked.”

“Call the police!”

“I have done – I’ve dialled 999.”

“I’ve called the RSPCA, they’re sending someone. But there’s no time – they won’t get here in time.”

By now, there is nothing more a puppy can do. Little Fella knows he has got his humans’ attention, and now it’s up to them. His mistress has picked him up and is cuddling him. The sound of a dog whining is still heard from the car, but now it is very faint.

Suddenly, there is commotion – a man bursts through the crowd and takes matters into his own hands. It is the man who runs the pub, and he has brought out a big shovel and a hammer, the road and rushes toward the car, hurling

himself at the driver's window. He swings the shovel at the door window, and the toughened glass shatters into a thousand tiny scratches, but doesn't break. He tries again – no luck.

Another man joins him, with a brick in his hand, with which he pounds at the window... this time there is a small hole. He tries again, and now the hole is opening up. Now many pairs of hands are working at the door, as men jostle to open up the hole in the glass; but it's too tough. They can't do it.

And now there's another noise, this one getting louder and louder, and now deafening - Little Fella has realised that there is a siren sounding. There is a flash of blue lights, and suddenly a police car is beside them : the officers have seen the crowd and realised exactly where the emergency is.



“Stand aside,” says the sergeant. “We know how to do this.”

Suddenly his hand is inside the window, then reaching inside for the door catch, unlocking the door, then reaching back to unlock the rear door, and then the second officer is

leaning inside to bring out the dog. It is a large dog – it is a golden Labrador, and it seems to be asleep.

“Is it dead?” asks someone.

“No!” cries another. “It’s breathing – it’s alive!”

And now there is another person in uniform beside the police – this is a woman from the RSPCA, who has rushed here in response to the emergency calls.

She is calm.

“Last summer,” she says calmly, “the RSPCA took 724 calls in five days from people concerned about dogs suffering in the heat. One of our officers used his phone to take a picture of the temperature gauge inside a car – it was 51 degrees. A car can become as hot as an oven very quickly, even when it doesn’t feel that warm to us - when it’s 22 degrees outside, in a car it can reach double that very quickly. You just have to touch your car seats to know how hot they get.

“Every year, we try and tell people through our Dogs Die in Hot Cars campaign, but some people just will not understand - many people still seem to be under the impression that it’s okay to leave their dogs in the car while they go shopping . We get a call about every hour during the summer... sometimes ten thousand calls a year.”

She stood up. “He’s going to be OK. I’ve moved the dog under shade, treated his fur with cool water and allowed him to drink a little, just a little. He’s already breathing better, and his eyes are open.”

There is more noise. There are shouts. A man pushes his way through the crowd.

“What’s happened? Who’s done this to my car? Has somebody been trying to break in to my car? There’s going to be trouble about this!”

He sees the police. He is furious.

“Have you found out who did this? I want them prosecuted!”

And then he sees the dog.

“Goldie!”

And then he sees the RSPCA officer. He looks down and sees the RSPCA inspector treating the dog, and suddenly he realises what he has done – by being careless, he has almost killed his own dog. There is silence all around.

“When it’s an emergency, people may well break into a car to save a dog,” said the police sergeant calmly. “The law states that someone has a lawful excuse to commit damage if they believe that the owner of the property would agree to the damage if they knew the circumstances... and I expect you would have wanted your dog rescued, sir?”

The owner of the dog and car was silent, and so were the crowd, as the policeman continued: “Do you know that two-thirds of the public say they have seen a dog locked in a hot car? Many of them called the police – many of them actually did break into the car to save the dog.

“Believe it or not, one-third of all the people who saw a dog in trouble did absolutely nothing about it.”

He looked at the dog owner, who was now looking extremely ashamed. The sergeant looked round at the crowd, who had fallen silent.

“I think that after this, any of you who see a dog in trouble in a hot car will do something, won’t you?”

Suddenly, the crowd relaxed. The police are asking around, wanting to know who saw the incident, and who raised the alarm. Fingers point at Little Fella and his mistress – “that’s the dog who that raised the alarm!”

“What a clever little dog! He saved the big dog’s life!”

Little Fella was aware that people were coming up to him, patting him, and saying nice things about him. People were shaking his mistress’s hand, and saying what a lovely little dog she has.

Well, thinks the puppy, whatever they are talking about, this is all very nice!



Just a couple of days later, he found himself under the very same table at the very same inn, and he was dozing comfortably, although feeling just a little peckish. Surely it must be time for lunch? Surely his mistress would order something nice, and pass a few treats down to him?

Above him, his mistress was talking with someone. Little Fella recognised the voice – it is the RSPCA officer who came to help save the dog, and she has been saying something nice about how brave and clever the little dog had been.

They were interrupted by the arrival of the waitress bringing their lunch order.

“Three steaks, madam – medium rare.”

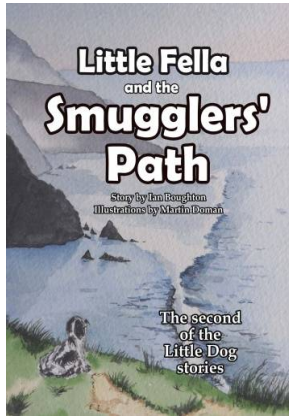
The waitress looked from his mistress to her companion and back again. There were only two people sitting at the table.

She was puzzled – “did you say three steaks?”

From beneath the table, Little Fella stirred, poked his nose out and looked up at her. He had a very pleased look on his face.



BOOK TWO



LITTLE FELLA and the SMUGGLERS' PATH

Story by Ian Boughton
Illustrations by Martin Doman

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Little Fella was puzzled. He pushed his black and white nose into the bush at the side of the road, breathed in, and concentrated. Something had been here very recently, perhaps a few minutes ago. He knew that scent – it came from one of those odd furry animals with long tails which lived with some humans.

His own human, the man, called them ‘cats’, and from some deep instinct, Little Fella knew that he was supposed to chase them, but what puzzled him was – if he caught one, what was he supposed to do with it? Play with it?

So far, the chance to find out hadn’t happened.

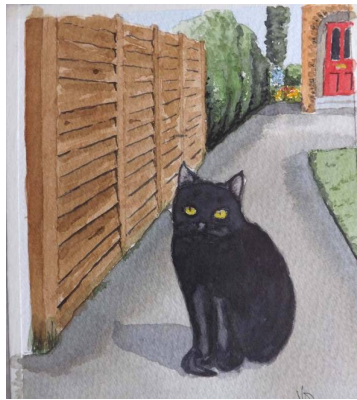
He was on his first walk of the day, trotting happily through the streets of the village where his humans lived. His man was holding the lead, ambling along slowly and giving the little dog all the time he wanted to investigate fences and hedges and flower borders. Only when Little Fella turned towards the edge of the big road where the cars passed did the lead suddenly become taut, and he was allowed to go no further.

He didn’t mind – the gardens were far more interesting. There had been rain, and the dampness brought out all the rich smells from the grass and flowers. He was enjoying snuffling among the roots of a privet hedge when he realised that he was being watched.

Barely twelve feet away, halfway up the drive beside a house, sat the cat. It was relaxed but watchful, both paws squarely in front of it and its tail drawn comfortably around its body.

Its eyes never left the little dog.

Little Fella looked back into those eyes, and saw in them all the experience of a cat who had met dogs before. The look in them was not simply superior – it was contempt. Little Fella knew that as a dog, he was supposed to chase a cat, and send it sprinting, terrified, for safety – but as this cat returned his gaze squarely, he realized that he was up against something he hadn't expected.



The cat was not afraid of him – not the slightest bit

This cat was not afraid of him. Not the slightest bit. Those eyes, set deep in rich black fur above a pair of quite magnificent whiskers, regarded him with a confidence which said, quite clearly, ‘I’ve met bigger dogs than you, and lived to tell the tale!’

Little Fella was baffled. What should he do?

He looked around to the man for guidance, but there was no help from the other end of the lead. The man simply looked down at him, smiled, and said: “well?”

Little Fella made up his mind. He was a dog, and dogs chased cats – that’s all there was to it. He looked back at the cat, which read his intentions as clearly as if he had spoken them out loud. The cat tensed, arched its back ever-so-slightly, and waited.

Little Fella is half-terrier, and terriers can move fast, even when they’re not convinced of what they’re doing. He pressed into the pavement with his back paws, and leaped forward – and, even as he felt himself come to a shuddering stop against the lead which his man was holding securely, he was aware that the cat had moved even faster.

Without apparently taking a step to prepare itself, the cat had spun through ninety degrees to its right, executed a standing high jump which took it five feet off the ground and nearly to the top of a wooden gatepost, used its front claws to drag itself in one smooth bound to the top of the post... and disappeared.

As Little Fella relaxed back and let the lead fall slack, he peered sharply to left and right – no cat was in sight. He trotted to the fence post, and sniffed. The cat had gone that way, but where?

There was no time to find out. A gentle tug on the lead told him that his man was getting impatient, so Little Fella gave up and obediently trotted back beside the fence to join him.

Five feet directly above him, nearer him than it had been at the beginning, a large black cat sat comfortably relaxed on top of the fence, gazing down impassively at the perplexed puppy which rejoined its master and continued its walk.



Little Fella was just two years old.

His teeth had grown strong and sharp. The games he played with his humans were wild boyish fighting games in which he would grab the man's arm in his jaws and refuse to let go, no matter how high or wide he was swung off the ground. His man pretended to complain about the hundreds of tiny marks Little Fella's teeth left in his arm, but he was only half-serious – Little Fella was half Jack Russell terrier, and the man knew that a Jack Russell is a born hunter. A farmer, watching him, had once said to his man – “heaven help the rat that comes up against that little dog!”

The man took him for most of his walks. They would head out at seven in the morning, and as Little Fella grew, his walks became longer. It was not unusual for he and the man to be out for an hour or more in the morning, and sometimes at lunchtime both humans, his mistress and the man, would take him for a walk by the river to look at the ducks and swans, watch the coots paddling busily, and sometimes see a stately heron sitting perfectly upright, waiting for an unwary fish.

Little Fella stayed well away from the swans. During his first summer, he had seen the graceful white birds guarding

their strange little grey chicks, and watched as those chicks grew fast to almost the same size as their parents. On one occasion, Little Fella had wandered down to the water's edge to lap himself a drink, and strayed just a little too close to the swan family – there was a commotion, a hiss, a threatening flap of large white wings, and the dog had scurried back to the safety of the humans.

Little Fella had learned very early on that the woman, his mistress, was really the one in charge of the family. It was she who patted his paws dry with a towel when he came in from walks, and to his disgust, took him into the bath when he had been rolling in too much doubtful grass. But she was generous with his food, and Little Fella could always bank on a full plate of whatever his mistress was cooking for herself.

For the humans, Little Fella was a wonderful companion. Those humans who are not fond of dogs cannot understand those who allow them in their houses, let them sit on their chairs, and even on their beds. To non-dog fans, man's best friend is an insanitary creature which washes itself in the strangest places, and is unable to use the toilet. To these people, it makes as much sense to have a pig in the dining room or a horse in the bathroom.

Those humans who love dogs see it differently.

Little Fella's dark eyes were big, maybe bigger than a human's, and twice as expressive. They were a rich chocolate brown, set deep in the black and white fur of his face, and never seemed to close. Even lying down, with his nose resting on his forepaws, Little Fella was rarely fully

asleep. The humans might be doing anything around the house, assuming the dog was sleeping, and would turn to look at him – and find those two dark eyes fixed quietly and unblinking upon them.

When Little Fella’s bright eyes opened up fully and his surprisingly wide mouth parted in a clear grin, the humans knew exactly what he was saying - ‘come on, let’s go for a walk, where are my toys, who’s got my tea, anybody want to play in the garden?’

Little Fella was even happy to go in the family car. He had come to accept that for a small dog in a world of bigger creatures, there are some things you just have to put up with, and so he would allow himself to be picked up by his mistress, and placed on the seat – and sometimes he was even given the best seat, in the front beside her, while the man sat in the back.

Sometimes he would stand upright with his front paws on the window pane, looking at the other cars going past, and invariably there would be a family car with children shouting ‘look at that doggie!’



The humans had a favourite idea for a morning’s walk. They lived in a seaside village, and liked to start at the little fishing harbour, head along the coastal path, maybe stop at a pub for lunch, and then turn round and back for home.

On this day, it was the man and dog who set out for their morning walk. They strolled past the harbour and the fishing boats, then left the golden curve of the sandy beach behind them and began to strike steeply upwards to the clifftop path.

This was fine by Little Fella. For a terrier allowed off his lead, there is always something of interest to be found in the bushes, trees and ferns that border a country walk, and the sand dunes that surround much of the coast. Some intense sniffing will always provide a puzzle about which of the animal world had been there last – had a rabbit scurried from one side of this path to the other, just a few hours ago, at dawn? What’s that strange dog-like scent, from something which had brushed that leaf recently – are there foxes around here? What’s that strange bird sitting on a branch, looking at us? What’s this hole in the ground here – can something really be living down there, sitting in its underground room, wondering what’s up here sniffing at its front door?

Little Fella knew about rabbit burrows, but had never been down one. He nosed curiously at the brown earth, disturbed around an opening perhaps eight inches across. The scents were confusing – something had moved from right to left, but something with a very similar scent had also moved from left to right.

He knew all this because smell is a dog’s most highly-developed sense, and a dog can tell not just whether another animal has been that way, but whether the animal was a friend or an enemy. If Little Fella began darting swiftly from left to right, he was working out where a scent started

and finished – if it couldn't be found to left or right, it had to continue forward or back. He would often face upwind and walk back into the scent trail, occasionally veering to the right and left to check that he was on the right track. If the wind was strong, it narrowed the trail of scent he could recognise, but best of all was a walk soon after a summer shower - scent is carried by moisture in the air, so on a hot and humid day, there would be more smells for him to investigate.

Today, Little Fella was enjoying himself. He tore from right to left, along the coast path, back to his human, past him and then round again. A left turn through a gap in the hedge, a right turn under a fallen branch, a wiggle left and right through nettles which a human would not have dared to risk, and he was deep into the hedgerow. A slight skid under his front paws told him that he had stepped on to something smooth – it was a flat piece of stone covered by moss, and with a pause and a four-legged spring to his right, he was safely off it.

The greenery before him seemed to have no opening, but Little Fella's nose found the way through. The scent of something which might have been a rabbit led him to one part of the bush, where it was joined by another scent, then another, and then a complete confusion of variations on the same smell. Many animals had been here – why? Where did it lead? The answer came with a little exploratory poke of his snout – a tiny opening in the greenery revealed itself, and with a growing sense of excitement, Little Fella saw it was a hole in the bushes that he could wriggle through.

With a shimmy of his shoulders and a push of the hindquarters, he was through – and if he could have spoken, he would have been speechless. He was standing on the very top of a cliff, looking out at the most breathtaking scenery that the coast has to offer – in front of him was a wide bay, with the sea stretching out to the horizon. The sun played patterns on the sea, and half a mile ahead of him a tiny sailboat moved lazily through the waters. To the left, he could see the seafront shops and the beach by the harbour they had just left, where children were playing beach volleyball. He could see a car begin to climb the hill out of the village, up the road that ran beside the coastal footpath.

Little Fella realised with uncomfortable surprise that he was nearer the edge of the cliff than was safe. He edged his nose to the ground and moved cautiously forward... he was not sniffing scents now, but searching for a safe place to put his forepaws.

Once, twice, three times he moved forward, thought better of it, and edged back. The fourth time, slightly to his right, he found that the pattern of the cliff top changed – there was a chalky indentation in the edge, and then there was a flat stone. He edged closer, sensing a path – but realised that the path led downward, far more steeply than a small dog could manage.

All his senses shouted ‘danger’.

He paused for a moment, then braced his forepaws at the edge and cautiously eased his nose over the top until his eyes could look downwards.

The cliff was not sheer – but it was very, very steep. And yes, Little Fella realised, there was a gradual way down. He could see the outline of something... was it steps? Yes, it was more flat stones - at one time, there must have been a stairway cut into the rocks there. Although the steps were long overgrown by years of brambles, he could see that they eventually reached a tiny cove, a long way below.

The tide was out, and so he could see a tiny beach directly below him – nice, but not really big enough for a dog to play on. The beach was surrounded by high rocks on all sides. Round to one side, a sandy path led round the cliff back towards the fishing village, and to the front, a narrow opening, perhaps only ten feet wide, led to the sea. Here, one big rock stood a clear eight feet above the sand, and beyond it, six or seven smaller jagged rocks burst up through the waterline between the big rock and the sea – it was a perfect, protected hidden cove.



It was a tempting place to explore – but Little Fella didn't like the look of that downward cliff. He retreated slowly, and as he eased on to his haunches, he became aware of his name being shouted. Once, twice, and with urgency. It was his human!

Little Fella turned, and tore rapidly back through the greenery. Following his own trail, he scurried through the hedging and found himself back on the cliff path. Thirty yards away, his man was looking deep into the hedgerow, searching. The man turned, caught sight of the terrier, and sighed with relief.

“Oh, Little Fella!” said the man. “Where have you been? I've been worried about you! I thought I'd lost you!”

They worked their way together back down the coast path until they came to the harbour.



The old man was painting a sea scene

As Little Fella and his human paused beside the beach, they watched an elderly artist working at his easel. He was painting a sea scene. Little Fella's man knew it was very bad manners to look over an artist's shoulder at his work,

so he guided the little dog a polite distance away from the old man.

As he did so, there was a commotion from the harbour. A siren started up, wailed twice, and died away; it was followed by a sharp ringing sound nearby. The old man put down his paintbrush, reached into his pocket, and pulled out a mobile phone. He looked sharply across the bay to the edge of the town and the harbour, then glanced at Little Fella and his man.

“It’s a shout,” he explained.

The old man had stopped work on his painting and was peering out to sea. He would have been about sixty, Little Fella’s owner guessed. He wore a fisherman’s gear of sweater, stained old trousers and sea-boots, rather like Wellingtons but tougher. Men who work by the sea are rarely bare-headed, and tend to favour either woolly bobblehats or, as this one, a strange kind of leathery hat that had long since lost any shape it might ever have had.

Those who live by the sea live a life of drama, and they like to talk and show off their knowledge. It was no surprise that this one was happy to put down his work and talk. Little Fella knew the signs of humans about to start a conversation, so he settled back patiently on his haunches and watched.

“It’s a shout,” the old man repeated, then realised that he needed to explain.

“A ‘shout’ is the signal for the lifeboat to go out. The lifeboatmen all carry pagers – when there’s an emergency

call, every pager sounds and tells them to rush down to the lifeboat station, as fast as they can.

“I used to be one of them... I’ve retired now, but I still carry my phone and I’m a member of Out On a Shout, which is a kind of club that gets signals to tell us when there’s an emergency. We all like to know when our boys are called out.”

The old man was clearly enjoying having an audience, and it seemed that he would talk for as long as Little Fella’s man was willing to listen.

The lifeboatmen and the coastguards, said the old man, are the rescue services of the sea. Every coastal town of any size around Britain has its coastguard patrol, its coastal watching stations, and lifeboatmen with their high-speed boats and rescue gear. For two hundred years it has been their job to look after those in trouble around the ten thousand miles of Britain’s coastlines – at one time they used to be on guard against smugglers, and then for ships in distress near the coast, but these days much of their work is in rescuing holidaymakers.

Families who live inland don’t understand the power of the sea, or the dangers of the seaside, said the old man – even on the beach where Little Fella and his man stood, there was danger waiting to happen.

Holidaymakers make mistakes which kill many children every year, said the old man. Families will blow up rubber rafts and loungers, and push them into the sea – and if the tide is on its way out, they can be carried hundreds of yards

away from the shore in minutes. Windsurfers, jet-skiers, canoeists, families on inflatable sunbeds, and even experienced sailors caught unawares by the tide can all cause a call-out for the coastguards and lifeboatmen.

The tumbling rocks towering five or six feet out of the calm and peaceful sand might seem wonderful playing places for kids, who could scramble happily up and down the grey handholds and footholds, dry and safe at low tide. But the tide comes in quickly, and it comes in deep. Twice a day, those rocks are all but covered by high tide, which means the sand suddenly becomes four or five feet underwater, and as some of the widest and most beautiful beaches are very flat, the tide comes in swiftly, so fast that a human cannot outrun the water.

Holiday time happens to be the time of the biggest tides of all, said the old man. In summer, the high tide in the morning can be over five metres, or about sixteen feet – it may drop sharply at low tide, but by late afternoon the second tide of the day may bring water of a depth well over the height of a man. Exploring little off-the-path coves and inlets can be great fun when the tide is out – but when the tide comes back in, terrified parents and kids can be trapped against the cliff, with no escape.

It is because of this that popular beaches have lifeguards on duty all day. They decorate their beaches with flags, which all have meanings – the green flag means that swimming off the beach is as safe as holidaymakers might hope for, but a red flag means ‘don’t go in the water’. Red and yellow flags show where the lifeguards are patrolling, and a

black and white flag shows where surfers are allowed, and means that swimmers should watch out.

However, as every lifeguard and coastguard knows, holidaymakers never take the trouble to find out what the flags mean, or watch for the times of high tides. They often launch their inflatable sunbeds on an outgoing tide, and from the east coast of England, the next stop is Europe. They start clambering up rocks when the tide is due in, not realising that the dry sand where they started will be under several feet of water within minutes.

And that is why, at the holidaymakers' favourite time of day, a summer mid-afternoon, the lifeguards are alert for the worst problems. Hundreds of times a year, said the old man, terrified parents will ring 999 because their children are missing at high tide. The message goes to the Coastguard lifeboat station, and the signal goes out for the men to rush to the lifeboat.

For many years, those signals were 'maroons', which were rather like fireworks, rockets which soared high above the lifeboat station – in the daytime, their light might not be seen, but the crack of the explosion would be heard across the town, and the lifeboat crew would have to leave whatever they were doing and rush to the shoreline and scramble aboard their boat.

Even if these brave life-savers are at work, they must drop everything in their race to the boat station – one, said the old man, was the town barber, who had left many a customer with a head full of shampoo when the signal came!

Today, those calls are done by pagers and sirens. Certainly, said the old man, word spreads quickly through a seaside town when the lifeboat is going out. Everyday shoppers in the streets stop for a moment and wonder – where is our boat going, and when will it return?

He and Little Fella's man turned, and the dog followed their gaze, as the smart dark-blue lifeboat raced away out of the small harbour and surged through the choppy seas. Within minutes, it was out of sight round a headland.



Later that day, it was time for Little Fella's afternoon walk, and as always, when he saw the man and woman slinging on their anoraks and boots, he knew he could expect a nice long outing.

The little dog raced up and down the hallway of their house excitedly, nipping at the man's hands, playing with him and teasingly refusing to have his lead put on. But both man and dog knew that in a few minutes, Little Fella would quieten down and allow the spring-clip to be fastened around the loop in his collar, because he really did want to go for his walk.

Humans and dog closed the front door behind them, crossed the road, and headed for the beach. Little Fella pulled at his lead, wanting to go and play by the water – but dogs aren't allowed on some beaches in the holiday season, and it was with real regret that his humans said 'sorry, we just can't let you go on the sand'.

They took their favourite path past the beach cafés, and past the three red-uniformed lifeguards sitting watchfully in deckchairs at the end of the strip that made up the area's biggest beach. The tide was now well on its way in, but the beach was so wide that several dozen families still had enough sand to lounge and play on. Only a couple of swimmers were in the water, while several enthusiastic surfers were taking advantage of the strengthening breakers which gave them a short but very exciting ride in to shore.

At one end of the bay, the sand had completely disappeared, and only the grey rocks stood above the waterline; seagulls perched on them and shrieked mournfully.

The terrier and his humans headed up the cliff path. Within minutes they were out of view of the beach, and had the path to themselves. Little Fella scurried happily from bush to hedge, following every scent trail he could find, while his owners chatted casually, following him unhurriedly.

Suddenly his man stopped, and pointed back down towards the harbour. "Look," he said. "The lifeboat's going out."

As they watched the blue boat racing away from the harbour, the man began to tell about their meeting with the painter that morning – but before he had time to finish his story, there was a wail of sirens, and looking across a field away to their left, they saw the blue flash of a police car as it raced up from the town, along the cliff-top road. To their surprise, it didn't carry on past them – it stopped in one position for a moment, then drove forward another hundred

yards, and stopped. Then it reversed hurriedly a short way and stopped again.

One of the officers in the car stepped out, shaded his eyes with his hand, and peered out towards the clifftop. He obviously could not see what he was looking for, because he sat back in the car and began talking earnestly on his radio.

Little Fella's owners exchanged a look. "Something's going on," said the man, as he rolled the little dog's lead up and stuffed it into his pocket.

Little Fella was happy. He was off the lead, free to ramble where he liked, and he had picked up the traces of his earlier exploration through the hedge. And he remembered that on the other side of the bushes, he had found something exciting.

Could he find it again? He nosed to left and right, found the opening, and wriggled through.

On his way through the hedge, Little Fella remembered the path he had found earlier. Yes, through the opening, that's right – what was that scent? Yes, to the right here... where is it?

Little Fella nosed cautiously to the edge of the cliff, nosing to the right where he remembered almost losing his footing on the mossy stone – yes, here it was!

He edged carefully forward, aware that the earth under his paws could give way at any moment, sending not just pebbles scattering down the cliff, but him with them.

His left forepaw found a stone larger than the rest, embedded deep in the ground, and not giving way – he pressed his weight upon it, moved his right paw to another firmly-sited stone, and eased his nose forward.

He looked down the steep cliff.

There, a long way below him, he could see humans. A family – a man, a woman, and two young children. He could see their holiday gear, a beach towel, and even their picnic – but all of it was floating on the water, which was higher now than Little Fella remembered seeing it before.

The small patch of sand he had seen this morning had now all disappeared under dark, swirling waters. The big rock he had seen this morning was now surrounded by the sea, which pounded itself against the stone, then drew back as if taking a breath and preparing for another effort before



On the rock was a family

hurling itself once more against the rock and the foot of the cliff.

It was on this big rock that the humans were standing. The man, looking at once both angry and terrified, would have been a comic figure in his bright holiday shorts, had it not been for the fury on his face. He screamed something to the woman, who stood beside him on the rock. Her eyes were wide open in terror as she turned to reach for the little girl, a pathetic helpless figure in one-piece bathing suit, who was screaming. The little girl was hysterical with fear.

Beside her, her brother, a boy of about seven, was silent. He stood immobile, watching the incoming water, his mouth wide open, transfixed.

This was a family about to die. And the furious father, who had led them to this secluded hidden cove, knew it.

Little Fella's dark, serious brown eyes took all this in with one look. Then he raised his gaze to a point beyond the rock, where a boat was at a standstill on the high, surging incoming tide.

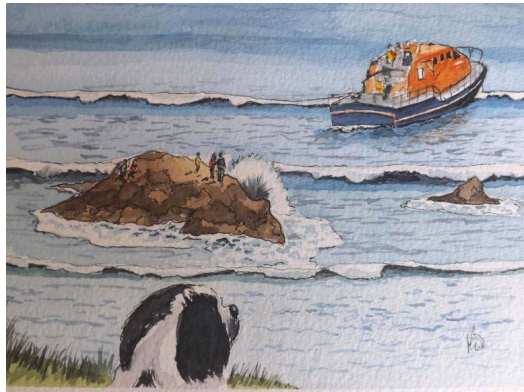
It was the lifeboat. It was resting, motionless, about thirty feet beyond the rock, and moving no nearer – because, with the high tide, there was no way for it to get between the seven or eight sharp smaller rocks that guarded the entrance to the cove.

Little Fella didn't know all this, but he did understand the looks on the face of the lifeboatmen who were standing thoughtfully on deck. These were experienced rescuers who

realised that nature had put an impossible barrier in front of them.

The lifeboat crew looked at the jagged rocks which were now just sharp points above the waves. These made it impossible for even a small dinghy to get through, and even a single swimmer would be unlikely to get past them – and even if he did, he would never get the family back out. There was no way in.

The lifeboat crew then looked away across to the headland, where that nice little strip of sandy beach which had been the holidaymakers' path to the cove had now disappeared under several feet of water. No way in or out there.



The lifeboat could get no nearer

The lifeboat crew looked beyond the trapped family to the shore, where the steep cliff towered above the waves. No way in or out that way.

Little Fella looked down at the cove. He looked out at the lifeboat. Then he turned and looked curiously inland, hearing the sound of more police-car sirens. Another patrol car was driving slowly past, the officers inside straining to try and see anything over the cliff edge.

Then Little Fella barked. Then he barked again. And then he barked as loud and long and continuously as his humans, back on the path, had ever heard him do.

This was no ordinary bark of a dog who wanted to play. This was not the bark of a lost dog who had got separated from his family. This was a bark that his humans had never heard from him before.

Terriers do not have a deep, resounding bark like bigger dogs. They have a short, sharp, high-pitched yap. And if that doesn't bring them attention, they yap again. And again. And again.

Woof, woof, woof, went Little Fella. Yap, yap! Bark, bark! He absolutely howled.

To those who do not like small dogs, a small dog's bark can be the most aggravating sound in the world... today, the humans were glad to hear it.

Little Fella had been yapping, at perhaps twice a second, for fully two minutes before the sheer insistence of his appeal brought two of the uniformed policemen out of their car and to the cliff edge.

One officer looked at the cliff. He looked at Little Fella. He looked again at the cliff, dropped to his knees, used his

hands to tear away some of the branches, and uncovered that very same ancient step which Little Fella had discovered. The policeman looked once again at Little Fella, then turned and shouted “here!” and spoke urgently into his radio. “We’ve found the old smugglers’ path! If these are the old steps, then there’s a way down to the beach!”

Suddenly more humans were crashing, barging through the bushes towards the dog and past him. One was an ambulanceman who almost stepped on him; another was a burly coastguard who shoved him aside with one big booted foot as he threw himself forward on to his stomach to peer over the cliff.

The coastguard waved across to the lifeboatmen, and spoke into his radio. “I can’t see any way down – it’s sheer cliff, all overgrown.”

“I think there is a way,” the lifeboat skipper’s voice crackled back over the radio. He was looking intently at the cliff through his binoculars. “I can see some marks in the cliff between the bushes – yes, it might be the old steps. I think there’s a ledge. Try it - we’ll talk you down.”

The constable who had been first to appear spoke briefly into the radio attached to his lapel, caught a coil of rope thrown to him by a man in paramedic uniform, and passed it to the coastguard who tied it around his middle and then, incredibly, walked right over the edge of the cliff, sending small stones skittering in every direction... but as he passed the small dog, he reached out and softly ruffled the white fur under Little Fella’s chin.

Then he was gone, abseiling down the almost-sheer cliff face, the rope snaking behind him as other officers took the strain. He was descending blind, seeing only the cliff face before his eyes, while the lifeboat skipper gave him directions. “Come to your left about six feet... down a bit more. Feel with your feet... looks like there’s a stone step there. OK, now down a little to the right, there’s a bush growing out of the cliff, I bet that’s a stone step there... yes, you’ve got it!”

And so, bit by bit, the lifeboat skipper guided the rescuer down until he had both feet on a small ledge, inches above the waves.



The rescuer walked straight over the cliff edge!

A second rescuer hopped over the edge, a rope around his waist and the other end held by two policemen, taking the strain. A third officer was holding a ladder – he approached the edge of the cliff, hitched a rope to the ladder, and lowered it down.

Forty feet below, the first two men to go down had positioned themselves on a ledge, just a few inches above the lapping water. They reached up for the ladder, extended it to its full length, rested one end on their ledge and reached the other end out to the rock on which the family was standing – they had created a bridge. Without a moment's hesitation, the first rescuer crawled carefully on to the ladder and made his way out to the rock, with the angry sea now drenching him with its spray.

It was a full hour before the men finished bringing the family up the cliff. Amazingly, the entire group had been brought out alive – children first, then the woman, then the man in his silly green shorts.

Little Fella and his humans had moved away from the edge of the cliff where all the action of the rescue was going on. Normally, the police would have shooed them out of the way, not wanting sightseers goggling at a real-life rescue in progress, but it seemed that every one of these men in their various uniforms acknowledged that Little Fella had earned his right to be there and see the end of the story.

One by one, using a combination of clever work with ropes and sheer brute strength on the part of the rescuers, each child and parent was brought to the top of the cliff, wrapped in a blanket, and hustled away to ambulances which had arrived and now stood waiting, the flashing of their blue roof lights casting bizarre reflections upon the darkening waters below.

Little Fella sat neatly on his haunches, his little tail curled under his left leg, and watched through serious eyes as each

rescue made it to the top. One child was crying helplessly, one seemed too terrified to make a single noise. Both looked in puzzlement towards him as they were led to the ambulances – but, later, would they ever remember seeing a small dog on the top of the cliff? Would they ever know that one small puppy had saved their lives?



Back at the harbour, Little Fella was the hero. His humans had been invited by some of the coastguards and lifeboatmen to bring their four-legged friend to the harbour pub that evening, and while the man modestly accepted congratulations on the intelligence of his dog, Little Fella was placed on the bar to sit where everybody could see him, and throughout the evening, members of the rescue party and their friends would come up, stroke his fur, and talk to him fondly, and quite respectfully.

“Everybody knew the tales about an old smugglers’ path that was supposed to lead down to the cove,” one lifeboatman said to Little Fella’s humans. “Nobody knew if it really existed, or exactly where it was, and it must have been overgrown for years... who’d have thought a little dog could have found it when we needed it?”

To a dog, human talk all sounds very much the same. But it was clear to Little Fella that whatever was being said by all these humans was pretty much in his favour.

And every time the man broke off from his talk with the off-duty coastguards and ambulancemen and police, all of

them now relaxing after a successful rescue, and looked across at where Little Fella was sitting politely and attentively, there was no need for words between them.

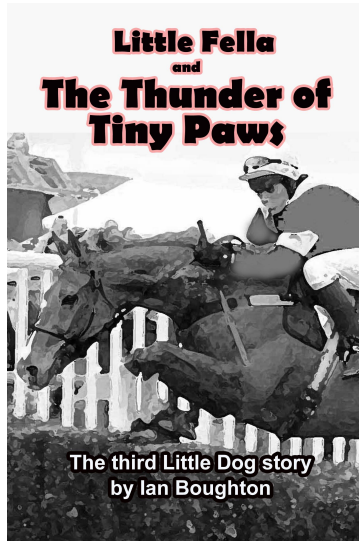
The man looked at Little Fella.

Little Fella looked at the man.

It had been a good day for a little dog.



BOOK THREE



Little Fella
and
The Thunder of Tiny Paws

Story by
Ian Boughton
from an idea by **Trudi Roark**

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The windows of the inn were steamed up, masking the sight of the steady rain outside. Little Fella stretched out under the table, exchanged a curious glance with a sheepdog at the next table, and wondered just how close he could get his nose and paws to the open log fire.

The other dog yawned and crawled forward, rested its nose on the brick surround of the pub fireplace, and looked at Little Fella as if to say: ‘I got here first!’

Little Fella put his nose on his paws and curled up where he was, resting on his mistress’s foot; she was leaning back in her chair, reading her book, in no hurry to leave the warmth of the cosy room. A full teapot stood on her table, next to an empty plate - it had been a good lunch for both mistress and dog.

As he dozed, Little Fella became aware of a strange sound. It was a kind of rhythmic, slow beat, and it was getting nearer and nearer. He rolled himself over on to his paws, stretched, and looked up and out of the pub window. Outside, he could see a very tall man – maybe twelve feet high. Little Fella was puzzled, and looked again – ah, that was it. The man was on a horse.

The horse turned its head and looked through the window, directly down at Little Fella. The little dog turned and

retreated back under his table. Those horse things are a bit too big to play with, and he did not know if they were dangerous or not.

A few moments later, hearing the sound of his mistress's voice, Little Fella stretched and yawned under the table, and moved out a little to try and see who was talking. In front of him, he saw several pairs of shoes which had not been there when he lay down – people had come to sit at the next table. Some of these shoes were good stout country shoes, but one pair were high black boots with brown tops – he had seen those kind of boots before. People who wore those boots were people who rode horses. That animal he had seen outside was a horse. Ah, that explained it.

The newcomers were chatting to his mistress, so Little Fella rested his head on her shoe again to get some more sleep.

“Are you coming to the racing tomorrow?” asked one of the humans.

“What races?” asked Little Fella's mistress.

“It's the point-to-point day,” came the answer. “It's the big horse event of the year. The Major here gives over his farm for the day, and every horse rider for miles around comes along to take part. Hundreds of people will be there; there are six or seven races, and everybody has a great time.”

And would his mistress like to come to the races the next day? The man wearing the riding boots, whose name turned out to be Nigel, was to be riding in one of the races, and his

horse, Lazy Lightning, was reckoned to have a good chance of winning.

“It’s the Major’s horse,” explained Nigel. “It’s also on the Major’s land, so he’s expecting me to win!”

“You most certainly are going to win,” replied a deeper voice, the Major himself. “Nigel and Lazy Lightning are going to win me that trophy!”

Is that a good horse, asked Little Fella’s mistress?

“It certainly is – you probably saw him a few minutes ago, when I rode him up the lane here to the pub. One of the Major’s stable lads has taken him back to the stables.”

“Is it like going to the big races you see on television, with all the famous jockeys?”

“Oh no,” said Nigel, “This is different. Point-to-point racing is ordinary people like me. It’s a kind of racing over ordinary farmland, for hunting horses and amateur riders – a lot of them are stable lads and girls who might end up becoming professional riders.

“A ‘point-to-point’ is a race that goes from one place to another – over a hundred years ago, farmers used to race their horses from one village church to another, which is why they call races ‘steeplechases’... they could see the church steeple in the distance, and they had to aim for it. If there were stone walls, ditches and hedges in the way, well, they just had to jump them!

“I once had the chance to ride in the New Forest race, which is a proper point-to-point – there is no racecourse, and all the riders gather together, and are told where the finishing point is going to be, and you just get there by any route you can!

“These days, we race across set courses on farmland, like the Major’s land. Most races are about three miles, so we have to go round the circuit twice, and we usually have to jump a lot of fences on the way.”

Sounds exciting, said Little Fella’s mistress politely.

“Oh, it is! I was quite young when I was first taken to the point-to-points – I was at pony club, and I used to help prepare the horses. When I saw my first race, I thought ‘I can do that’, and the first time I raced over fences, it was thrilling - I didn’t really ride him, I just hung on, and when we went over my first fence, I thought ‘this is what it must feel like to fly’.”

Now, now, my boy, said the Major. You are boring the lady – she doesn’t want to hear all your stories about racing.

“Oh, I do!” said Little Fella’s mistress. “Sounds like a good day out. Can dogs come to the races?”

Certainly, said the Major. Everyone takes their dogs to the point-to-point races – why didn’t she and Little Fella come with them, tomorrow? She and her little dog could come and visit his stables the next morning, and he would take them on to the race ground.

“Listen to that, Little Fella,” said his mistress to the puppy who was settling down again near the fire. “Sounds like we’re having a day out tomorrow. Hope the weather will be good.”

The next day, Little Fella was placed in his mistress’s car and driven to the Major’s farm, where they were given a tour of the stables, and watched the stable lads and girls getting the horses ready for the afternoon’s racing.

Little Fella was more or less free to wander round the front of the stables, although his mistress had been told firmly that the little dog must be kept on his lead. Horses do not like little dogs – they are scared that the smaller animals will run under their hooves and trip them up.

Little Fella nosed through the straw on the ground, and peered ahead, where he could see a long row of front doors... but they were only half doors. They were stable doors. The bottom halves were closed, but the top halves were open, and out of each, a horse’s head appeared, silently surveying the humans walking round the stable yard.

Little Fella became aware that he was being watched. He looked to left, and to right – nothing. Then it occurred to him to look directly upwards – and there, a clear six feet above the little dog, was a large horse’s head looking down at him from its open stable door.

Dog looked at horse, and horse looked at dog. In their own languages, neither spoke. The giant chestnut brown horse simply regarded the little dog impassively.

“That’s him!” came the voice of a stable lad. “That’s Lazy Lightning – and he’s going to win, no doubt about it.”

“Why is he called Lazy Lightning?” asked Little Fella’s mistress.

The stable lad laughed. “He’s so big, and so well-built, he never looks as if he’s trying – he just looks as if he’s out for a jog around the course. Then you suddenly realise he’s six lengths ahead of you, and that you’re never going to catch him!”

The stable lad chuckled, ruffled Lazy Lightning’s muzzle, and went on with his work.

Then a voice called: ‘let’s go to the races!’, and Little Fella could feel the ripple of excitement that spread through the stable yard.

The Major walked purposefully across the yard. Time to go to the course, he said, adding that it wouldn’t be far... it was on his own land. They tumbled into his Range Rover, and within minutes had arrived at another large field.

Here, everything was activity. Hundreds of people, mostly dressed in the green and brown drabness that country people tend to wear, milled around – some of them were inspecting all the trade stands and tables and tents where they could buy everything from souvenirs to food. Some of them had wandered over to the paddock area, to see the horses being made ready before the races.

Some were crowding round the ‘bookies’, the men who took bets : they stood on little boxes which raised their

heads above the crowd, and beside them were blackboards and some electronic display boards showing which horses would be running in the next race, and the ‘odds’ against each – that is, the chances each horse had of winning.

“Gambling is a mug’s game!” laughed the Major, appearing beside Little Fella’s mistress. “But remember to put a pound on Lazy Lightning!”

Looking round the crowds, Little Fella noted that everybody had their dogs with them. Generally, because country people like ‘working’ dogs, they were all bigger than him – he saw retrievers, labradors, setters, some German shepherds. But as he looked round, Little Fella realised that he could also see a number of smaller dogs – there were many terriers, and almost all of them were Jack Russells, the finest small dogs in the world, favoured by many country people, who believe them to be big dogs in a small body.

As he and his mistress wandered through the crowd, several of these terriers moved towards him to touch noses... it was as if they realised that he was one of their own kind.

And he is, because Little Fella is a mixture. His mother is a Jack Russell terrier, and from her, Little Fella had inherited the Jack Russell traits of bravery and loyalty. But his dad is a Lhasa Apso, descended from the watchdogs kept by Tibetan Buddhist monks, and they are alert dogs with a very keen sense of hearing. They are friendly and loyal, and as watchdogs, they like to see everything that is going on – even in a café, Little Fella liked to sit on his mistress’s lap and watch all the other people. But if a Lhasa Apso

senses danger, then they will bark loudly, and everyone will know that they have something to say.

Not only can Little Fella bark, but rather surprisingly, he can jump high, and can jump fast.

The racing was to take place across two massive fields. The Major owned a very big farm, of many hundreds of acres, but because he was so keen on horses and racing, he had made sure that there was room for a big racing circuit.

The horses were being prepared in a fenced-off paddock in one corner of the main field. They were led to the starting point by their stable lads and girls, a route which took them almost through the crowd of spectators, who were able to get a very close look at these superb animals.

To her surprise, Little Fella's mistress said to the Major, many of the stable 'lads' were girls.

"So are many of the jockeys," he replied. "Most of the famous jockeys started out in point-to-points, and pony clubs. Some of those who are really serious about making a living with horses will come and work in a stables for someone like me, and giving our stable lads a chance to ride in a race is very exciting for them. I train one horse every year just for the stable lads and girls to ride.

"Once upon a time, it was only the boys who went on to ride in races, but today, there are just as many girls doing so – and they are very, very good."

The Major had explained to his guests that a point-to-point race usually has a course of about three miles, and has

many fences for the horses to jump. Each fence is usually just over four feet high, or about one and a quarter metres. They are made of thin brushwood, so a horse which fails to jump a fence cleanly will not hurt itself. As the races are on farmland, the fences are not there all the time – there are special people who will bring the fences to the course, wheel them into place, and take them away again when the race day is done.

On this course, there was one fence which was the Major's pride and joy. This was The Hedge, and he had had it made especially to his own design. It was so wide that six horses could cross it at the same time, it was four feet six inches high, and to make it look like a real hedge, it was two feet thick at the top.

On the Major's firm instructions, the Hedge was always the last fence on his course, and being both the landowner and the organiser of the racing, he made sure that his guests always had the privileged position of sitting by this fence. The Major parked his Range Rover there, and by sitting on the bonnet and even the roof, he and his friends all had wonderful viewing positions. Looking in one direction, they could see across to the starting point, then watch the horses going round the outside of the field, and gradually coming back round towards them; they were right next to the horses crossing the Hedge, and then they could watch the runners in their final gallop to the winning post, a hundred yards away.

Little Fella sat neatly and politely on his mistress's lap, taking a great interest in everything he could see around him.



They're off!

At the first race of the afternoon, the little dog was frightened when he heard a deep rumbling sound from the other end of the field. What on earth was it? He snuggled up against his mistress for reassurance, but she simply grinned down at him and said: “don’t worry – the horses are coming!”

The puppy reluctantly turned his gaze to the racing track, and was fascinated to see a dozen horses hurtling towards him, pell-mell, with their riders clinging on, heads down and backsides up in the air.

Little Fella glanced at his mistress. She was clearly enjoying herself, so everything must be all right, then. Nothing for a little dog to be scared of. He turned his furry head back towards the track, just in time to see the leading horse soar gracefully over the fence, and head away to the winning post, a hundred yards down the field.

From then on, Little Fella enjoyed himself greatly. Every time his mistress pointed towards the starting line, he would watch keenly, his brown eyes watching the horses as they charged half a mile up the far field, then turned sharply left and careered across the road where the two fields joined, hurtling over the fences and hurdles which had been placed there, before they turned at the top of the field and headed down to where he and his mistress, and the Major's guests, set by the final fence.

Each time, Little Fella watched closely as the horses thundered towards the final fence, then reached up and over it at full speed, their jockeys rising slightly out of their saddles at the highest point of the jump as the horses soared gracefully over it, landed and sped off towards the winning post. To a little dog, it all looked a lot of fun and he would have very much liked to charge up and down the racetrack himself, but those horses were too big for a little dog to play with, and his mistress kept him firmly seated on her lap.

Soon, it was time for the big race of the afternoon. Now the Major and his guests began to look serious. This was the time that the Major's horse, Lazy Lightning, would be running. Little Fella sensed a change in the attitude of the humans he was with as they all raised their binoculars and followed the horses which paraded down from the parade ring and made their way across to the starting point, half a mile away.

"This is a fast race," the Major told his guests. "We expect it to be close. I think Lazy Lightning will win, but there are

a lot of really good horses in this race. It will be a close thing.”

Who are the other horses?

“Well, there’s Lucky Jim, he’s a new one; Tagine is pretty hot, and Willie Eckerslike is a horse from the north. Roasted Joan is hot stuff, and then there’s the black-and-white, Binkie’s Double, there’s Dilham Delight, Up The Stairs and Hygge Jigge.

“They’re all good. But Lazy Lightning is the best!”

Little Fella watched with interest as the horses were led from the parade ring by their stable lads and girls. One of those horses looked familiar – it was the big brown horse he had seen at the stables! It was Lazy Lightning!

From the parade ring, the horses and their stable lads and riders had a long walk to the starting line. Their route took them walking right past the final fence where the Major and his guests had their prime watching point. As Lazy Lightning walked past, his rider Nigel touched his cap with his whip to acknowledge the Major, the owner of the horse. As he did so, the big brown horse looked down at Little Fella – and, long after, his mistress would tell everybody that as the big horse strolled past, Lazy Lightning winked at the little dog!

And then, as one person, the crowd shouted ‘they’re off!’, and Little Fella watched with his mistress as the horses headed off from the starting line into the far field.

“Lazy Lightning’s fourth,” said the Major as he watched through his binoculars as the horses jumped the first fence. And now it became clear to all of them that his horse was a very strong animal indeed. By the third fence, Lazy Lightning had come level with Lucky Jim in front of him, and as they hit the ground, the Major’s horse had his nose in front. Lazy Lightning was in third place.

As they careered towards the next fence, Lazy Lightning was closing visibly upon Tagine in front of him, and then, almost effortlessly, the big brown horse eased past. He was now in second place, just a length behind the leader, Willie Eckerslike.

“Now you’ll see why he’s called Lazy Lightning,” said the Major. And indeed, it seemed almost without effort that the giant horse caught up with the horse in front of him, and as they all turned left into the final straight, passed ahead and into the lead. And he did not let up – over the next fifty yards, Lazy Lightning opened up a lead of three or four lengths over the horse in second place, drawing farther ahead with each stride.

As the runners approached the final fence, the Major and his guests were all on their feet, shouting themselves hoarse. It was clear that the others were not going to make up any ground on Nigel and Lazy Lightning.

“He’s got it!” roared the Major. “They’ll never catch him now!”

Coming towards the last fence, Lazy Lightning was now four lengths clear. The next six horses were all in a close

pack, but they were racing each other for second place – nobody was going to catch Nigel and his fine horse. The Major, his friends, and Little Fella’s mistress were all shouting encouragement as Lazy Lightning headed at full speed towards the final fence.



Nobody expected the fall...

Nobody expected the fall. It wasn’t the horse’s fault. They simply reached the final fence at full speed, rose high over it, and as they soared over the fencing, Nigel realised he was a little off balance...and then it was too late. He rose up from the saddle, but didn’t make it back again – Lazy Lightning hit the ground cleanly, and raced away down the course, all the way to the winning post, but his rider was no longer with him.

However, Nigel did not hit the ground cleanly when he came down with no horse under him. He came down awkwardly, and his left leg buckled under him, breaking

with a crack that every nearby spectator heard. He lay on the landing side of the fence, and groaned.

The spectators at the final post all realised the situation instantly. Six horses were now hammering for the final fence as fast as they could go, side-by-side, and all likely to cross the fence at the same time. What those horses and their jockeys could not see was that on the other side of the fence was Nigel, spread out in the middle of the course, lying at exactly the point where six sets of hooves would shortly land.

There was no escape.



When they all spoke about it later, Little Fella's mistress, the Major and his friends, all realised that none of them could really explain in detail what had happened. Each of them had clearly seen Nigel fall, but everyone agreed that what happened next was all a blur, and over in just a few seconds.

What everyone agreed was that they saw a little flash of black and white fur, as Little Fella shot up from his mistress's lap, and they all heard the thunder of tiny paws on metal as he landed on the bonnet of the Major's Range Rover. It was a fine leap for a little dog, but nothing compared to his next two jumps – one took him on to the

roof of the Range Rover, and the next flying leap landed him on the top of the final fence.

And there he faced towards the oncoming horses, and he barked.

This came as an unwelcome surprise to the arriving jockeys and their horses – one moment they saw the final fence before them and were preparing for their leap, and the next, a little black and white dog was sitting on top of the fence, barking at them for all he was worth.

Woof, woof, shouted Little Fella. Yap, yap, woof, woof!

Horses do not like little barking dogs. They may be big animals, but they don't like little dogs which make loud noises, and all six of the approaching runners reacted in different ways – Tagine shied off to the right and ran past the fence instead of going over it, while Willie Eckerslike headed left and off the course completely and disappeared into the beer tent. Lucky Jim stopped in its tracks and reared up on its hind legs, depositing its rider on the grass. Hygge Jigge ran round and round in circles, not knowing which way to go. Dilham Delight simply turned and raced back up the course the way it had come. Binkie's Double screeched to a halt at the very edge of the fence and found itself staring face-to-face into the eyes of a little black and white dog, which gazed steadily back at him but refused to move.

And so not a single one of those horses went over the fence, where they would surely have landed on top of Nigel, who was still lying there injured. But within moments rescuers

were beside him, preparing a stretcher to carry him to an ambulance.



Just a couple of days later, Little Fella found himself under the very same table at the very same inn. Above him, his mistress was talking with Nigel, who had caused a commotion when he arrived, walking with the aid of two crutches, and his broken leg entirely covered in a big plaster. He was famous - the story of his escape had been in the papers, and was the talk of the county. The customers had all cleared a path for him to the table, and the staff had fussed over him to make sure he was seated comfortably.

Nigel reached down and tickled Little Fella's ear. "I owe your dog a big present," he said to Little Fella's mistress. "If it wasn't for him stopping those horses, I would be in a very bad way. I might not be alive to tell the story."

Little Fella looked up and licked Nigel's hand. As he did so, out of the corner of his eye, the little dog glimpsed a movement at the far side of the room. He turned his furry head towards the window – and there, being led past by a stable lad, was a big brown horse. It was Lazy Lightning!

As they passed, the horse stopped. He turned his large brown head towards the window of the pub, and stared through, looking directly down to where Little Fella was sitting by the table. And then, to the astonishment of everyone inside, the horse firmly pulled his stable lad towards the pub door, and stood there in the doorway.

Little Fella sprang up and raced to the door, where he stood in front of Lazy Lightning.

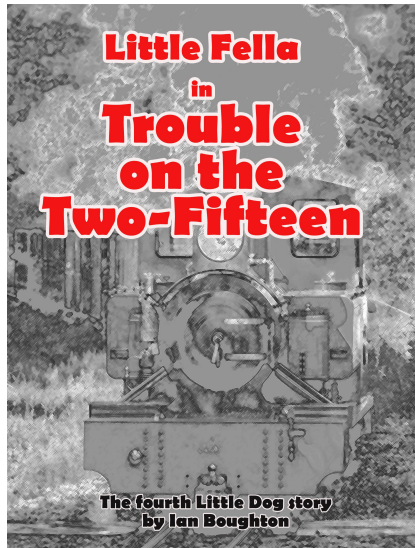
The horse looked down at the dog.

The dog looked up at the horse.

And then the horse slowly lowered his great head, Little Fella reached up as far as his tiny paws would allow, and dog and horse rubbed noses.



BOOK FOUR



Little Fella
in
Trouble on the
Two-fifteen

Story by
Ian Boughton

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Little Fella was walking along a country path when he heard a sound like an owl. Whoop, whoop! He was puzzled. It was early afternoon, and the owls aren't out and about then. He sometimes sees and hears them late at night when he's sitting outside his kitchen door looking at the night-time garden, but not this early.

His mistress looked at him and laughed, seeing his puzzled little face.

“Don't worry, Little Fella – it's the train!” And indeed the sound changed from a 'woop' to a 'chuff, chuff', and a few yards away to the side, Little Fella saw a very strange thing. It was a little red railway engine, pulling along a series of carriages with people looking out of the window and waving to him as they went past.

His mistress had been taking him for a walk along the path which runs beside a wonderful small railway in Norfolk.

Norfolk is a super county for both railways and dog walking. It is very flat, having no hills or mountains, which means it is very convenient for small dogs. It is also very

convenient for steam railways, because they have no hills to climb!

For people who love steam railways, Norfolk is a great place to visit. There are several railway lines which used to be part of the main railway network, but are now owned by groups of people who have kept some old steam engines working, and thousands of tourists come to visit them every year.

And there are also some very special ‘little railways’. Britain has many of these, which run on tracks which may only be fifteen inches wide, but have perfectly working steam locomotives, and carriages which can hold many people. One of the very best is the Bure Valley Railway, which brings people down from the town of Aylsham to the villages of Wroxham and Hoveton, where they can get on to boats on the Norfolk Broads.

In the summer, with lots of holidaymakers around, a train on a railway like this might be carrying two hundred people. But the trains don’t go very fast – powerful as the little steam engines are, they are kept to around twenty miles an hour on a small railway.

The disadvantage of being a very flat county is that when it is windy, it can be very windy indeed. Although it is in the east of England, the winds come mainly up from the south-west, and because there are no hills to slow the winds down, they can reach quite a speed. There are also often winds coming from the north-east, all the way from Scandinavia, and when these cold winds blew, Little Fella’s

mistress used to say “these cold winds are coming all the way from Russia, with nothing to stop them!”

So there can often be winds of twenty miles an hour in autumn and winter, and sometimes, a couple of times a year when the gales come in, there can be very serious strong winds indeed. When these winds come, the seas get very rough, trees can shake and bend, and it is very sensible to take care.

And indeed, some days later, as his mistress was getting Little Fella ready for his afternoon walk, she looked a little worried as she shrugged herself into a big fluffy coat and woollen gloves.

“There’s a terrible wind out there, Little Fella,” she said. “It’s been blowing a gale all morning. The news on the radio said that the wind has been coming in from the east for days, that the gusts have been up to sixty or seventy miles an hour, and that it has blown the tiles off the roofs of some houses, and that it’s very dangerous to drive on the main roads. Some of the big bridges have been closed because of the wind.

“But you’ve got to have your afternoon exercise, so we’ll get in the car and drive along the country roads, which are quiet. That’ll be safe. Shall we go and walk by the railway?”

Little Fella took his special position in the car – he sat in the front passenger seat, where he could look out of the front window and see where they were going. They were not driving fast along the country lanes, but his mistress,

who always kept talking to him when they were out, was sounding a little worried. Now and then he could feel the strong wind against the side of the car.

“I don’t like this,” his mistress muttered, half to herself and half to the little dog beside her. “Look, there’s some branches which have been blown down across the lane!” And she gently steered the car past branches which were not quite blocking the way. Everywhere there were piles and piles of light brown and gold autumn leaves.

About twenty minutes later, they pulled off the lane into a tiny little patch of rough ground by the side of the road. Ahead of them Little Fella could see a wire and post fence, and beyond that he recognised the railway tracks. They were going to walk along the path which ran beside the railway; it ran all the way along beside the tracks, although the little fence stopped any people or animals from getting on to the line, except at certain special crossing places.

“It’s nine miles all the way long the track... but I don’t think we’ll walk all the way today, Little Fella!” laughed his mistress as she zipped up her coat, put on her gloves, and locked the car. Because they were well out in the Norfolk countryside, and far away from any traffic, Little Fella was not on his lead, but was allowed to scamper along the path beside her.

And it was certainly windy. Luckily, there was no rain, and was not particularly cold, but the strong wind buffeted them as they walked along. Little Fella was better off than his mistress, because much of the path was bordered by hedgerow, and this protected a little dog from the worst of

the wind. But his mistress clearly felt it, because she wrapped her scarf around her face, and trudged along, occasionally stopping to clear from the path branches which had been blown down from the trees.

After a while, as they came to a bend in the track and the path, they realised that someone was walking towards them from behind, catching them up quickly as he hurried along. Little Fella's mistress stopped, turned, and politely stood aside to let the man past, because he seemed to be in a hurry.

He was wearing a high-visibility jacket, a railwayman's cap, and carried a shovel, a lantern, and a big red flag.

"Hello!" he grinned as he reached them. "I'm sorry to push past you, but my job is to check the railway line, and on a day like this, I have to make sure nothing has blown down on to the track. I'm a bit behind already, and I'm expecting the two-fifteen past at any minute."

He bent down and ruffled Little Fella's fur behind the dog's ears. Funny how humans always choose that place to pet a dog, but Little Fella was quite pleased. It was always nice to get attention.

The railwayman and the dog's mistress fell into step with each other and walked along the path, chatting about the terrible weather. They approached the sharp bend in the track, and as they began to see round the curve, the man stopped abruptly.

"Oh no," he said. "Look at that!"



And there, not fifty yards ahead of them, was a large tree branch lying across the track. It had clearly been uprooted and pushed over by the gale – the large tree roots, which were normally hidden underground, could clearly be seen up above grass level.

“Whenever you see a tree blown down, you realise just how powerful the wind can be,” he said. “I’m not sure I can lift that off the track, it seems far too big. What I will have to do now is walk back along the track, round the bend, the way we’ve come, and warn the next train to stop and not come this far. That’s why I’ve got the red flag, and my lantern shows a red light.”

They all stopped at the path beside the fallen tree.

“I’ll have a closer look,” said the man, and clambered over the fence that separated the rail tracks from the walking path. He stepped on to the tracks, tested the weight of the branch, looked up at Little Fella’s mistress and shook his head.

“No, I’ll never move that. I have to walk back and stop the next train.” He checked his watch and whistled to himself. “And I’ll have to hurry – the two-fifteen will be due any minute now. I’m going to have to run.”

He swung his shovel over his shoulder, picked up his lantern and the flag, turned back to the path... and fell flat on his face. He had caught his right foot under the rail track and tripped.

“Ow!” His face showed that he was in pain. He grasped his ankle with his hand, attempted to rise, but as soon as he put his weight on his right foot, it gave way under him and he collapsed back on to the track.

“Can you move at all?” asked Little Fella’s mistress.

“No, I’ve twisted my ankle. It hurts like billy-o! I can’t even get up.”

“But how are we going to stop the train?” asked Little Fella’s mistress. She pulled out her mobile phone from her pocket. “I’ll call 999.”

“You can’t,” replied the man, still lying flat on the track and rubbing his foot. “There’s a very bad phone signal out here in the country, and even if you did get through, there would be no time for them to stop the train.”

And as he spoke, Little Fella heard that sound again:

“Whoo! Whoo-hooo!”

All three of them, humans and dog, turned their heads at the same time, towards the bend they had recently passed.

Quite clearly, above the trees, they could see puffs of thick white smoke moving towards the bend at quite a speed. The two-fifteen was on its way, and would be round the bend within a few minutes.

“Does it have time to stop?” asked Little Fella’s mistress.

“Probably not,” answered the man, his face ashen white.

“We come round that bend at only about twenty miles an hour, but I don’t think he can stop in time. He won’t see the tree until it’s too late, and he’s going to hit it.”

“Right,” she replied. “I’m going to run up the track and stop him!”

What happened next surprised both of them. When he told people about it later, the railwayman said it was ‘the strangest thing I ever saw’.

Little Fella’s mistress turned and began to hurry towards the bend... but far faster than she was, Little Fella sprinted past her up the track. And to her astonishment, he was holding the man’s red flag in his mouth, just as any other dog would carry a newspaper.

She had no chance of catching a speedy little dog – Little Fella scorched round the bend ahead of her, and though she could not see it, she clearly heard a sharp blast on the train’s whistle, followed by the screech of brakes.

Little Fella’s mistress caught her breath and ran as fast as she could around the bend. And there she saw something quite extraordinary.



The train had slowed to walking pace and then stopped, and the engine driver and fireman were leaning out of the side of their cab, looking down at the side of the track.

There, staring back up them with a determined look on his face, sat the little black-and-white dog, with the flagpole between his jaws and the red flag cascading down beside him.

It was as clear a ‘stop’ signal as the driver had ever seen.

So he stopped the train.



It took an hour or more for the situation to be cleared up. The engine driver and his mate clambered down from their cab, and Little Fella’s mistress led them round the bend to where the railwayman lay sprawled, and the big tree trunk lay across the tracks. The fireman ran to the nearest road,

where he was lucky enough to stop a passing car; the driver raised the alarm when he got to the nearest village, and soon the police, an ambulance, the fire brigade, and the railway's own repair teams were on the scene. The railwayman was hustled off in the ambulance to hospital, and the railway teams used lifting gear to remove the tree from the line.

Little Fella and his mistress watched all this with interest, as the engine driver told anyone who would listen just what a strange sight he had seen.

“I was coming up to the curve, and round the bend came a little dog – and do you know what? He had a ‘danger’ flag in his mouth! I’ve never seen anything like it – but a red flag means only one thing, so I shut off the steam and hammered on the brakes.

“That is one clever little dog!”

Little Fella and his mistress still often walk on the path by the railway. And whenever a train goes past, the driver and his mate always wave, because everyone on the railway knows the story of the little dog and the rescue.

And sometimes, for a treat, Little Fella and his humans ride on the train from one end of the line to the other. It doesn't cost them anything - because of the rescue, the manager of the railway has given them a free pass, and they never have to pay for their ticket!



Ian and Little Fella hope you have enjoyed these stories.

We hope there will be more soon!

**THE
LITTLE DOG**



STORIES