

“And they’re off!” shouted the commentator as the horses bolted from the start. There were 40 horses battling to be the winner of *The Grand National*. The spectators, all with their posh suits and beautiful hats, looked on as the horses jumped over the first hurdle.

“Arghhhhhhh!” the commentators shouted as two horses fell, throwing their jockeys to the ground, each rolling into the smallest ball they could. The remaining horses kept going up the racecourse, bumping into each other as they steered around the bend. Gasps of horror came from the crowd as another three horses fell, this time throwing one of the jockeys over the hedge at the side of the track; he rolled along the ground, then stood up, sending the crowd into rapturous applause and cheers.

“He’s ok,” the commentator said to his colleague.

His colleague just nodded and kept watching his screen. “No, I don’t believe it! Two more down!” he said, standing up from his chair, nearly pulling his headphones off his head. He sat back down, adjusting his microphone and trying to compose himself.

The horses carried on thundering up the course, bumping into each other, jostling for pole position. Another jump; “Three more down!” shouted the commentator, jumping from his chair again and knocking his microphone off the desk.

“We have two horses pulling away from the pack,” said the other commentator, trying to fill in while his colleague tried to find it under his desk. Unfortunately, in the commotion, he knocked his chair over so when he sat down, he fell to the floor. His legs up in the air, flat on his back, his colleague trying to keep going with

the race while fighting back laughter. “So, it’s *MARGARETANDROYBOY* and *PERFECT PETER* neck and neck as we come to the last jump.”

Suddenly, the crowd fell silent and just stood still, like they had seen a ghost. “What the ...?” The commentators looked at their screens and then at the racecourse. They blinked twice and couldn’t believe their eyes.

As the horses were running up the racecourse, the grass was disappearing behind them; not a blade was left in sight. No one could believe what they were seeing. All the spectators looked at each other in complete disbelief. What was happening? What was this?

“Don’t look behind you, riders, just keep going!” shouted the steward over the Tannoy.

The jockeys all looked behind them to see what was happening. They couldn’t believe their eyes — no one had ever seen anything like it. The jockeys just kept going — it now wasn’t about winning, it was just about not disappearing with the grass. The steward had opened one of the fences at the side of the course that led to the car park — no chance of concrete disappearing, was there?

When all the jockeys and horses were safely through, the steward closed the fence and looked at the jockeys. “I don’t know ...?” They all watched as the grass from the whole racecourse completely disappeared, but where? “I’ll call the police,” said the steward.

“And tell them what?” said one of the jockeys.

This was a question the police couldn’t answer. Only a special pair could solve this one ...



Sunday April 14th, 2024,
theherald.co.uk - No.20245

Check out the latest
weather on page 14



Grass Stolen at The Grand National!



Police are baffled. The grass was stolen while the horses were running. "It was weird, we all watched as the grass just disappeared, it just went, and I had £50 on *PeterPerfect*," said one spectator.

An official for the racecourse said, "One minute the grass was there and the next minute it was gone. It was like it was being pulled from underneath the ground."

Police are asking anyone with information to contact them.

The superintendent in charge of the investigation said, "We have no clues or suspects at this time. Why anyone would want to steal the grass from the racecourse while the horses are running or at any other time is beyond me."

By Abigail Hirst, Photo Paul Cutts

Jake was like any other Jack Russell cross terrier. Well, that was what his owners Coral and Bruce Ward thought. But to his friends and the animals who visited the park every day, Jake and his best friend Sammy, a whippet, were heroes.

“Right, Jake,” said Coral. “We’re off to work. Be a good boy, see you later.”

The kitchen door shut, then Jake heard the front door shut, and then the car moved down the drive. *Finally*, he thought, *time to go to work myself*. Jake pushed against the panel under the cooker to reveal a secret passage and crawled inside. “Wheeeeeeeeeeeee!” he yelled as he went down the helter skelter.

“Will you ever get bored of that?” Sammy asked when Jake finally got to the bottom.

“Morning, treacle,” Jake replied.

“I’ve told you, my name is Sammy, and I’ve no idea why you say that every morning. You’re not even from London.” Sammy was the brains of the outfit. Jake was clearly not; he was more the muscle. Jake liked it that way — he liked fighting.

“We’ve got a new assignment coming through. There’s been reports of grass going missing all over the country, and HQ wants us to investigate.”

“Grass?” Jake looked puzzled.

“Yes, grass, Jake, another weird one. Maybe our weirdest yet. How long have you got before the dog walker comes to take you to the park, Jake?” Sammy asked.

“When the big arm on the clock goes straight up and the little arm goes one to the side of the big arm,” Jake

said. He wasn't the smart one, remember.

Sammy rolled his eyes. He'd tried to teach Jake how to tell the time but had given up when Jake had got angry and destroyed the clock. "Right," Sammy said, "let's get out there and start questioning our fellow dogs."

Reader, stop!! What am I doing? This is not where the story starts. The story starts at Battersea Dogs and Cats Home about a year or so ago, with Gino ...

Gino was a Chihuahua, who despite his size (he was eight inches tall), had already had four homes. Each time, the family had brought him back, and each time, they had said they couldn't cope with his attitude. So, he was back at Battersea Dog and Cats Home awaiting family number five, and hopefully, this time it would be his forever home. His carer, Claire, had high hopes this time. She'd even made him a posh poster for his kennel to make him more appealing to prospective adopters.

 	
Dogs Name:	Gino
Age:	2 Years
Breed:	Chihuahua
Sex:	Dog
Good with Other Dogs:	Just needs time to get to know them
Good with Cats:	No
<p><i>Additional information – Gino needs a home preferably without children and especially not small children. He needs someone asseräve and able to stick to the ground rules of being alpha male / female.</i></p> <p><i>Any questions, please see Claire</i></p>	

Two months passed, but every time someone came to visit Battersea, they completely bypassed Gino. Claire was so upset; she loved this little dog. "They just need to get to know you, Gino," she said one day as family number five walked past his kennel.

*

It was a beautiful summer's day when Phillip's mum and dad decided that today was the day they would bring home a rescue dog. Phillip was a big, grey Great Dane. He was 18 months old, and his mum and dad wanted to get him a friend, someone he could play with while they were either working from home or in the office. So, they put Phillip's lead and harness on and fastened him in the car, then got in themselves. "Right, Phillip, are you ready to pick your new best friend today?" They set off on the 45-minute journey to Battersea. The window was open in the back so Phillip could stick his head out. The wind blew through his jowls, flicking drool all down the side of the car and up into the air. As they passed a cyclist, a large bit of drool landed on his hands, making him veer off the road onto the path and into a laurel hedge.

"Sorry!" Phillip's mum shouted, making sure the cyclist wasn't hurt. "You'd better wind the window up before someone else gets covered."

They arrived at Battersea at 10 a.m., unfastened Phillip, and brought him into the office. Claire was waiting for them.

"You must be Mr and Mrs Fletcher, and you must be Phillip," she said, bending over to pat Phillip, who responded by wagging his whole back end.

"Yes, I'm Natalie, and this is my husband, Mick,"

Natalie said.

“Follow me. I’ll take you into our waiting room, then I’ll bring the dog I think is a perfect match for you.” She led them into the waiting room and then off she went. To get ... who else? Gino.

She wasn’t gone five minutes before the door opened and in walked Gino. Phillip stood up, towering over him. His mum looked at her husband. “It’s like David and Goliath! I don’t think this is a good fit, Claire,” she said. “Wait, oh my!” Phillip had laid back down to Gino’s level, which meant Gino could reach his head and was licking Phillip’s face. Phillip rolled onto his back, at which Gino walked onto his belly. “Phillip actually looks like he’s laughing.” Claire said she’d never seen Gino play in all the time he’d been with them (on and off) since he was six months old.

“Looks like we’ve got a winner. I think Phillip’s in love,” said Natalie, who looked at her husband to see if he was happy for them to take Gino home. Much to her surprise, he was crying.

“Looks like Gino has finally found his forever home,” he said, wiping away the tears.

“Amazing!” said Claire. “I’ll go and get the adoption forms.” She disappeared and came back with what looked like a hundred forms. Natalie and Mick didn’t mind as long as Phillip was happy, and clearly, he was.

So, off Gino went to his new home. Phillip’s mum and dad watched as both dogs followed each other all over the house and slept together curled up in the same bed. They were just as they’d wanted, best friends. A few days later, it was time for Gino to leave the house, and not just the garden but to go outside on his first proper walk to Regent’s Park. Both their leads were clipped onto their

collars. Gino took a deep breath as the front door opened; he could see the park across the street. He stepped through the door, down the path, across the street and through the huge gates into the park. He was outside!

Their leads were unclipped, Gino looked at Phillip, Phillip looked at Gino, and they were away.

“Phillip, I’m outside, I’m playing!!” Gino shouted as he spun around so much he became dizzy and fell over. His mum ran over to check he hadn’t hurt himself.

“Come on, Gino,” Phillip called as he ran towards the middle of the park. Gino got up and ran after him as quickly as his little legs could take him. Don’t forget he was only eight inches tall. Phillip was a horse compared to Gino.

Suddenly, Phillip stopped. “I have the other dogs in the park to introduce you to, Gino,” he said as a little dog zoomed past them both.

“Hello,” said the little dog.

“Wayne, stop, I have some ...” It was too late; the little dog had gone. “That was Wayne. He’s a miniature dachshund. All the other dogs in the park walk about three or four miles. Not Wayne, he runs 10 miles even with his little legs, which are smaller than yours!”

Gino looked down at his legs. Phillip was right, of course, they were small, but how could another dog’s be even smaller, he wondered as he tried to find Wayne in the park.

“There he is!” shouted Phillip. “Let’s try to stop him so you can meet him.” Phillip jumped in front of Wayne as he tried to ZOOM past. Poor Wayne went crashing into Phillip, which sent him flying into the air. He landed on his back with his legs still running.

“Hello, I’m Wayne,” he said from upside down.

“Wayne, this is Gino. He’s my best friend, and this is his first day in the park.”

Gino looked at Phillip. He had never been anyone’s best friend before.

“Welcome, Gino, it’s lovely to meet you. I’m sure we’ll see a lot of each other. Sorry, I must go. I have goals I need to reach.” Wayne was gone.

Phillip laughed. “That’s Wayne,” he said, looking around the park for the next character he wanted to introduce Gino to. “Gino, follow me. I want you to meet Charles.” Phillip started to walk over to a bench neatly cradling a big oak tree. There sat Charles, a British bulldog, whose owner was sitting on the bench saying hello to everyone, including dogs, who walked past. “Morning, Charles,” said Phillip, “I have someone new for you to meet. This is Gino.”

“Oh, good morning, Gino. Welcome to Regent’s Park,” said Charles in a very posh British accent. Charles was clearly an older gentleman. His face was grey, and he looked very distinguished with a Union Jack bandana on. His owner was a middle-aged lady, very well dressed.

“Hello, gentlemen,” she said, passing them both a biscuit. “Have you come to say hello to Charles? Charles, isn’t that lovely?”

Phillip liked Charles’s mum; she always spoke to them like they were human, and more importantly, she had biscuits, and posh biscuits at that. Gino said hello while he finished his biscuit.

“Right, we must go, Charles. Gino has other dogs to meet. See you tomorrow!” Charles saluted. “Charles thinks he was in the army, but we all know he wasn’t. Dogs aren’t in the army, but we all like Charles, so we play along. His owner adopted him a few years ago. He’s

quite old and doesn't walk very far, but she spoils him, and rightly so," Phillip said, nodding his head.

Next, Phillip saw the triplets. "Oh, Gino, you're going to love these three, they are so much fun!!"

"Morning, Phillip," the triplets said in unison: Three West Highland white terrier brothers who were full of fun and occasional mischief.

"Morning, Maurice, Barry and Robin, I'd like to introduce you to Gino. This is his first day in the park," Phillip said very proudly, puffing out his chest.

"Hello, Gino, we are very pleased to meet you. Welcome to our beautiful park. I think you'll be very happy here," said Maurice, dropping the ball he was carrying.

"Maurice, Barry, Robin," came a call from across the park, "time to go home."

"That's Mum, sorry, we have to go. See you tomorrow, guys. Hopefully, we can play together soon," said Robin, picking up Maurice's ball and running towards the voice that had called them.

"Their parents are massive Bee Gees fans, so they are named after them," said Phillip, walking towards another dog he wanted to introduce Gino to.

What's a Bee Gee? Gino thought but didn't say out loud — he didn't want to seem ignorant.

"Morning, Wolfgang. Gino, I'd like to introduce Wolfgang. He's a German wirehaired pointer. If you lose anything, Wolfgang is the dog to find it. Wolfgang, this is Gino," Phillip said.

"Hello, Gino. Phillip told me yesterday you're finally coming out. I'm so happy for you!" Wolfgang sat down so as not to tower over Gino. The other dogs Gino had met today were little dogs. Wolfgang, on the other hand,

was big. Gino liked the big dog's beard and was a little jealous he couldn't grow one of his own. "Gino, have you met Laura yet?" Wolfgang asked.

"Laura?" Gino looked at Phillip, a little puzzled.

"No, but we're going to meet her now," said Phillip. "See you later, Wolfgang." They said their goodbyes, "I've saved the best till last," said Phillip.

Phillip started to run over to some bushes way over on the left-hand side of the park, and Gino followed. "Where are we going?" said Gino, very out of breath.

"I have a friend who lives under these bushes. I bring her biscuits every day!" Phillip shouted back; he was way ahead by now. Sure enough, Gino could see a small dog hiding under the bushes. "Morning, Laura," Phillip said, dropping the biscuits he'd hidden in his harness down onto the ground for her.

"Morning, Phillip, and you must be Gino." Laura winked as she looked him up and down, sizing him up.

"Laura's a stray. Her mum was taken into care about a year ago and no one came to get her. When the council cleared the house, she ran into the park, and she's been here ever since. I bring biscuits and other bits when I can." Gino could tell that in her day she had been a beautiful dog but now, living outdoors, her hair was dirty and knotted.

"I'm an apricot poodle," said Laura. "My mum was my best friend. We did everything together." A tear came into her eye as she remembered her past life. "But I'm here now living free," her voice lifting at the end of the sentence like she was declaring how fabulous her life was to anyone that was nearby and listening.

"Gino, Phillip, where are you?"

"Mum's shouting at us. See you tomorrow, Laura, be

safe,” said Phillip, licking her on the forehead.

“Nice to meet you, Gino,” Laura said, winking again.

“I like her,” Gino said as they walked back across the park.

“Teatime, you two,” Mum announced, clapping her hands as they both ran back to her. “Did you enjoy your first outing?” she said, giving him a big hug. Gino wanted to tell her how happy he was and that he’d never been so happy in his short life. He licked her cheek instead, which did the trick because she hugged him tighter.

Life was pretty perfect for the Fletcher family. Gino and Phillip were inseparable. There were walks to the park, the seaside, Airbnb’s. This was about to change, not in a bad way, but life for Gino and Phillip was about to get a little bit more exciting.