

Big Dog Bonnie



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Big Dog Bonnie

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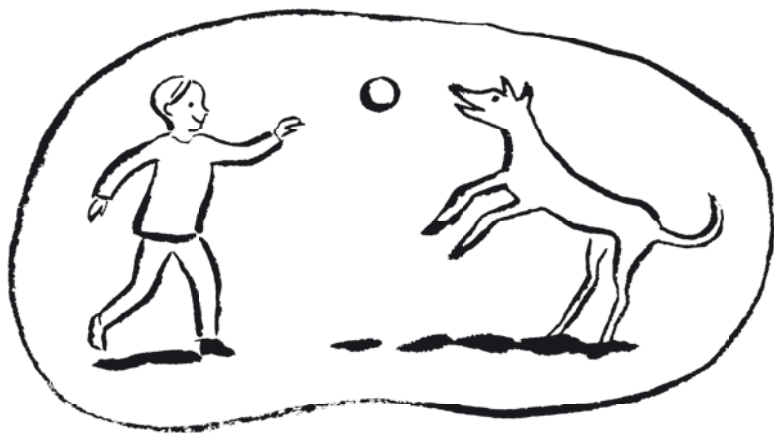
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For my parents – who love
the real Bonnie
B.M.

To my mother, Gilia
S.M.





♻️Mouse♻️

Ever since he was a very small boy Harry had wanted a dog. Badly.

He used to talk about it all the time: about how everybody ought to have a pet, and more than just a pet, a very special sort of dog – that’s what he wanted, no, he *needed* – who’d go with him everywhere, and be his best friend, someone he could talk to, and play games with; and how it was especially important when you were in a new place and didn’t know people;

and anyway, dogs were called man's best friend for a very good reason, so that's why life wouldn't be worth living until they had a dog in the family, and—

“Oh, Harry, STOP going on!” his mother said.

“I'll stop when you say I can have a dog. Go on, Mum, for my birthday,” he pleaded.

She sighed one of those sighs which came up from her feet all the way through her body, making it limp – so he felt guilty.

“Harry, I've got enough to do without having some great hound galumphing around the house,



knocking things over and making a mess,” she said in that voice he knew so well.

It told him that if he went on, it would be his fault if Mum got one of her bad heads and felt upset and tired. It told him that this was hopeless. So he said no more – not that time, anyway. But he knew this would never go away. Because unless he had a dog to call his best friend, he would always be lonely.

Harry sat in his bedroom and talked to his imaginary dog. Prince, he was called – a cross between a Labrador and a collie... No, a German shepherd and a red setter... Well, the truth was, he didn't really know quite what kind of mix the ghost dog was. But he knew Prince was very big, brown-and-black-mixed, with melting chocolate eyes and sharp ears that pricked up at the sound of his name.



Naturally Prince was the cleverest dog in the world. When he stood on his hind legs he was as big as Harry himself, and when he stretched out in front of the TV he looked just like a great big cosy hairy rug. Harry knew he was really a softie, but to the rest of the world he looked like a fearsome guard dog. One bark and any Mean People would just go running. Harry never could quite



decide who these Mean People actually were. Burglars and bullies just about did it, but he also wondered if having a big dog to look after him might stop those big boys in his new school calling him Shorty.

“You’re the best dog ever, Princey,” he whispered to his ghost-dog friend. Sometimes he’d even reach out his hand and imagine scratching under those soft ears, with that warm doggy smell in his nose. He wanted a dog. He needed a dog. He *ached* for a dog!

“NO!” said Mum for the hundredth time. Or was it the thousandth?



That particular day, school was worse than ever. Harry didn't understand why the others in his class didn't get what it was like to be new, in a strange town, when your mum spent half her time crying about stuff and the other half painting walls, sewing curtains and generally fussing over their new flat. It wasn't that they were mean to him exactly, except for Dave (the toughest, most popular boy in the class) going on about Harry not being able to reach the top shelf in the library. Harry knew that at moments like that his face set into a silly, desperate grin. It said *Just like me, please!* – like when Prince came galloping in from outside all muddy, knowing he was being naughty by making a mess. Then his tongue would loll out and he'd grin, so nobody could be cross for long.

Oh – but there was no Prince.

No dog.

As Harry wandered slowly out of the school gate, he thought how unfair life was.

He didn't see much of Dad because of his new job, new house and new everything else. He watched his classmates rushing ahead of him, some of the girls arm in arm, and wished – wished *so* much – that he could make at least one friend.

Mum looked different today. It wasn't her clothes, although Harry noticed that she looked a bit nicer, in the smart jacket she hadn't worn for ages. No, it was her face. Her cheeks were pink and she even wore a touch of lipstick, while her eyes sparkled in a way he hadn't seen for a long time – not since everything went wrong.

“What's up, Mum?” he asked.

She shrugged her shoulders in an excited way, and beamed at him. “Nothing's up! I've got... Oh, nothing.”

As they started to walk home, Harry nudged her. "Come on, Mum! Got what?"

She couldn't help herself. "A surprise!" she squeaked. "A surprise for you. And for me!"

All the way home an annoying little smile lurked at the corners of her mouth, but she wouldn't say another word. It wasn't far to their house, a tall Victorian building divided into flats. They were lucky to have the garden flat, and Mum had already started cutting back and planting, ready for the summer.



When they turned into their road, there was a removals van outside the house next door, which was still one whole home.

“Oh, I hope we get nice neighbours,” said Mum absent-mindedly, “and I hope they like my ... secret!” She giggled mischievously.

Harry couldn’t stand it any more. “Mum!” he almost yelled as she put her key in the door. “TELL ME WHAT THE SURPRISE IS!”

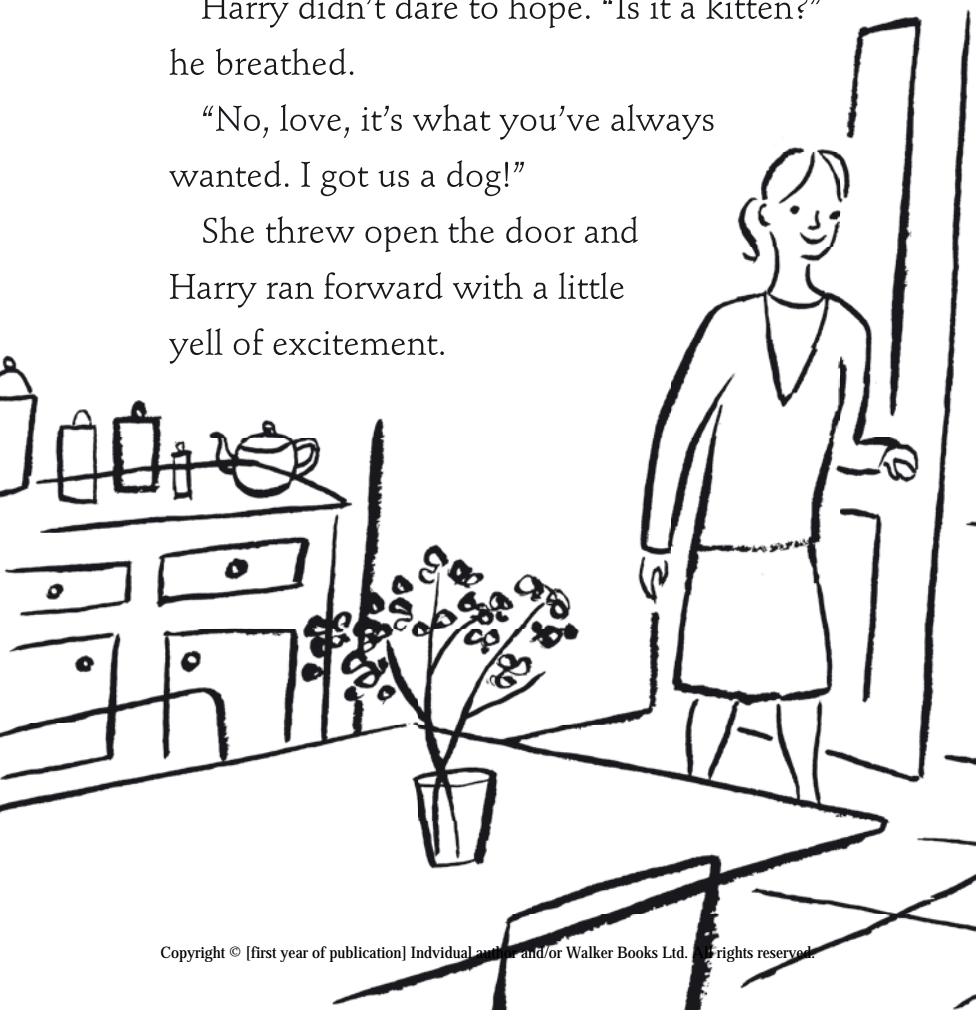


The kitchen door was closed. Mum turned to him with her hand on the doorknob and whispered, "Sweetheart, you've been such a good boy, putting up with everything, and so today I got us a brand new friend. A pet..."

Harry didn't dare to hope. "Is it a kitten?" he breathed.

"No, love, it's what you've always wanted. I got us a dog!"

She threw open the door and Harry ran forward with a little yell of excitement.



“Cool! Come here, boy! But ... hey, Mum,
where is he?”

He stopped. The kitchen was empty,
or so it seemed.

“Look!” said Mum.

And there in the corner by the fridge,
sitting up on one of the flowered cushions
from the living room, was the smallest,
silliest dog Harry had ever seen. It was
about the same size as his old teddy;
pure white, with floppy ears and tiny
black eyes, nose and mouth,
like chips of coal in a
snowman’s face.



When it saw them it wagged an apology for a tail, which curled over its back like a silk whisk. It jumped off the cushion and pitter-pattered towards them on tiny legs, looking excited and afraid at the same time. Mum bent and scooped it up like a baby. The little creature relaxed into her arms.

Harry didn't speak. But that didn't matter, because Mum was chattering away.

"You see, I was passing the RSPCA Cats' and Dogs' Home the other week and something made me go in. I was actually thinking that if we got a kitten you might stop nagging for a dog.

"Anyway, the ladies on the desk were saying that this little one – she's what they call a Maltese – had just been brought in.



You won't believe it, Harry – she'd been left tied to a tree in the park! Who would do such a thing? They reckon she's only six months old. Look at her! No wonder I fell in love. So I said I wanted her if nobody claimed her. I just couldn't help myself – she's *so* sweet. Don't you think she's gorgeous?"

Still Harry couldn't speak.

"They had to come and check where we lived, you know. They go to real trouble to make sure their animals go to good homes. Thank goodness we've got the garden, eh, love? Bonnie's already been out exploring. I think we'll put a cat flap in so she—"

"Bonnie?" he interrupted in a flat voice.

She rattled on. "Yes, love, in the car on the way to get her I was listening



to my favourite singer – you know, that one you don't like much, Bonnie Raitt – and it just popped into my mind that this one's a Bonnie too! I know I should have let you choose really, but don't you think it suits her perfectly?"

Harry just stared at the small white dog, and she stared back at him with eyes like black buttons.

For the first time Mum looked closely at him, and started to look worried. "Harry? What's the matter? I thought you'd be excited. Aren't you pleased we've got a dog at last?"

For a couple more minutes Harry was silent. Then he roared, "THAT'S not a dog, Mum – not a PROPER dog!" and rushed from the room before she could see his tears of disappointment.

In his bedroom Harry confided in his big, handsome imaginary friend, whose tongue

lollled out in sympathy. “It’s just pathetic, Prince – did you see it? More like a stupid little mouse than a dog, and if Mum thinks I’d be seen dead in the street with that thing on a lead, she’s wrong! I bet it’d be scared stiff if a cat came into the garden! And *Bonnie*? I mean, what kind of name is *that* to shout out? If Mum wants a girl’s dog for herself, that’s fine. But that silly little thing’s got nothing to do with me! Oh, Princey – I’m *so* fed up...”

At last Mum shouted down the hall that tea was ready. When Harry pushed open the kitchen door, she wore that bright face which said she was upset but determined to make things all right. Bonnie started a shrill yapping which sliced into his brain. “Look, she’s saying hello!” smiled Mum as the little dog pranced around.

“Huh. Does she know how to say goodbye?” said Harry.

He sat at the table, and Mum plonked down a plate of shepherd's pie. She was a good cook; it was his favourite. Harry started to feel a bit more cheerful. Bonnie was standing on her hind legs, front paws on his knee, begging to be picked up. She looked quite cute, but Harry thought of Prince and refused to soften. So Mum scooped her up and the little dog snuggled down on her knee as if she'd lived with them for ever.



They ate in silence for a while, then Mum asked, “You do like her *really*, don’t you, love?”

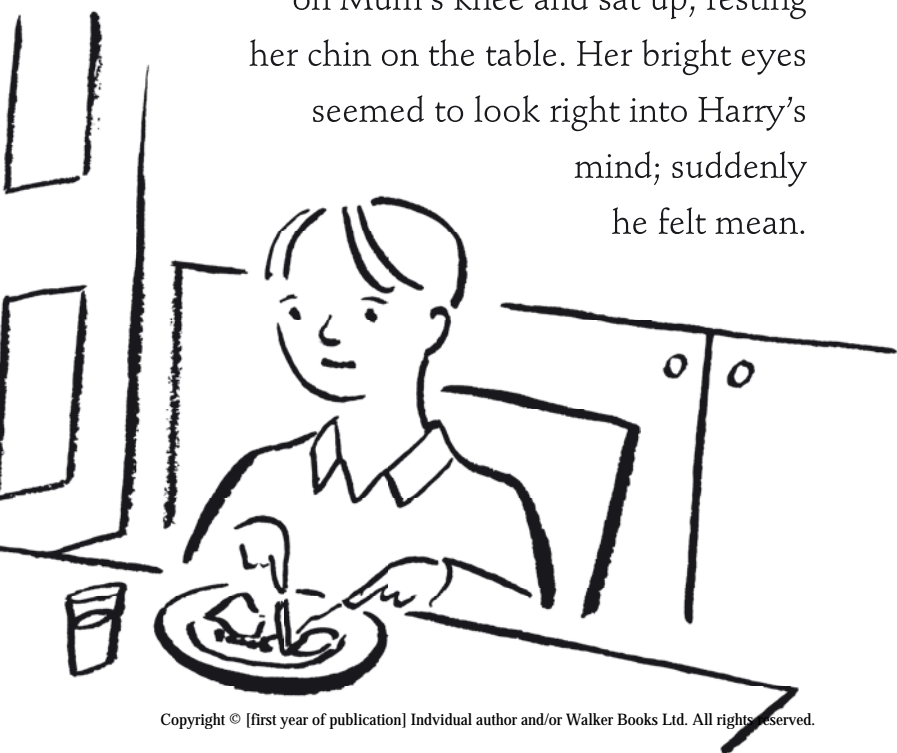
“I wanted a dog, not a mouse.
She’s too *small*.”

“Too small for what?”

“Too small for anything!”

“Is she too small to love, Harry?”
Mum asked sadly.

At that moment, Bonnie uncurled herself
on Mum’s knee and sat up, resting
her chin on the table. Her bright eyes
seemed to look right into Harry’s
mind; suddenly
he felt mean.



“She’s all right really,” he muttered.
“But I’m not taking her out. People will laugh at me.”

“Fine,” said Mum in her cool voice. “I’ll take her for walks myself.”

Harry did his homework; Mum watched TV with the dog on her knee, and then insisted he help her search the Internet for dog accessories. “She’ll need a pretty bed, and things like that,” she said. Harry wanted to scream, and at last he escaped to his room. He read for a while, then Mum came to say goodnight.

“Where’s it going to sleep?” he asked.

“In the kitchen,” said Mum, giving him a kiss, “and she’s not ‘it’, Harry. She’s Bonnie.”

She clicked off his light and went out.

Miserable, Harry whispered, “Goodnight, boy,” into the darkness, imagining Prince lying down over by his door – always slightly ajar to let some light in. Prince kept

him safe; how could a ball of white fluff do that?

Harry didn't know how much later, but he was just slipping into sleep when he heard the tiniest sound, a scraping or scrabbling, as if a mouse was in the skirting board. He raised himself up on one elbow.

Skitter, skitter, skitter across the wooden boards of his room. He imagined a giant spider, or a cockroach... Eeeeuch!

Suddenly he felt a little tugging at his duvet, and glanced down.

The small white face seemed to glow in the darkness. Bonnie had her paws up on the side of the bed, and as he stared at her she made a tiny growling noise, as if asking



to be picked up. Without thinking, Harry reached down and lifted her, amazed at how light the dog was in his arms.

“Hello, Mouse-Face,” he whispered, “how did you get out of the kitchen? You can’t sleep here, you know.”

Bonnie put her head on one side and looked at him.

“I mean it,” said Harry, putting on his sternest voice.

But the little dog just flopped down, curled into a ball, and went to sleep.





BONNIE was dreaming.

Somewhere in the room, there was an enormous dog. She knew she had met him before:


he was very big, brown-and-black-mixed, with melting chocolate eyes and sharp ears that pricked up at the slightest sound. But so did hers.

When he began his long low rumbling growl to warn her off, she started up an answering one in her own throat: a fierce sound that would strike terror into the heart of any rat.



Oh, she'd grab it, shake it, finish it off all right!

And just because he was a big dog, not a rat, it didn't mean she wouldn't see him off too.



Grrrrr, on your way! I'll yap up such a storm you won't know what's hit you. There's only room enough for one dog in this home.

