

Best Dog Bonnie

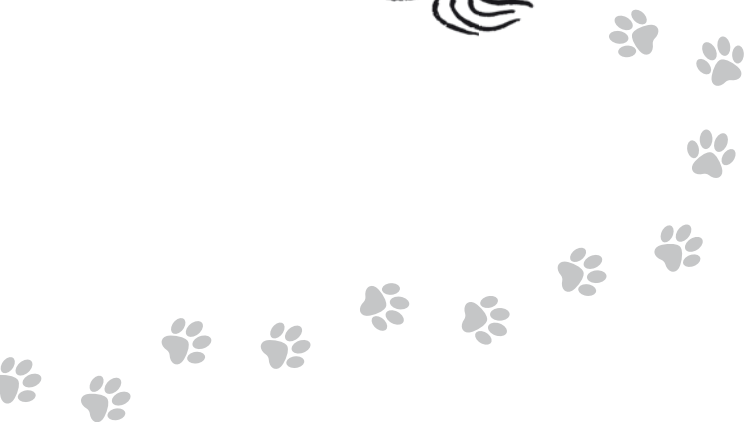


Books About Bonnie:

Big Dog Bonnie • Best Dog Bonnie

Bad Dog Bonnie • Brave Dog Bonnie

Busy Dog Bonnie • Bright Dog Bonnie



Best dog Bonnie

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For Gaynor and Lily
B.M.

To my grandmother, Jean,
who had a Bonnie dog
S.M.





•OK•

“She’s looking very scruffy, Harry,” said Mum, as Bonnie scuttled across the living-room floor after the ball.

“I like her scruffy,” said Harry.

They hadn’t had the little dog very long, but she was certainly looking very grubby indeed. Her white coat was turning grey, the ends of her ears had dabbled in her dinner, and there were black stains streaking down from her eyes.



Because they'd never had a dog before, they didn't quite know how to look after her.

"Can't you just turn the hose on her?" joked Zack, Harry's friend from next door.

"Can I brush her?" asked his twin sister Zena, picking Bonnie up.

Harry handed her the dog brush, but Bonnie wriggled like an eel and Zena soon gave up – just like Harry did, when he remembered to try, which wasn't often.

"Raggy rabbit," teased Zena.

"Messy mouse," said Harry.

"Pongy puppy," laughed Zack.

"I felt all these knots in her coat," Zena said, frowning. "But if you tug at them she'll yelp. What are you going to do, Harry?"

Harry didn't know. His dream pet had been a huge dog called Prince, with a short, shiny black and brown mixed coat, and sharp ears that pricked up when he came into the room. But Mum had got them quite

the opposite, and although Harry liked Bonnie now, he could see she was a lot of trouble to take care of. I mean – a white dog? One game of footie and she'd have to go in the washing machine!

“Yes, pets need a lot of care,” said Harry’s mother, “and we need to find out more.”

They went to the library, but there were no books on small white dogs. Next stop was the pet shop, where there were guides to Labradors, collies, cats and goldfish, but nothing about posh Maltese dogs.

“Let me look it up on the computer,” said the shop assistant, and she clicked away until a big smile spread across her face.

“There’s a book called *The Maltese Today*. Would you like me to order it for you? It’ll be here in a couple of days.”

Then she peered over the counter and frowned at Bonnie. “She needs a bath!”

So they bought dog shampoo, conditioner to detangle her coat, eye-stain wipes and her own sponge, and went home to give Bonnie her first bath. Of course, Zack and Zena came round as well.

Harry was quite excited – but as soon as Bonnie saw them running the water she fled.

“She understands,” laughed Harry, “and she doesn’t like baths!”

Black eyes gleamed from beneath his bed, bright as buttons. Harry reached under and gently pulled her out. “You have to get clean, Mouse-Face,” he whispered. “I don’t always like baths myself!”

He carried her to the bathroom. Bonnie began to shiver and shake until Zena couldn’t bear it. “Oh, she’s really scared!”

“She thinks she’ll go down the plughole,” said Zack.

“In you go,” Harry said, holding her over the bath.

If Bonnie could have flown she would have been out of there, but there was no escape. She was lowered into the warm soapy water before you could say “small grey dog”, and then Mum sponged more water over her head.



Harry began to laugh. He couldn't help it. Bonnie looked so funny, her thick coat soaking wet and flattened to nothing, which showed how tiny she was underneath. The hair on her curly tail hung like shreds and he could see pink mottled skin beneath the wet fur.



She wasn't a pretty sight.

“Mmm,” grinned Zack.

“The words *drowned* and *rat* come to mind!”

“Mean!” giggled Zena.

“Come on, gang, we have to take this seriously,” ordered Harry’s mum.

“We’ll take an end each,” Harry decided. “I’ll wash her head and shoulders and front paws. You do her ... other end.”

“Thanks,” muttered Mum.

It was soon over. They wrapped the squirming Bonnie in a towel and the laughter began again. Her little face poked out just like ET, a creature from another world longing to get back into its spaceship and escape. Be anywhere but here.

Harry’s mum gave Zena the hairdryer – and then the trouble *really* began. Bonnie hated being dried. The more they did it, the wilder her coat became, and by the time Mum came back in from the kitchen Bonnie looked like a mad snowball.

And Zack had twisted the hair on top of her head into punk icicle spikes.



All three children burst out laughing at Mum's face. Bonnie certainly looked cleaner – but she was still far from the pretty white dog Harry's mother had rescued from the RSPCA home.

"Right!" said Mum. "Stand aside. I'm officially taking over this dog beauty business."

Uh-oh, thought Harry.



Two days later, Mum collected the book from the pet shop, and there on the front cover was a Maltese – a real princess of a dog. She had long ears down to her knees, a dazzling white coat, long and silky, and a little pink bow on top of her head, gathering up the long hair so it didn't fall into her eyes. The show Maltese stared out from the book as if she knew she was beautiful, as if there wasn't an animal in the world she'd be afraid of.

“Oh, how *lovely!*” breathed Mum.

“Yuck,” snapped Harry. “I’d hate our Bons to be a prissy mutt like that.”

But he was worried by the glint in his mother’s eye.

The same day, Mum found a dog grooming salon called Millionhairs, and they had a spare appointment. Harry didn’t understand how Bonnie knew, but as soon as Mum opened the car door she dived off his lap and tried to hide under the seat. Mum scooped her up, and she started that terrified shaking again.

“D-d-don’t l-l-leave me, Harry,” she seemed to be saying.

The young woman in the salon frowned at the clean-but-tangled Bonnie, told them you had to groom dogs *before* you bathed them – and promised to put everything right.

“Are you trying to grow her hair?” she asked.



Mum pulled the new book out of her shopping bag. “Well, how long would it take for her to look like *that*?”

Harry was sure Bonnie was asking him to get her out of there. Her black eyes *begged* to be rescued. But there was nothing he could do. Not once Mum had made her mind up about something. She’d been so cheerful lately, and he knew it was because

of the dog and their friendly new neighbours – and the fact that she was getting used to Dad not being around. So he didn't want to spoil her fun. But he didn't want his fun with Bonnie spoiled either.

When they got home the flat felt very empty. Harry wandered into their garden and called over the fence for Zack and Zena, but they weren't around. He watched some TV but there was nothing good on. He felt cross and restless – and Mum noticed.

“Admit it, Harry, you really love Bonnie now!” she said, with that annoying smile people have when they know they've won an argument.

“Uh, she's OK,” Harry mumbled.

It shocked him to realize how much he missed the small white dog who had come into his life so unexpectedly. Worse, he dreaded what she would look like when she came home. It was bad enough having

a girly dog, without her looking like something a model might tuck under her arm to go shopping. How would he ever live it down?

Help! thought Harry. And inside his head he seemed to hear a little answering yelp.

Two hours later, the phone rang. It was time to collect Bonnie from Millionhairs.

Mum went into the salon and came out five minutes later holding a beautiful little toy – so pure white and fluffy she might have been taken out of a box on Christmas Day.

Her tail waved like a silk flag, and – horror of horrors – she wore a tiny pink bow on one side of her head.



When Mum put her in the car Bonnie jumped all over Harry, licking him and yelping with joy at being back with the people she loved. Despite himself, Harry laughed, cowering under her kisses.

“Look at you!” he said. “Get the pink bow!”

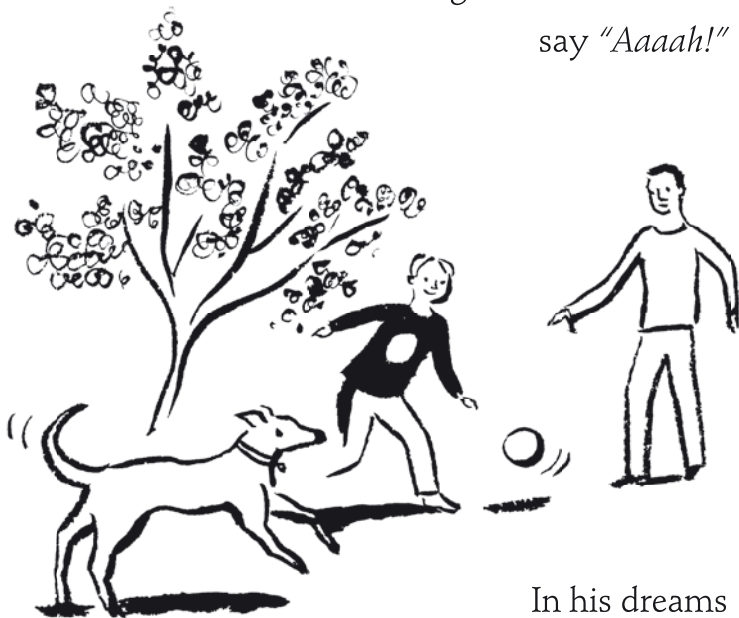
“So sweet – and she smells like flowers,” cooed Mum.

“Can I take it out right now?” asked Harry.

“No, you cannot!” said Mum “Don’t you think she looks gorgeous?”

Now, the truth was, Harry *did* think Bonnie looked cute, but he didn’t want to admit it. In his mind he was the big, tough boy who raced around the park with his big, tough dog at his heels, so that no Mean People would ever dare say anything bad to them for fear of those great yellow fangs and that blood-shivering growl. But in his

heart he knew he was just little Harry who
loved Bonnie, the smallest dog in the world
– who was now officially the prettiest
dog in the country, and who always
made girls and old ladies
say “Aaaah!”



In his dreams
Harry and his hound would
be joined in the park by Dad, and they'd
all play football. Dad would say how fast
Harry was getting, and he'd have biscuits in
his pocket for Prince, and it'd be brilliant.

In reality Harry hadn't seen his father for five weeks, and lived in a flat with his mum and a minuscule mutt with a pink bow in her hair.

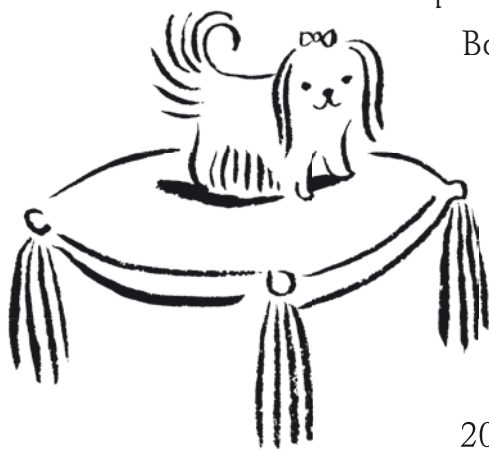
What could you do?

Harry stroked Bonnie as Mum drove home, entwining his fingertips in the softness of her squeaky-clean ears. Keep your dreams to yourself and make the best of what you've got, he told himself.

When they got home Mum sat down at the living-room table and started to read the book about Maltese dogs.

"I didn't realize it's such an old breed," she called out. "It says here the Chinese emperors had dogs just like Bonnie..."

"Yeah, carried around on a silk cushion by a slave," muttered Harry from the sofa.



After a while Mum grabbed the remote and switched the TV off, her face all lit up.

“Listen, sweetheart, I’ve just had the best idea ever!”

“Ye-es?” said Harry warily.

“You know you’re always saying I need to find myself a hobby so I won’t get a bit sad, like I sometimes do?”

“Ye-es,” said Harry again.

“Well, this is what I’m going to do: make myself a real Maltese expert – and turn Bonnie into a champion dog!

There’s a dog show in town in a couple of months, and she could win a rosette. She might even win Best in Show!

And after that – Crufts! Then we could get her a boyfriend, have puppies, who knows? Oh, I’m *so* excited!”



Harry's heart dropped into his trainers.
But his mum's face shone, and she clutched
Bonnie so close that their faces squashed
together and the dog appeared to be smiling.


“Don't you agree, love?”

Harry groaned inside. He knew “OK” was
the only possible reply.





Bonnie liked feeling clean.

**The only thing wrong was something caught in
her hair above her right eye which pulled a bit.
But never mind – it was good to be home. She'd
been afraid when her pack left her in that noisy
place with the sprays, the hairdryers and the
other dogs looking as miserable as she felt.**



That old West Highland terrier told her all he wanted was to turn into a Scottie. When Bonnie asked why, he looked at her as if saying “Duh!”


Then Bonnie got it: a black Scottie doesn't show the dirt.



The brushing hurt, the water got in her eyes, the hairdryer roared in her ears ... but here she was, nestled on the sofa between Harry and Mum – clean. She liked it when they made nice sounds at her, and being clean seemed to bring more nice sounds than usual.

And they were talking about her, a lot.

But like all dogs, Bonnie had a good deal of magic in her. She knew what Harry was feeling even before he did. So why wasn't he happy, even though he was smiling at his mum?



Bonnie rolled over on her side and stretched.
I'll find out.

