

# Dodge and the Tornado

## Chapter 1

Dodge tilted his head to the wind and sniffed the air. It smelt dry and dusty like it always did just before it rained. He listened. A strange roar rumbled in the distance, like a heavy train thundering down the track. He tilted his head again, trying to get a better view but the buildings were in his way. He looked along the street towards the park, then back towards the underpass where he had sheltered for the night. Strange, he thought. No humans. That was never a good sign.



The roar was getting louder. He scampered up the hill to get a better view. Raising his front paws against an old bin, Dodge stared over the buildings towards the vast plains of the American Midwest. There, in the near-distance, tearing up everything in its path and reaching high into the sky like a giant spinning-top, was a raging mass of swirling wind. He'd seen something like this before - the humans called them tornadoes - but this one was the biggest yet, and it was headed straight for the town. Dodge made a little whimpering noise and sprinted towards the underpass.

The wind was getting stronger. Leaves, rubbish and old plastic bags danced in circles in the air as Dodge darted between them. Trees bent unnaturally on the street-side and tiles torn from roofs landed like missiles on the road. Dodge focused on the underpass. It was a strong-looking bridge made to carry heavy lorries. If he could make it there, he would be safe. The roar of the tornado was louder than ever now; the sound of ripping metal adding to the deafening noise as the wind whipped at his fur. He weaved through a mist of dust and rubble and with a huge leap dived into the underpass. He nuzzled under his blanket, clenching it with his teeth. With his eyes tightly shut and with the tornado raging around him, he wondered where Banjo was.

## Chapter 2

Dodge could feel all sorts of things hitting him. They were small at first, like wrappers and pieces of cardboard but they were starting to hurt. He opened his eyes slightly. Dark clouds hung angrily over the buildings and he could see a huge column of wind spinning down the street towards him. It was ripping and tearing at anything in its path. Cars were tossed around the street like toys, windows were smashed and whole branches were torn from trees. The sound was unbelievably scary and loud.

Dodge whimpered and held his front paws over his eyes. He just needed to stay put and wait for the tornado to go away. Then he would find Banjo and everything would be alright again. He was safe where he was. The underpass was made of steel and bricks.

The tornado wasn't that strong... was it?

Something hard thudded into his side and he yelped. He turned in time to watch his blanket disappear into the swirling wind. He covered and lowered his head. The twisting column was almost at the mouth of the underpass now – metres away – screaming and thundering with rage. The bridge trembled and the ground vibrated like an earthquake. Stones kept spitting and whipping into Dodge's body and he could feel the pull of the tornado as it tried to suck him into its grasp.



It was no good. It wasn't safe here after all. He felt as if the entire bridge was about to collapse at any moment. Dodge spun around and sprinted away from the storm.

That's when he heard it.

A familiar sound. Something he couldn't ignore. He stopped and turned around again, staring into the mass of destruction as it spat stones, glass and tin cans like bullets around his head.

Dodge took a deep breath, slowly stepped forward and stared into the eye of the tornado.

### Chapter 3

There it was again. That sound. He couldn't wait any longer. In an instant, Dodge was running towards the tornado.

Towards danger.

As he approached the mouth of the underpass – where the tornado was at its strongest - Dodge began to accelerate. He was a small dog, but he had always been fast. If he was quick enough, perhaps he could dart through the tornado without getting sucked in. The closer he got, the faster he went. Stones and debris hit him like hard, wild rain, but he kept going. Just as he was about to hit the column of spinning wind, Dodge closed his eyes and leapt forward.

Boomff!

The tornado grabbed him, twirling and tossing him through the air. It roared at him, screamed at him, twisting his body this way then that way. Heavy lumps thumped at his chest, legs and head. He could feel his body rising into the air like a crazy, backwards helter-skelter. Up he went, weightless and dizzy, spinning wildly. But despite the tornado's tight grip, Dodge could feel himself slipping free. The speed he leapt into it had worked.

Suddenly, the tornado released him. He was hurtling downwards now. He opened his eyes to

find himself way above the buildings! As he fell, the tornado snatched and clasped at him, desperately trying to claw him back in, but Dodge was too quick. He looked down. The roof of a nearby building was close. Too close. He was going to crash straight through it. The tornado tugged again, pulling him up, then letting go, slowing his speed. Before he had time to think, Dodge landed, rolling and summersaulting along a partly destroyed roof, then onto his paws. He pounced up and carried on sprinting through the storm, dashing across a wooden beam, then leaping onto a lower building. Within three steps he had jumped to a window ledge, then bounded off a nearby wall to land safely on all fours in the middle of the street. He peered around. It looked like a bomb had hit it.



Dodge smelt the air, out of breath and bruised. He tilted his head. The scream of the tornado had lessened, but he wasn't listening for that.

There. There was that sound again. Dodge sprinted into a nearby building and down some stairs. It was dark and the sound began to get louder. Dodge stopped again, sniffing the floor. He was relying on his sense of smell now. He picked up the scent and bounded along a corridor of broken furniture and flickering lights.

As he turned the corner, he found what he had been looking for. There, trapped under a heap of fallen shelves and wooden cabinets, was an old man whistling his special tune. Dodge squeaked with happiness and licked the man's face.

He had found Banjo.

### Chapter 4

"Dodge!" the old man smiled, rubbing the dog's chest and face. "Heh, heh, where've you been, boy?" His voice was slow and croaky. Dodge hopped around him, squeaking and nuzzling excitedly and the old man chuckled in that deep, soothing way that always made Dodge feel happy.

Something thudded behind them and the little dog spun round. He stared into the darkness and tilted his head. He could still hear the tornado whistling and wailing outside.

"It's alright, boy," the old man said, stroking his neck. "Ain't nothing but falling books. Twister's done its worse now." Dodge turned back to the old man. His eyes looked tired behind all that white fuzzy hair and beard. Banjo gave him a weak smile and tried to move.

“Nnggg...” he groaned, trying to shift from under the weight of the bookshelf. “Ahh... ain’t no good, boy...” he whispered, tired and out of breath. “I’m stuck like honey to an ant...” The old man closed his eyes and took a few deep breaths. Dodge stared at him, slanting his head from one way to the other. Banjo looked

different from normal. He still looked sad, but older somehow.



Dodge thought back to the last time they’d been together and wished Banjo hadn’t asked him to wait by the underpass that morning. They’d been travelling through the Great Plains of the American Midwest for months - years maybe - wandering from one dusty town to the next, relying on strangers’ goodwill to provide them with a few cents for food.

Wherever they went Banjo always found them a good spot to rest; sometimes under a bridge, sometimes a run-down old house; they’d even slept in disused railway carts before. The best nights were the ones spent in the open countryside on still, star-filled nights, far away from people who could sometimes be cruel to Banjo. The old man would lie back and whistle his special tune or talk fondly about his old life, especially his daughter, and Dodge would listen, curled up close, and drift off to sleep with his heart full of happiness.

Wherever Banjo went, Dodge went too. But that morning it had been different. Banjo had finally tracked his daughter down to an apartment where dogs weren’t allowed. Dodge had waited by the underpass but when Banjo didn’t come back, the little dog got worried, especially when people started to leave the town.

He watched as Banjo slowly opened his eyes again. “I met her, y’know,” he said quietly. “Melissa. Just as I remembered, so she was, even after all those years. Hair golden-red like the setting sun.” The old man’s eyes twinkled. “Just like her mother’s.”

A gust of air breezed past and Dodge glanced down the darkened corridor. The storm was quieter now; the wind less violent against the building.

Banjo patted Dodge gently on his head. “I didn’t tell her, boy,” he said, sadly. “You know... who I was. Didn’t want to ruin things for her. Got herself a lovely little son, it didn’t seem right to tell her, you understand don’t you, boy?”

Dodge rested his head on Banjo’s chest.

“I can always rely on you,” the old man whispered, sleepily. He sounded more tired than Dodge

had ever heard him sound before. “Always wanted... to be a grand... father... alwayssss...” Banjo’s voice drifted off and his body went limp. Dodge licked the old man’s face but he didn’t respond. He leapt up and nudged him with his nose.

Nothing.

The little dog turned towards the flickering corridor, then back towards his best friend. He needed to get help. But where could he go? Where were all the people?

He had to think. Fast.

### Chapter 5

There wasn’t a moment to lose. Dodge gave Banjo one last lick and sprinted along the corridor. He skidded around the bend and shot up the stairs. As soon as he was on the street he screeched to a stop. The tornado had passed and the sun was peeking through the clouds making it hard for him to see. As his eyes adjusted to the sudden change in light, he twitched his ears to listen out for any sign of people.

There. Footsteps! Dodge angled his ears to pinpoint which direction the sound was coming from. It was back inside the building! He peered up but couldn’t see anybody. He waited, focusing entirely on the sound. There it was again! It was coming from one of the higher floors! Dodge leapt back into the building and flew up the stairwell. By the third floor he could hear more footsteps. He stopped and sniffed the air.

“Doggy!” a little voice cried out. Dodge looked up and saw a small human boy toddling towards him.

Dodge wagged his tail and barked. He wasn’t sure if the small human was big enough to help Banjo but he was his only chance. He circled back and walked down the first flight of stairs, then turned back to see if the boy was following him.

“Doggy wait!” the boy squealed excitedly as he tottered down the stairs one by one.

Dodge barked again and scampered further away. He could hear a human female calling out to the boy in the distance. He waited until the boy came into view again before scampering into the corridor. The small boy giggled behind him.

Dodge could see Banjo hadn’t moved from last time. He sniffed the old man’s face and gave it a lick.



“Doggy!”

Dodge turned around to see the small human staggering over the fallen books. The boy laughed and Dodge made a squeaky sound.

“Woz-wong, doggy?” the little boy asked, holding his hand out to stroke him.

Dodge allowed the boy to pat him on his head then barked to tell him to help Banjo.

“Lewis!”



Dodge spun round to see a human female walking towards them.

“I told you not to run off!” she shouted in a worried kind of way. As she clambered beneath the flickering light, Dodge could see the woman clearly. She had a kind face with golden-red hair. “Oh, hello,” she said when she noticed Dodge. “Where on Earth did you find this dog, Lewis?”

The little boy pointed to Banjo. “Man not well,” he said, sadly.

“Oh-my-gosh!” the woman gasped, holding her hand to her mouth. “It’s that nice old man we were talking to earlier!”

She rushed over and held Banjo in her arms.

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It didn’t take long for the emergency services to arrive. The ambulance woman allowed Dodge to travel with Banjo all the way to the next town but he wasn’t allowed in to the hospital with him. The kind-faced lady from the building looked after Dodge in her friend’s house just down the road. She made sure he was fed and watered and when it was night time and Lewis was in bed, she would cuddle up to Dodge and talk to him about the father she hadn’t seen for years. How her best memories were of him telling her stories when she was little; how she would drift off to sleep listening to his soothing voice, counting the stars through her bedroom window. Sometimes she would sing her father her bedtime song and he would smile. Dodge loved listening to the lady’s bedtime song because it was the same as Banjo’s special tune. It made him feel warm and happy inside. The lady told Dodge that her name was Melissa and Dodge wondered if all human females were called Melissa.

One day, after a few weeks, Banjo appeared at the front door with Melissa. He had bandages on his head and held a long stick to help him walk but his smile was bigger than Dodge could ever remember. The little dog yelped with happiness, licking Banjo’s hands and face until the old man was roaring with laughter.

They didn’t travel much after that. Banjo found a small apartment that allowed dogs and

they lived there instead. Every week they would visit Melissa and Lewis in their new home and they would have a meal and Banjo would smile a lot. Banjo smiled more than Dodge had ever known.

Every now and again, when the wind picked up, Dodge would go outside and smell the air, remembering the day he fought a tornado. And when it did; when the sky rumbled in the distance and the wind tugged at his fur, he would close his eyes and thank the tornado for making his best friend happy again.

