COBWEB

Books by Michael Morpurgo include:

ALONE ON A WIDE WIDE SEA
THE AMAZING STORY OF ADOLPHUS TIPS
BILLY THE KID
BORN TO RUN
BOY GIANT
THE BUTTERFLY LION
COOL!
THE DANCING BEAR
DEAR OLLY
AN EAGLE IN THE SNOW
AN ELEPHANT IN THE GARDEN
FARM BOY
FLAMINGO BOY
THE FOX AND THE GHOST KING
KASPAR – PRINCE OF CATS
LISTEN TO THE MOON
LITTLE MANFRED
OUTLAW
RUNNING WILD
SHADOW
SPARROW
TORO! TORO!
WHEN FISHES FLEW

Illustrated in full colour:
THE BOY WHO WOULD BE KING
PINOCCHIO
TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE
THERE ONCE IS A QUEEN
TOTO

For Nick and Helen,

Remembering your Drovers' Way walk, 250 miles, from Treginnis in Pembrokeshire to London, in support of Farms for City Children, and to thank you for all your help with this book. Cobweb and I could never have done it without you!

First published in the United Kingdom by
HarperCollins *Children's Books* in 2024
HarperCollins *Children's Books* is a division of HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

www.harpercollins.co.uk

HarperCollins*Publishers*
Macken House, 39/40 Mayor Street Upper
Dublin 1, D01 C9W8, Ireland

1

Text copyright © Michael Morpurgo 2024
Illustrations copyright © Michael Foreman 2024
Cover illustrations copyright © Tom Clohosy Cole 2024
Cover design copyright © HarperCollins*Publishers* Ltd 2024
All rights reserved

ISBN 978–0–00–835213–4

Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman assert the moral right to be identified as the author and illustrator of the work respectively.
A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Typeset in Aldus LT Std 12/18pt
Printed and bound in the UK using 100% renewable electricity at CPI Group (UK) Ltd

Conditions of Sale
This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form, binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of HarperCollinsPublishers Ltd.



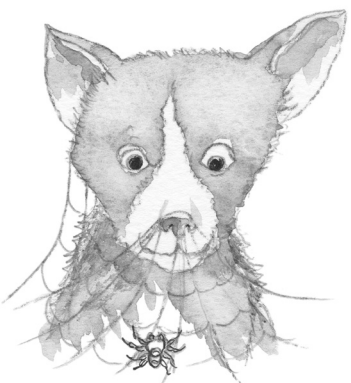
This book contains FSC™ certified paper and other controlled sources to ensure responsible forest management.

For more information visit: www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

MICHAEL MORPURGO

COBWEB

Illustrations by Michael Foreman

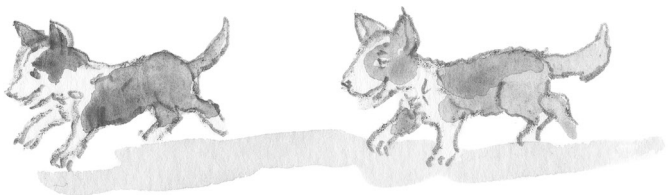


HC
CB
HARPERCOLLINS
CHILDREN'S BOOKS









Chapter One

They call me Cobweb. And I know why. I'll tell you why later. I may be a dog, but I know and understand a lot more than people think I do. It's true that I didn't know much and I didn't see much when I was first born, not for a while anyway. I had to learn, like you did. The world was just a foggy, foggy blur to me – a haze of light and

shadow and sound and silence, a world of warm milk and closeness and licking and warmth.

I came to know people at first by listening to their voices – and to one voice in particular. The first voice I ever heard. Gentle and soft, it was, as I was picked up and held, cuddled and stroked. The voice said to me: 'Hello, littlest one. I'm Bethan. And I'll look after you always, always. Promise.'

Then came the day when my eyes opened and I saw the world as it is, not blurry at all any more, but clear and bright, just as it has been all my life and every day since. That same day I saw my Bethan for the first time – a face of smiles and laughter. But then, soon enough,



I saw the face of another voice that I had come to know too, a louder voice. This face was hardly ever a smiley one like Bethan's. 'Tad', she called him.

'Don't you mind Tad,' Bethan would say to me. 'He's my father. He can be a bit grumpy these days. He says it's because he's got aching bones, but I know better. He's been like it since . . . since it happened. He's sad. I've been sad too, but you make me happy again.'

Bethan was the one I loved best in the whole world right from the start, because I could tell she loved me best. That's the way love often works, if you didn't know. My mother loved me too, of course, but she had six others like me to feed and look after, so she had to spread her love seven ways. Not easy. She licked me clean, fussed over me and fed me, like she fed all of my six brothers and sisters.

We all of us had to learn to fend for ourselves when it came to feeding – and that wasn't easy for me, being the smallest. I always had to push and wriggle my way through the jumble and tumble of the others, each of us struggling to get to the best feeding place at the front, and all of them fighting to shove me out of the way, topple me out, push me to the back if they could. Mostly, they couldn't. I may have been the smallest, but I was as good a barger as any of them. I had to be.

Anyway, very soon I knew that it was Bethan who really looked after me – really loved me best. She was out working on the farm with Tad most of the time, but whenever she could she'd come into the barn to see me. She would pick me up, carry me about, talk to me, stroke me, kiss my nose. She never wanted to be without me. And I

never wanted to be without her. I think she could tell that I needed more looking after than my brothers and sisters, being the smallest, which of course I was. And I liked that.

Soon Bethan was taking me off to all her favourite places on the farm – sometimes even into the farmhouse where she lived with Tad, where she knew, and where I soon discovered, that dogs weren't allowed. Tad kept telling her again and again that farm dogs belonged out in the barn or on the farm.

Bethan told him straight. 'If I can't bring Cobweb inside, Tad, then I'll go and live with him in the barn! Honest I will!' And she meant it too. I could tell. Tad could tell too, so he gave in. He usually gave in. She had a way with him.

After that, Bethan took me in and out of the

farmhouse all she liked. Snug it was in there, on her bed, and warm and lovely. But for a while I still slept at nights with my mother and in amongst all my wriggling brothers and sisters in our corner of the barn. That was snug enough too, and smelly. I was happy with smelly. I'm a dog, remember? So I had the best of both worlds – barn and farmhouse. I was a happy little dog wherever I was, but I was always happiest with Bethan.

Bethan and I, we always understood each other somehow, right from the start. I often knew what she was thinking before she said it, and she always knew what I was thinking before I barked it.

I soon discovered that Bethan had a favourite place she loved to be. Treasure Island.

'I'll take you there one day. There's no treasure,' she told me. 'It's just an old story – an

old fairy tale about some treasure chest buried on the island somewhere, full of gold coins – from the wreck of a Spanish galleon. That's what Mami used to tell us.'

Bethan told me her joys and, in time, her sadnesses too. One day she told me of the greatest sadness inside her. I hadn't known the reason, but I had sensed it was in her long before she told me of it.

'Mami's dead, you know. I miss her every day. And I miss Dylan too – my big brother, he was. Best brother anyone could have. And Mami was the best mami too. Tad misses them both every day, every night, like I do. I've never spoken about them out loud to him, nor to anyone else. Only to you.

'Tad doesn't like me to speak their names. He doesn't want to remember them as they were.

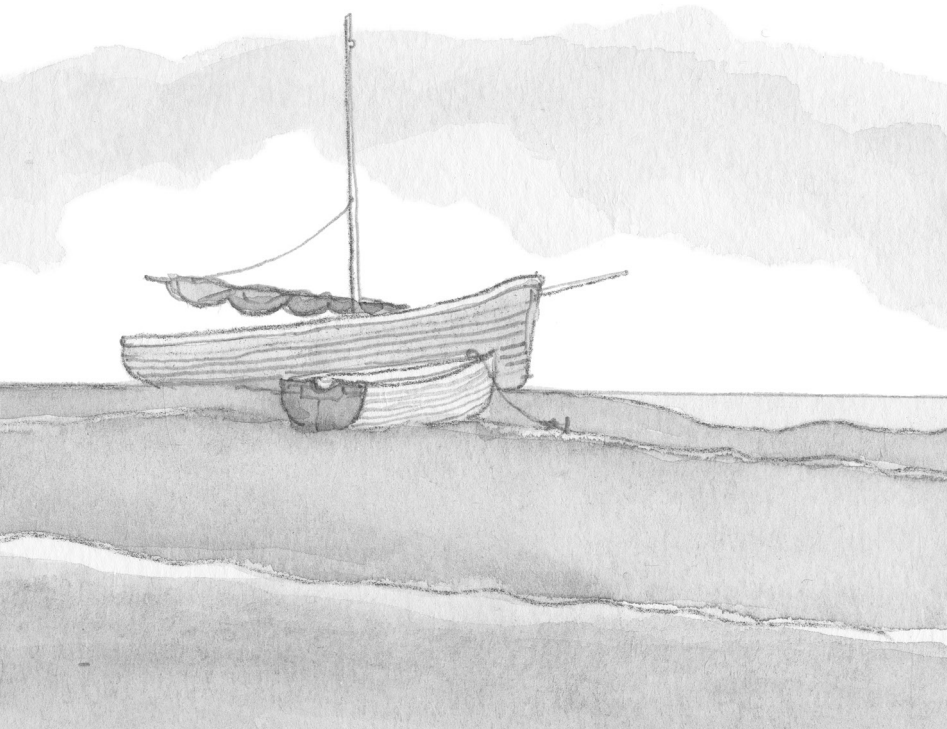
But I do. Mami used to tell Dylan and me lots of stories, but her story about the treasure chest hidden away on Treasure Island was my favourite. It was Dylan's favourite too. He always said he was going to find the treasure one day and dig it up, and then we wouldn't have to be poor any more. Do you know what else Mami told us, Cobweb? Mami always said if you believe hard enough in a



story, then it will come true. It's not true – I know that. But I can hope, can't I, Cobweb?

'I hope every day that Mami will come back, but she hasn't, and she won't. And nor has Dylan. Doesn't stop me hoping.

'It happened when I was little. They went out to pick up the lobster pots in the boat one day – five years, three months and two weeks



ago it was – and they just didn't come back. *On the next tide*, I'm always hoping, always telling myself. *They'll come back on the next tide*. But they never do – of course they don't, and I know they never will. Oh, wouldn't it be grand if all we hoped for came true?

'When Tad's deep in his sadness, Cobweb, he goes on and on about how poor we are, about how now that Dylan's gone and Mami is gone, we have to do all the work on the farm and in the house on our own now. We did have Barri to help for a while, from the village, but he wasn't much use, and paying him wasn't worth it, Tad said. And Barri kept telling me it was too much like hard work on the farm. Grumbling all the time, he was. And I didn't like Barri about the place, anyway. He shouted at my sheep and frightened them silly. So,

if I'm honest, I'm glad he didn't stay.'

Bethan loved to talk. I didn't understand the half of it, of course, but I loved it when she spoke to me. I felt she was confiding in me, trusting me.

'Barri left to be a soldier, you know,' she said, 'to fight the Frenchies in the war, against Boney. The Frenchies don't have a king like we do, Cobweb. They have an emperor instead. I don't know why. Napoleon, he is – Boney, we call him. And Boney wants to invade us, and we don't want him to, do we? So we're fighting him and he's fighting us. A few young fellows from around here have gone to the war, like Barri did. And we haven't heard of him or seen him since. There's been one or two killed. That's what happens in wars, Cobweb. People die, and that's really sad.

'Anyway . . .' She still hadn't finished. 'Anyway,

Tad and me, we're on our own again now. But the trouble is there aren't enough hours in the day to get all the work done, not enough hands to do it, and stone walls are falling down. A shed blew away in the last gale, and the roof's falling off the house, and there's more gales to come – there always are. And Tad says we'll never have enough money to mend everything, no matter how hard we work on the farm. And he goes on and on about how he knows that there is treasure out there somewhere on Treasure Island, that there must be, and that one day he'll find it and then we'll be rich, and everything will be fine.

'I can't tell him that there's no point in hoping for the impossible, can I? There is no treasure, and Mami and Dylan are gone – gone for good – and we can't bring them back. There's only sheep over

there on Treasure Island. My little treasures they are, my lovelies. Treasure enough for me. And there's rabbits over there, of course, Cobweb – lots of rats and rabbits. You'll love the rats and the rabbits. Plenty for you to chase.'

Even when I was a very young pup Bethan would take me with her over in the boat to Treasure Island – to meet the sheep, she said, so I'd get to know them and they'd get to know me. Tad would take my brothers and sisters sometimes, but Bethan only ever took me. I wasn't sure what for to begin with. I was soon to find out.

