

THIS & THAT

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VOLUME 2

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MY TIGER

He came towards me out of the fog. I tensed. How dangerous was he? I could see the fog glistening on his lovely coat: black, tan, cream and white. His eyes never left my face. At ten feet, he stopped and sat, but still he held me with his gaze.

What was this dog trying to say? At first I thought he was sending out some sort of challenge and I was strangely drawn towards him. Thinking back on it, I truly believe it was love at first sight.

On that misty, drippy autumn afternoon, I lowered my shopping and sat down in the wet leaves to improve our acquaintance. He seemed to appreciate this because his tail thumped twice. I moved a little closer, extending my hand. Two more thumps. Slowly, he licked his lips and - I know you won't believe me - but he *smiled*. He *did*.

He followed me into the newsagent's. So, when he sat on one of my feet, I wasn't wrong, I thought, about the magic rapport. Then *imagine!* The man said he was *their* dog.

'But he's a damn nuisance! And a danger to the public!'

'A danger?' I queried in disbelief. The little animal was leaning amicably against my leg.

'He runs after the army lorries - gets right up close to the wheel, barking his head off. They brake. They swerve. There'll be a nasty accident soon.'

'But he seems so friendly.'

'Oh, ah. He's friendly alright - with little girls!'

I was nine at the time.

'The police are always telling me to control him better,' he went on, 'Only I just *can't* keep him in - he's a Houdini!'

I looked at the pink, floppy tongue, hanging sideways out of long jaws and wondered what a Houdini was. The dog looked up at *me*, swallowed and - I swear - *smiled* again. I wanted to hug him. But