

Puppy Love:
Lisa's First Rescue

by Corey Podell and Jamie Silberhartz

She'd been hearing the cries all night. The noise was horrendous. It sounded like an injured animal was right outside her window.

Closing her eyes, Lisa tried to count sheep, yet she couldn't help but picture a tiny creature in pain, crying out for her help. It was the middle of the night and Mummy and Daddy were fast asleep. If she woke them about the noise, she knew they'd just make her go back to bed.

Lisa, dressed in her favorite pink dressing gown, tiptoed down the hallway, passed her parents' and brother's room, passed the servants' quarters, and slowly went down the staircase. Her house was one of Dulwich's oldest and most historic homes. It was grand and beautiful but had so many creaks it was almost impossible to sneak anywhere.

"Light as a feather," Lisa repeated as she shimmied through the dining parlor to the grand entrance. It was mid-November and freezing, so Lisa grabbed her mother's mink coat from the hall tree before stepping outside.

The grounds were pitch black, so Lisa tried to be the bravest 8-year-old she could be. Mummy's mink was huge on her and dragging in the autumn leaves, but Lisa didn't care about material things right now; she only cared about the animal in need.

The cries were getting louder. She was close! The porch lamp from old lady Maine's house was still on, shining its light right under Lisa's bedroom window. Thank goodness!

She squinted—there was a wrestling in the bushes. Was it a rabbit? Could it be a squirrel? What if it was rabid? She hadn't considered that until now. Suddenly a little furry head popped out of the rose bush, startling her. She could hardly believe her

eyes—it was a tiny puppy!

Lisa crouched down, offering up her hand for the pup to smell. He sniffed with his wet little nose and whined. Without hesitation, she scooped him up in her arms and tucked him into the mink coat. Lisa looked into his soulful eyes and said, "You are quite a handsome boy, aren't you?"

He snuggled closer to her, and she knew she had done the right thing. He was so light, and his ears were the softest she'd ever felt. "I'll take care of you, don't you worry," she whispered into the puppy's ear.

But she was stuck; she couldn't bring him in the house. Even though she'd always wanted a puppy, Mummy was "deathly allergic." Even when Lisa played with her friend Molly's St. Bernard, she had to scrub her hands before coming home. It was too cold to leave the pup outside all night, so she had to think of something else.

They had a shed in the corner of the yard filled with outdoor equipment. Lisa had never been to the shed—she was more of an "indoor" type of girl—but she knew she could hide him there, at least temporarily.

Once in, she pulled at the light, finally able to get a good look at the little fellow. He was unlike any dog she'd ever seen. Although soft, his fur was remarkably scruffy. He was white with brown and reddish gold spots and couldn't have been bigger than a loaf of bread. Could he be a Retriever? No. He certainly wasn't a Dalmatian; his paws were tiny. Lisa knew a puppy's paw size helped indicate how big he or she would grow. She prided herself on knowing every breed of dog.

She'd memorized them from the canine anthology Daddy kept in his library. Oh how she would love to take a look now! But ever since her brother, Mark, and his cronies snuck in and drank some of Daddy's brandy, there was a lock on the door.

The puppy let out a little cry, and Lisa knew she had to focus. The shed was filled to the brim with lawn furniture, croquet sets, and tennis rackets. There was a red wagon in the corner that Mark used to pull Lisa around in when she was small. Perfect! She took off Mummy's mink and wrapped the puppy up like she had seen Aunt Shirley do with baby Frederick.

"I shall name you Rumble!" Lisa declared.

The silly pup kept trying to lick her hair. She realized he needed to eat and vowed to find some sort of canine kibble tomorrow. Leaving the light on, she locked up the shed and ran back to the house.

"Leeeesa!" Mummy called from downstairs the next morning. "Time for school."

Lisa rolled over and looked at the clock. She was late! Yawning, she couldn't think of another time she had felt so tired. Then she remembered...Rumble! She'd never have time to check on him before school without Mummy seeing.

She thought about asking Mark to do it, but he would just tattle. Daddy might be more understanding, but he was already on the tube to Knightsbridge. Actually, he would be angry she left the house in the middle of the night. He always said she was 8 going on 28.

Lisa assured herself the puppy would be OK until she got home.

He'd lasted this long without her, hadn't he? For a moment, she wondered if the whole thing had been a dream. It seemed surreal that the world's cutest pup would end up right outside her window like a real life fairy tale.

Suddenly Mummy yelled from downstairs, "Has anyone seen my coat?"

This was most certainly not a dream.

Lisa couldn't stop thinking about Rumble all day. She could barely concentrate on her handwriting lesson, and even dozed off during history with Headmaster Aldridge. The headmaster was not a kind woman; she smacked the back of Lisa's hand with her long ruler. "Wakey, wakey Miss Vanderpump!"

Lisa stuffed extra bread in her sack during lunch and, as soon as the bell rang, scurried home to the shed. Thankfully she found him snuggled nice and warm in the mink. He jumped up to greet her, tail wagging and tongue licking. "Oh my darling!" she cried out.

She gave him her extra food and filled a bowl she had snuck from the kitchen with water. Rumble lapped it up with glee. Lisa told Mummy that she and Molly were going to the library, but she snuck into the shed and stayed there cuddling and playing with sweet Rumble until she was called to supper by Cook.

This secrecy went on for the rest of the week. Lisa would spend every spare moment in the shed with Rumble, opening the backdoor so he could go to the bathroom. She brought him extra food stolen from school and played with him until sundown every night. It took everything in her not to cry for sweet Rumble when she had to go back inside.

Mummy never suspected a thing, but Lisa felt badly about lying to her. She also felt badly that Mummy had accused a maid of stealing the mink and fired her. She was sure the maid would find another job, but Lisa would never find another Rumble.

On Friday morning, Lisa's teacher Miss Pembroke asked her to stay after the lesson for a chat. Lisa had always liked Miss Pembroke; she was young and sweet, but homely and plump. Lisa wished Miss Pembroke would let her style her hair one day or do her makeup, but she knew better than to ask. Mark said Miss Pembroke was a "haggy spinster." Lisa didn't know what that meant, but she knew it wasn't a compliment.

"Yes Miss Pembroke?" Lisa asked as she sat down next to her. Miss Pembroke smelled like onions; Lisa guessed that was why she didn't have a husband.

"Lisa, I've noticed that you've been quite tired and that you've been stealing food from the school kitchen this week. Is everything OK at home?"

Lisa could feel her face flush. "Everything is fine Miss Pembroke. I've just been extra hungry this week. I'm a growing girl after all!"

Miss Pembroke smiled and looked relieved. "Alright darling, just promise to tell me if something isn't quite right. I'll be discreet." Lisa promised and rushed out.

That weekend, Lisa realized she had a problem. Rumble was growing and needed space to play and be a proper dog. The shed was too small, and he had more energy than she could handle.

On a crisp and sunny Saturday afternoon, Lisa took a rope and fashioned a leash out of it. First she and Rumble snuck by Mark

and his friends playing cricket. Then she yelled to Nanny, who was distracted with ironing Lisa's school uniforms, that she was going for a stroll.

She took Rumble for a long walk, exactly what he needed. They went past Eynella Road, Dulwich Park and the duck pond. Rumble was the happiest she'd ever seen him, chasing ducks and greeting strangers with licks and nuzzles.

Lisa eventually found herself steering Rumble toward Casino Avenue, a shabby street with boarding houses and flats for the poorer people of Dulwich. Lisa rather liked the quaintness of this section of town. Rumble seemed to like it too as he dove with glee into piles of leaves that hadn't been swept by the city. Lisa worried about Rumble getting filthy, but then she remembered he lived in the shed.

"Lisa!" called a voice from across the way. Who could she possibly know in this neighborhood?

She saw Miss Pembroke sitting on the porch of the shabbiest-looking house on the block. Lisa and Rumble crossed the street to say hello. Lisa had never imagined her teachers living outside of school, and especially not here. It made Lisa feel sad for Miss Pembroke. Wasn't she embarrassed?

"Would you and your little friend like to come in for a spot of tea?" asked Miss Pembroke, patting Rumble on the head. Lisa nodded as she followed her teacher into the house.

The sitting room looked a lot like Lisa's Granny's house: plastic-covered sofas accented with weathered quilts and lamps from the 1930s. Her shelves were filled with books and family pictures. Miss Pembroke snuck away to put on the kettle, and Rumble

began to sniff out the room.

"Cream and sugar?" called Miss Pembroke from the kitchen.

"Yes please."

"Have you had any lunch?"

"No ma'am, but please don't go to any trouble."

"It is absolutely no trouble at all," said Miss Pembroke. "What a treat to have the company!" She came out of the kitchen carrying a tray of delectable-looking scones and crumpets. Rumble was nibbling at her feet as she sat across from Lisa.

"I'm sorry Miss Pembroke. I haven't had a chance to teach him his manners yet."

"Oh darling, I love it! I miss having a pup around. I lost mine last year. I tried to get my Louie to sit for years, but it never happened, and I didn't love him any less." She picked up Rumble and nuzzled his face.

Lisa had never seen her teacher smile this big or glow so much. She looked rather...pretty? Lisa gazed around the room and realized it was more cozy than shabby. Rumble loved everyone he'd met that day, but seemed to want to lick Miss Pembroke's face right off. Was Miss Pembroke giggling? That's when Lisa knew. She felt it in the deepest part of her soul.

"Miss Pembroke, you have to keep him!" Lisa blurted.

He didn't deserve to spend his days in a shed in secrecy. Miss Pembroke could give him a good home, and he could give Miss Pembroke the love that was so visibly absent in her life.

"He's your dog Lisa! I can't take your dog."

Lisa told her the story of Rumble: how she found him, cared for him by stealing food from school, and had to keep him a secret from her Mum. It felt so good to finally tell the truth.

Miss Pembroke tore off a bit of her crumpet for Rumble to nibble as he curled up on her lap. "Alright Lisa, I'll take Rumble. He can't live in a shed forever after all. But on one condition."

Oh no! Lisa wondered if the condition was that Miss Pembroke was going to tell Mum what she had done. "Yes Miss Pembroke?"

"I will take Rumble as long as you come walk him every now and then. I certainly don't want him missing you too much."

Lisa could hardly contain her excitement. "Yes! I'll come every day Miss Pembroke!"

As Lisa walked home sans Rumble, she realized that in her entire eight years of life she had never felt quite as happy or accomplished than in this moment. She may not be able to have a puppy of her very own for quite some time, but she could find perfect homes for dogs in need until then. And for now, that was enough.