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Opening extract from

Little Manfred

Written by

Michael Morpurgo

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michael morpurgo

LITTLE MANFRED



ILLUSTRATED BY
MICHAEL FOREMAN

HarperCollins *Children's Books*

THE SEA WAS ten minutes away from the farm, no more. So there was hardly a day of my life that I didn't go down to the beach. It was my favourite place to escape to. Farm chores were definitely not my idea of fun – except bottle-feeding lambs or calves – but if there were sheds to muck out, and there always were, I'd make myself scarce, quick as a twick, and run off down to the beach.

The trouble was, that as soon as he was old enough, Alex would always follow me. Alex was my little brother and he talked a lot. He was seven by this time; I was twelve and liked to do my thinking and my sulking on my own. But wherever I went he went, and wherever we went, Mannie came with us – that's Manfred, our black and white sheepdog. We'd go swimming in the sea in summer, all three of us.



Part One



We'd chase the gulls whenever we saw them ganging up on the oystercatchers; we'd skim stones if the sea was calm enough – twenty-six bounces was my record – Alex had only ever managed two! Whatever we did, wherever we went, the three of us were always together.

All our friends thought Manfred was a funny sort of a name for a dog. Apparently I'd called him after our toy dog, Little Manfred, a wooden dachshund, painted brown with red wheels. Mum had played with him when she was little. Then I'd had him to play with for a while, and now he belonged to Alex; only Alex wasn't that interested in him any more, mostly because he'd grown out of him, but also because Little

Manfred only had three wheels by now, and didn't work very well. Dad had trodden on him the Christmas before, by accident of course. So Little Manfred was 'busted', and Alex never let Dad forget who'd done it. Dad was always saying he'd mend him, but he never did. So there Little Manfred had stood ever since Christmas, lopsided on the sitting-room windowsill, waiting for a new wheel.



Part One



For some reason I never really understood, Little Manfred always seemed more important to Mum than to anyone else. She really cried when the accident happened. I don't think I'd ever seen her so upset. I'd see her looking at Little Manfred so sadly sometimes, stroking his back almost as if he were a real dog. And at Christmas after the accident, she tied a red ribbon round his neck, "to make him feel better," she said.

I didn't discover why she loved him so much or why he was called Little Manfred until one day in that summer of 1966.

I remember the exact day. It was the day after England won the World Cup at Wembley. Both Dad



and Alex were football mad. Just about everyone in England was that summer, except Mum and me. We hated the fuss and ballyhoo, but all the same, I've got to say that I did quite like it when England won. I watched the game on the television with Dad and



Alex. Mum ignored the whole thing, she was just not interested.

Anyway, that next morning I was wandering along the beach with Alex. He had a football at his feet and kept replaying Geoff Hurst's last-minute goal over and over, dribbling the ball down the beach and then letting fly as he scored the goal yet again. Then he was Nobby Stiles, skipping along, holding the cup up high, his socks round his ankles. It made me laugh out loud watching him. And Mannie loved it too, barking his head off and then chasing after the ball wherever Alex kicked it.

It was a wild and blustery day with clouds scudding across the sky. I sat down and watched the



waves tumbling in towards the shore. Mannie was bored with football by now because Alex kept taking the ball away from him. Instead he was doing what he usually did, chasing everything that moved



– his tail first, then gulls, leaves and a paper bag that was flying low across the beach, just too high for him to catch. After a while he came running back to me. I knew what he was after. And I knew