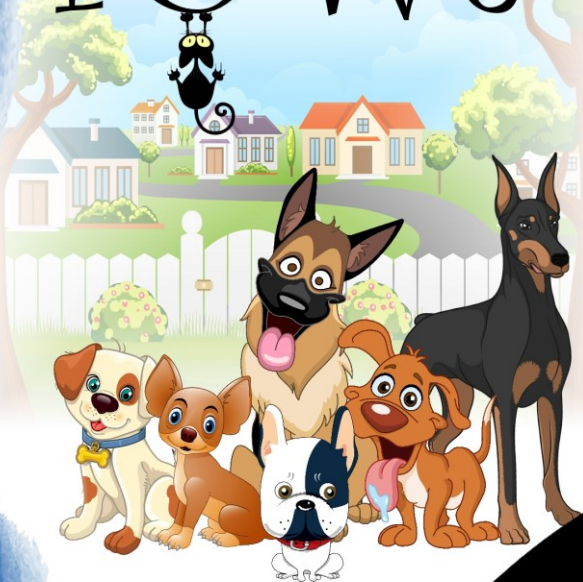


# DOG TOWN



DEBBIE L  
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DOG TOWN is set on the northern beaches of Sydney, Australia.

The story came to the author in a dream. A small dog named Harry, who loved to run, found himself lost in a strange town. Harry's best friend, Junior, was very sad about his disappearance. In this dream, the small dogs and big dogs lived apart, and cats were extinct. This formed the basis of Dog Town.

The Dog Paddle Challenge in Dog Town is based on a real race called the annual Scotland Island Dog Race. This event is a doggie-paddle race of 600 metres from Scotland Island to the ferry jetty at Church Point, in Sydney's northern beaches. The entry fee is a tin of dog food and the winning dog of each category takes all. There is only one rule: the owners must accompany their dog in the race, either by swimming, or on kayak or body-board, but the dogs must swim the race. And the dogs love it.

In 2019, a cat entered the race for the first time.

The author watched this race one year, and saw how much fun the dogs had. She simply had to include the race in this book.

Dog Town

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This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are fictitious or have been used fictitiously, and are not to be construed as real in any way. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locales, or organisations is entirely coincidental.

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First electronic publication: March 12, 2020

# Chapter 1

## *Harry's odd dream*

**HARRY** was dreaming that a cat fell out of the sky and landed on his head.

He woke at once. Darkness filled his kennel; he couldn't be sure if it was very late or very early. Now wide awake, he puzzled about the cat in his dream.

Cats were unheard of in Dog Town. The way summers without mosquitoes were unheard of. Or non-fattening chocolate bars were unheard of.

Baffled, Harry shifted his thoughts to something else. Bones. Toys. Yet when he closed his eyes, images of cats swam across his mind. They beckoned to him, called out to him for help.

Harry sat up. A shiver settled over him. As he struggled to grasp the meaning of this odd dream, he became convinced that it meant something horrible for dog-kind.

The blanket at his feet offered a good place to avoid thinking on his dream any further. He hid

under the blanket, until the heat of the summer's night made it hot enough to cook a roast.

Harry pushed his nose outside his kennel. It was hot and humid, without a breath of wind. Vastly different to that afternoon when the wind's temper had set every door in the house banging.

Even though it was too hot inside his kennel, he didn't want to leave it. Outside in his backyard, shadows skipped across the treetops. Shadows that didn't belong there, shouldn't be there without the wind or clouds to drive them.

"Just more of my bad dream," Harry whispered.

He retreated into his blanket and closed his eyes to go back to sleep.

It wasn't long before his bladder woke him up by announcing with a pinch in his belly that it wanted to be taken outside.

"Traitor," he growled at his abdominal region.

Determined to stay in bed, he twisted and turned, trying to find a comfortable position. He squeezed his legs together, but the pressure became unbearable. As unwilling as he was to go out into the

darkness, he knew he would have to oblige his bladder's demands for relief.

"It was just a dream," he woofed quietly.

He stepped out into the darkness, just as shadows danced along the fence. They reminded him of the cat in his dream.

It had been a black cat with yellow eyes.

It knew Harry's name.

In Harry's dream, he and the cat had played together. They had laughed and rolled down grassy hills and tossed dandelions at each other. Then it had begun to drizzle with rain, and the cat had shown Harry a tunnel where he could stay dry.

This was all preposterously unbelievable, of course. Harry had never played with a cat before. Harry had never even *met* a cat.

No dog had. Well, perhaps Old Roger had. Old Roger was the oldest small dog alive. But Old Roger never spoke about cats. No dog did. And there was good reason for this.

Cats were extinct.

## Chapter 2

### *Let sleeping dogs lie*

HARRY wasn't afraid of the dark – the bad dream had caused the flurry of worry inside him. But he *was* afraid of dew on the grass. He considered anything 'wet' as harmful to his health.

Not only did Harry dislike dew, it made it impossible to sniff out a good potty spot. He weaved up and down the path, backing over his trail several times. Finally, unable to force himself to step out onto the damp lawn, he lifted his leg on the pole of the clothesline.

Just then a frog croaked, startling the dog. And because he was standing on three legs he almost toppled over.

"It's my imagination playing tricks on me," Harry said, with more bravado than he felt.

He bounded toward the house.

For the rest of the night, sleep teased to Harry the way a gooey chocolate cake teases someone on a diet. He became afraid to close his eyes, because each time he did, he saw cats in the hundreds. They were

everywhere, tumbling down from the sky, flying toward him. And each one hit him square on the head. He wouldn't have been at all surprised to wake up the next morning covered in bruises.

For the next hour he tossed and turned. Finally, when it seemed he'd be awake until dawn, he closed his eyes and the sleep fairies whisked him off to the land of nod.

Harry jolted awake moments later.

"Drats to cats," he said.

What on earth could it mean to be plagued by visions of cats?

While he had no clue what the dreams meant, he knew a dog that might.

Whenever Harry needed to hear the voice of reason, it spoke through his best friend, Junior. Junior was a Beagle. He had a white fur coat with brown spots. One of these spots sat over his eye to make it appear as if he wore a monocle.

Junior was the wisest dog Harry knew.

Harry braved the shadows once more. When he reached the clothesline, he stopped to stare at the gardenia bush that spread its branches guardedly along the fence. Normally, Harry communicated with



his friend by way of a gap in the fence, usually concealed by the bush. Now, dew dampened the ground between the dog and the fence, sending a shiver of dread along Harry's spine.

He called out to his friend in a soft bark.

Nothing. Not a sound.

Harry willed his friend awake using the power of his mind, until he realised that his mind powers were another figment of his imagination.

"Come on, Junior," Harry cried out, louder this time. "Wake up. I need some of your good sense."

Harry detected movement, and this lifted his mood. But the sound turned out to be a gush of wind teasing the gardenia bush awake.

Junior would never have believed me anyway, Harry thought.

But he knew someone else who might.

With a whoop of delight, Harry ran to the other side of the concrete path under the clothesline. Here, the fence was a hodge-podge of chicken wire and steel garden stakes, a result of a gale wind blowing the fence down a few months ago. This temporary fence allowed Harry a clear view of the neighbour's yard, all from the safety of the path. Although he

suspected Fleabag – his other best friend – would also be fast asleep.

“Fleabag.” Harry used a gentler tone, hoping his sing-song voice would carry across the yard and into her ear. “Are you awake?”

Fleabag was a Chihuahua with a shiny caramel-coloured coat. Like Junior, she was Harry’s best friend. Unlike Junior – who would label Harry’s dream an ominous warning – Fleabag was as bouncy as the ribbons on her collar. She was the type of dog who always found the positive in things. *She* would think Harry’s dream was a wonderful foretelling.

But a foretelling of what? he wondered with a scowl.

He would never find out what either dog thought if they could not be coaxed from their sleep.

“I do wish you would wake up,” Harry said of his peacefully sleeping friends. Then he let out a series of hushed barks. “Wish, wish, wish.”

Wishing out loud was dangerous. It increased his chances of spending the remainder of the night inside the laundry room. So he gave up wishing and returned to his kennel.

Counting the slats in the roof seemed like a

good way to pass time, until he remembered that dogs lacked the ability to count. Instead, he squeezed his eyes shut and waited for the sleep fairies to whisk him back to the land of sleep.

They took their time.

When sleep finally arrived, it came for good. Harry slept uninterrupted for the remainder of the night.

In the morning, the dream lingered in the corners of his mind. He knew of only one way to chase this dream away.

He would hold a race around the streets of Dog Town.

# Chapter 3

## *A race to the beginning*

**DOG TOWN** consists of two suburbs – Big Rover and Little Rover. Big dogs live in Big Rover. And small dogs live in Little Rover. This is Dog Law.

Big Rover lies in the north of Dog Town, and Little Rover lies in the south. Little Rover is relatively flat with approximately fifty single-storey and double-storey homes spread evenly across the township. It has a few nice shops to the north of town, near a lovely park. In this park is a giant brick tower with a clock halfway up its south-facing wall.

Where Little Rover is a place alive with activity, Big Rover is a place where things go to rest. It has fewer houses and about twenty mansion-styled homes that are built on very large blocks. It has dozens of sheds that could store aeroplanes. Large treeless plots of dirty land are filled to the brim with garden and household stuff. At its northernmost end there is a steep hill leading to a wild forest, however this forest is uninhabited by man or beast.

A wooden fence runs east to west along the

border of Little Rover and Big Rover, as a constant reminder to the inhabitants of Dog Town that they do not get along.

A large body of water sits to the west of both towns. This body of water, known as Buster Bay, is the only thing the two precincts share, although on a strict roster.

On the shoreline of Buster Bay, smack bang in the middle of Dog Town, there is an unpainted wooden jetty. It operates a ferry service to an island inhabited by Furless Ones. (This island is known as Mystery Island because it is a mystery to the dogs how the island stays there without floating away.)

Once a year, when the nights are so hot that it seems the wind has run out of puff, a group of dogs from Big Rover board a ferry bound for Mystery Island. These dogs then compete in a race across the water. They start the race at Mystery Island and end at the jetty on Buster Bay's shore. This race is known as the Dog Paddle Challenge.

The dogs of Little Rover are forbidden from participating in this race. This, again, is Dog Law. This ban, however, does not deter the small dogs from holding their own race. On a regular basis they

run around the streets of Little Rover, starting at the abandoned shops on Sit Boy Lane. The race ends at the clock tower on Good Girl Avenue.

Such a street race was currently underway.

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**HARRY** spied the bell of the clock tower over the treetops. He heard the bell strike the first of twelve chimes.

“First place, here I come,” he whooped with delight.

“First to the finish line has to take a bath,” Fleabag shouted, right on his tail.

“Stop changing the rules, Fleabag,” he barked.

“At least we can tolerate a bath,” Junior cried out, though from further away.

Junior was talking about Harry’s phobia – called ablutophobia, a fear of water. Harry suffered terribly from it. He was afraid to get too close to his water bowl in case it tipped over. And he never bathed. His brown coat could very well have been white underneath the dirt for all anyone knew.

He could see no point in bathing anyway,

because he often rolled in something filthy afterwards.

Even now, the thought of water made Harry look up at the sky. Above, he saw a wide expanse of blue and not a cloud in sight. Just the way he liked it.

Sneaking a look behind him, he noticed Junior trailing behind in third place. As usual, Junior's attention was on the traffic rather than on the race. But Fleabag, who was in second place, was gaining on him. She was competitive, probably more competitive than Harry, yet something other than canine competitiveness propelled Harry forward.

Harry was the champion racer, and he'd been the champion racer for two years. He wasn't about to quit and give up the title and the prestige that came with it. (Did he mention that the fastest dog also got a share of all Little Rover's bones?)

The small dogs of Little Rover looked up to the fastest dog, and Harry quite simply adored the adoration that came from being a champion.

He dug his nails into the asphalt and did a sideways slide out of Fifi Street. As he swerved into Good Girl Avenue, he narrowly avoided a collision with a bicycle carrying a young Furless One.

“Watch out, Harry!” Fleabag yapped.

Harry ducked. The bike pedal came within an inch of his head.

“I swear they act like they own the roads,” he mumbled.

He dug his nails into the asphalt and quickly regained the distance he’d lost during his near collision with the bike.

When Harry next looked over his shoulder, he saw that Junior was overtaking Fleabag. He lowered his head and charged toward the finish line, where a bright yellow banner swung in the air between two streetlights on Good Girl Avenue.

As the banner came into sight, Harry bit down on the pain that snaked up his legs. He told his feet to go faster, and they obeyed. Anyone looking would have seen his ears pressed flat against his head and his eyes squeezed into narrow slits. (This was to stop the bugs from crashing into his eyeballs).

And then, when his heart felt like it would explode, the race was over. Harry had won.

The other racers congratulated him, marvelling at how such a small dog could run so fast. Harry often wondered about this too. He was a dog of



mixed-breeding and unknown origin. A pound puppy to be precise. Nothing special about Harry at all. Except that he was as fast as a deer and as zippy as a blowfly.

After the street race, some of the small dogs went home to rest. But some of the dogs went home to prepare, because the *real* race had yet to be run. That race would take place later that night.

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