

A young dog encounters adventure in the Florida woods and finds his true self by overcoming adversity and learning the value of friendship.

Little-Dog and The Big Secret

By Glen Ellington

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Little-Dog
and the
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GLEN ELLINGTON

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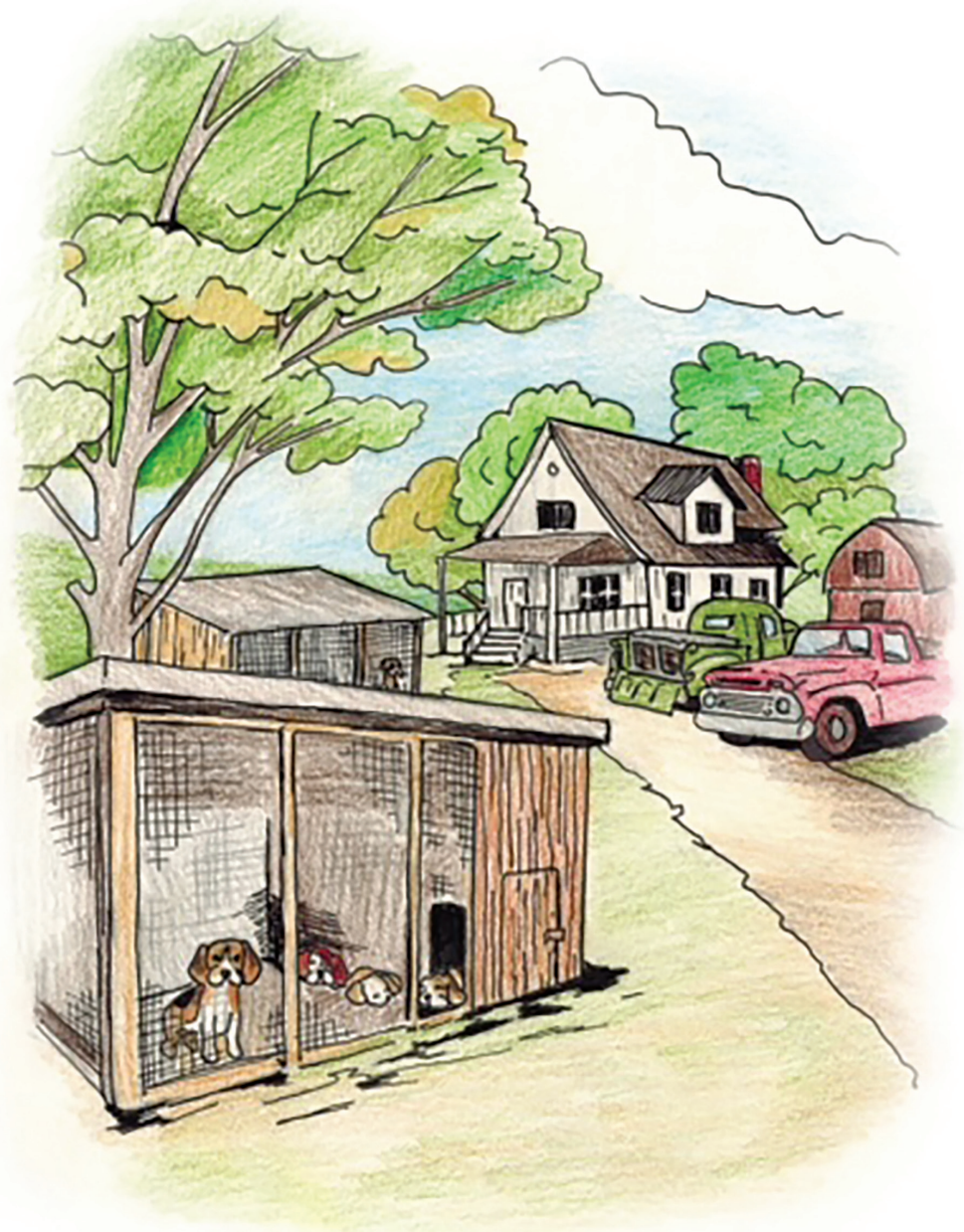
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CHAPTER 1

Something's Happening

The North Florida sun felt nice and toasty warm on Little-Dog's face as it peeked through the thick branches of the old maple tree. Little-Dog sniffed the morning air and stretched a stretch that seemed to wake up every muscle and nerve in his body, then trotted over to the water bowl for a cool morning drink. Little-Dog wasn't the only dog in the kennel. Still asleep inside the wooden doghouse were his two brothers Pipsy and Red and his sister Buttercup. They loved to sleep and were always the last to get up but Little-Dog hated to sleep. He was always afraid he would miss something very important .

“Like what?” Red had asked many times.

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“I’m not sure,” Little-Dog had replied, “But something. Something so big and beautiful that if I missed it, I’d never see it again.”

“You’re crazy.” And with that, Red rolled over and went back to sleep as usual.

Little dog was 3 months old and so were his Beagle brothers and sister. There had been just the four of them and little dog was born last. While his brothers and sister had begun to grow real fast on a diet of milk from Mama-Dog, Little-Dog had stayed small and a little on the sickly side. But by and by he began to grow and now he felt as strong as any of Mr. Johnson’s hunting dogs. But since he was still just a little bit smaller than his litter-mates, everyone knew him as Little-Dog.

Mr. Johnson or “Bud” as his friends called him, was a kindly man who ran the feed store in town and had a small farm about 5 miles outside the city limits. He was a good man who loved life. He loved his family, he loved his church, but most of all he loved to hunt. And Bud Johnson had the best kennel of hunting dogs within 100 miles. He prided himself on selecting the best breeding stock and then carefully, lovingly training his dogs until he had a dog that was just what he wanted--- an A-1 First

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Class hunting dog. And not just any kind of hunting dog, either. He raised dogs that hunted only one kind of animal---deer.

From the time they were pups, Bud would give his dogs rawhide sticks and deer bones to gnaw on and play with and then when the pups were a year old the real training would begin. Bud would choose only two dogs a year to become deer dogs. He would train them to find a piece of deer hide after he had hidden it in the deep woods, covering it with leaves and mud. After several months of this rigorous training, the dogs were ready for the opening of deer season.

And it was this day that Little-Dog didn't want to miss. He didn't know what hunting was all about because the hunting dogs were kept away from the pups, but he knew that he was going to be involved in something big, very big, and that's why he couldn't wait to get up every morning just in case today was the day he had been waiting for.

The air was crisp and cool as Little-Dog finished his wake-up water. Red, Pipsy and Buttercup were still curled up asleep. Suddenly Little-Dog stopped short and

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sniffed, then he listened, and he heard something he had not heard before. It was the sound of a truck.

Now he had heard Bud Johnson's truck lots of times as he drove back behind the farmhouse to the dog kennels but this was different. This wasn't one truck but two or three or more. Lots of trucks and voices, men's voices. Little-Dog had heard men's voices before as Bud showed off his dogs to his friends but this was more intense. These voices were shouting --shouting things like " Back that up! Get that box on here! Watch out for those rifles! Times a wastin'. Let's go!"

Little-Dog also heard lots of dogs barking and the sound of truck doors slamming and engines revving up. He wondered what this could be.

"Gosh," he thought out loud, "could this be what I've been waiting for? But if it is, how come I'm not going too?"

About that time, the noise had finally awakened his brothers and sisters, and Red stuck his still-asleep nose out of the doghouse and sniffed.

"What in the world is going on?" Red asked, his eyes just barely open enough not to stumble over the water bowl.

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“It’s happening, Red, just like I knew it would,” said Little-Dog.

“What is? asked Red, through a mouth full of water.

“I don’t know, but it’s big, real big.”

“Well if it’s so big, how come you don’t know what it is?”

Little dog looked down. “I don’t know, Red, I just got a feeling, I guess.”

“Well, the way I look at it, said Red, “ If it was something for you, you’d know about it and you don’t, so it isn’t. So there.”

Before Little-Dog could respond the others were awake and Pipsy and Buttercup clambered out of the doghouse.

“Oh, that awful noise!” moaned Buttercup, covering her puppy-ears with her paws.

“Yeah,” chimed in Pipsy, “Can’t a dog get any sleep around here?”

“Little-Dog here thinks something big is happening and that he’s supposed to be part of it,” said Red, with just the hint of a smirk on his face.

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“Well, if Little-Dog says he’s supposed to be there then he is,” said Buttercup. She had always defended her little brother when the other pups would make fun of him for being small.

“That’s just it, Little-Dog replied,” I don’t know. I just have a feeling, that’s all.”

“Well, Little-Dog, said Red, “All I know is that here you are and it’s a nice day for lying in the sun and doing nothing and that’s just what I’m going to do.” And with that, Red trotted over to the far end of the kennel, laid down with his back to the others, put his nose to the fence and slept.

Little-Dog felt terrible. “I guess you all think I’m crazy don’t you?”

Buttercup reassured him. “If you feel something that strongly then you stay with that feeling no matter what anybody says.” She kissed him on the forehead. “I believe in you Little-Dog, just believe in yourself.” And then she, too, found a soft place in the sun and went to sleep. Pipsy wasn’t sure what to say. “Well, Little-Dog, you know, you can sometimes think something is what it isn’t and, well, I...” Little-Dog cut him off.

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“Thanks Pipsy, I understand what you mean”. Pipsy shook his head and flopped down as well and Little-Dog found himself alone. The sound of trucks and dogs had long since stopped and Little-Dog had only his puppy-thoughts to keep him company. But he was still small and growing and thinking tired him out quickly so with a yawn and a scratch he too, settled down for a mid-morning nap.

CHAPTER 2

The Adventure Begins

When Little-Dog awoke the air was cool again and the sun was low in the sky. “I sure slept a long time,” he said. The others were still snoozing in the late afternoon sun. Then the sound of dogs and men and trucks filled the air and the deer hunters were home again. Little-Dog strained his ears to hear the words over the sound of growls and barks.

“Almost got him Junior.”

“My big black one will find him tomorrow.”

“Got to get these dogs their dinner.”

“Bet it’ll be an 8-pointer for sure this time. Bud.”

The sound of men’s voices died down as trucks pulled out and left. Bud Johnson took his dogs down to the kennel on the other side of the barnyard and put

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them away. It took him the better part of an hour to clean the kennels and make sure each valuable animal was fed and watered . These were important dogs and he treated them right.

Little-Dog watched and thought “ What could they be doing? And why can’t I go along with them? Don’t they know I’m supposed to be there too?”

“Are you thinking about things again, Little-Dog?” asked Buttercup, awake from her nap, “You always were one for thinking, weren’t you?”

“Buttercup,” said Little-Dog, “If you just know something is so and you just gotta do something, shouldn’t you just do it? I mean if you’re really sure?”

“Little-Dog, you do what you know is right. But if you’re wrong, you’ll have to get yourself out of it.”

“Thanks, Buttercup”, said Little-Dog,” I can take care of myself. I may be a little dog but inside I’m as big as a dog can be.”

Night fell and the farm was quiet. The hunting dogs were snoring in their kennel and Bud Johnson and his wife Marie were fast asleep as well. Nothing was stirring and all was at rest, all except Little-Dog. He paced back and forth outside the wooden doghouse that sheltered

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his brothers and sister from the cool, night air. He paced and thought, paced and thought.

“What is it ? ”he thought, “what do I do?”

But, as usual, all this thinking tired out the young dog and eventually he clambered into the doghouse with the others and tried to sleep. But even when Little-Dog was asleep he was still thinking puppy-thoughts.

In his dreams he was walking down a dusty road and he came upon a very old dog sitting on the side of the road near a small tree. He asked the dog where the road was leading to but the old dog wouldn't answer. He asked again, but the old dog shook himself once and then with the faltering voice he said “ The road leads where you will follow but beware of the wrong path for it is very dangerous and many is the young dog who has strayed from the true path.”

Little-Dog wanted to know what this meant so he asked again but suddenly the old dog had changed into a large cat and was snarling and pawing the air .Little-Dog was afraid and turned to run away. The cat sprang after him and Little-Dog found himself running and running and pushing his legs out away from him and pushing and...

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Little-Dog awoke outside the fence. He looked around and saw what had happened. He had been running in his dreams but his legs had actually been pushing against an old, loose board in the side of the doghouse. There was a hole in the fence right behind the doghouse and he had been kicking so hard he had just kicked himself right outside of the fence. He looked back at his litter-mates and he wanted to say “Hey look, there’s something out here, something more.” But a little voice inside him said “No, this is for you. Their time will come later but this time is just for you.”

So Little-Dog turned away and with just a touch of sadness he walked toward the farmhouse. This was a different world out here! There was space to run and then an old stump to jump up on and a tractor to crawl under! The moon shone brightly and Little-Dog could see as if it were daytime. He walked over to Bud Johnson’s truck and saw a large box with metal screening on it in the bed of the pick-up. There was a low bumper and he jumped up on it. He sniffed the box and the truck bed.

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“This is where the other dogs were today,” he thought. “This is where I want to be too. “And he slipped in through the unlocked side, and finding some warm hay he curled up into a tight ball and started to drift off to sleep. Just before he did he thought, “ At last I’ll find out what this thing is all about.” And then he was asleep with a smile on his little puppy-face.

Old Mike, the rooster, woke Little-Dog with his loud, morning crowing and then the pup heard the sound of trucks and men and dogs, just like the day before.

“Let’s go, Junior.”

“That deer is gonna be mine, today!”

“Okay boys, let’s get them dogs!”

Little-Dog heard Bud Johnson’s voice. “ Get those dogs in the box, boys. We’re burning daylight.”

Little-Dog felt the truck shudder as men and dogs were lifted aboard. The dog box was opened and four hunting dogs went yelping in. Little-Dog stayed hidden under a pile of hay and then he felt the truck moving. At last, he was going to see what all the excitement was about!

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The truck lurched down the washboard road and little dog peeked his nose out of the hay.

“Well, what have we here, boys?” said a large dog with a black patch over one eye, “Just what do you think you’re doing here?”

“I, uh I, just wanted to see what all the excitement is about”, said Little-Dog nervously, “I didn’t mean to do anything wrong, honest.”

The dog with the black patch brought his nose down to Little-Dog’s face and spoke in a low snarl.”

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Well, let me tell you, Little-Dog, that you have made a big mistake. And this mistake may cost you your life.”

Little-Dog was terrified. “Honest. I didn’t mean any harm, I just wanted to...” The big dog cut him off.

“You just wanted to be a big dog didn’t you? And to do the things the big dogs do right?” The voice seemed to soften for a moment. “Well, you’re not a big dog!” he shouted, “And at the rate you’re going you may never get to be one!”

“Don’t let him bully you, son,” said an older dog from the other side of the cage, “ You only did what a lot of us wanted to do when we were your age and didn’t get the chance. Now lay off of him, Tracker, he’s just a pup.”

The other dog growled, “Just keep him out of my way or I’m not going to care what happens to him.” And Tracker went to the other side of the box and lay down, still growling under his breath.

“Th, thank you,” said Little-Dog, “I didn’t mean to do anything wrong.”

“I know you didn’t son,” said the older dog. “By the way, I’m Old Duke and I guess I’m the oldest dog around here now.”

“What is this all about, Old Duke?”

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“Well near as I can figure, we’re after something. Something that lives in the woods and something that these men really want.”

“What is it?”

“Don’t know. Never seen it. You see, we go out once a year and ride through the woods in this box. And then the men stop and get out and look at the road and talk about something and then one of them lets a dog or two out and we run off into the woods.”

“And you don’t know what it is you’re chasing?”

“Haven’t the foggiest idea. All we do is get a sniff of the road and then, well my nose just sort of takes over and I just sort of know which way to run and I run and I run until one of the men puts me back in the box. And that’s all I know.”

“Wow, that must be great, just to run and run.”

“Trouble is, I don’t know what I’m running after. We hear some loud noises now and again and the men start yelling some and then it’s back in the truck and home we go.”

“Well, Duke, what do you think it is?”

“Well, sir, I think it must be some sort of animal. But what they want it for is beyond me. But now, listen

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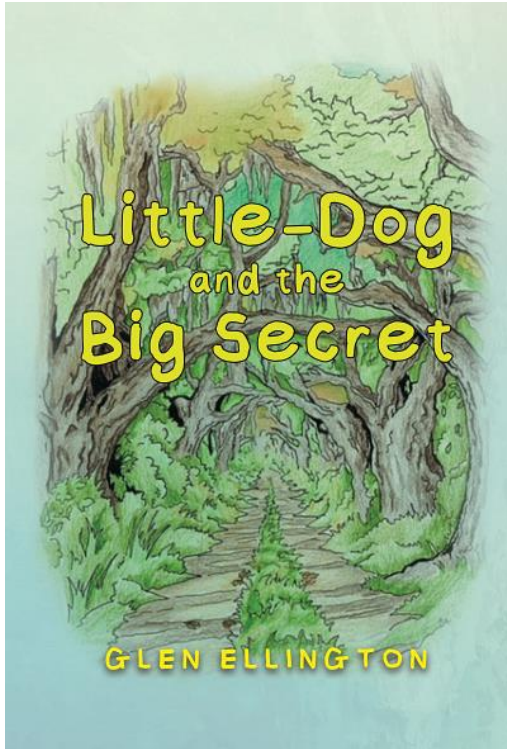
here. If you got any thoughts about takin' off running through the woods, you just better forget it. This is no place for a young pup to be. You'll be lucky if you don't get a whoopin' for running away."

"But I had to go, Duke, you got to believe me. I just had to. I felt this feeling, you know, and I just had to."

"I guess I understand, son, but you better lay low until we get back to the farm or you could get hurt. You made Tracker plenty mad and if he gets a chance he'll have it in for you."

"Thanks for telling me that, Duke, but even though I may be a little dog, inside I'm as big as a dog can be."

"Well, son, you're probably right about that," said Duke, and he smiled an old-dog smile and lay back in the hay and slept.



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