

# Nobody's Dog

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About the Author

Also by Colin Dann  
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## About the Book

How does it feel to be abandoned? To wake up one morning cold and miserable in a strange, unfamiliar place where no one even knows your name? This is what happens to a cross-breed collie who is separated from his brother when his family finds two dogs too difficult to cope with. Will he survive? And will he ever find a home where he is really wanted?

Colin Dann

# NOBODY'S DOG

RHCP DIGITAL

*For Clive and Linda*

‘Still looking for your owner?’ The voice was quiet but friendly.

Digby, a young border collie, let his front paws drop to the ground. He had been balancing on his hind legs, straining to peer through the grille in the door of his pen. As usual there had been nothing to see in the corridor outside; no sign that his present misery was likely to end. He turned sadly and saw a lean and grizzled black greyhound watching him. The dog had entered Digby’s pen through the sliding door from the rear passage, which was used by the staff of the Dogs’ Home to bring food or cleaning materials into the various dogs’ quarters.

‘They must think we’re compatible,’ the greyhound said, referring to the open door. ‘Most dogs are confined alone, except for exercise. My pen’s next to yours,’ he explained.

‘Oh yes - I see,’ Digby murmured. ‘I don’t know much about this place. I haven’t been here long.’

‘No. And that’s why you’re still spending most of your time gazing out for a glimpse of your master. But I don’t know why you’re here at all, a handsome youngster like you.’

Digby’s ears pricked up. ‘Perhaps . . . perhaps it’s a mistake?’ he asked hopefully.

‘Perhaps.’ The greyhound didn’t sound very optimistic.

Digby’s morose expression returned. Then he asked, ‘How do you know so much about me?’

‘I only know what I see,’ the greyhound replied. ‘If I get on the shelf in my pen and stretch up, I can see into yours.’

I've felt very sorry for you. It's always the same for new dogs. They all believe they'll soon be fetched away again, when they first come in.' He sat down on the bare concrete floor. 'And then, as time goes on . . .' The greyhound's voice tailed away and he looked meaningfully at Digby.

Digby swallowed hard. He dared not dwell on the unspoken suggestion. 'I'm glad you came to see me,' he muttered. 'I'm not used to being alone, you see. I had company. There were two of us: my brother Tam and me.'

'Oh?' The greyhound was puzzled. 'Then how did you become separated?'

'I don't know; I don't understand it,' Digby replied miserably. 'One of my owners brought me here - it was the eldest one; the one who seems in control. I thought he would come back for me. I've never been left anywhere this long before. My brother was still at home when we left.'

'So you've no idea what's happened to him?'

'None at all. I think about him all the time. We were always together.'

'That's too sad. Well, look - let's not make ourselves any more unhappy. My name's Bouncing Jet Streak of Fleetwood. What's yours?'

Digby gaped. 'Er - Digby,' he stammered. 'What did you say you were called?'

'Oh, it's my kennel name. Call me Streak and forget the rest.'

'Kennel name?'

'Yes. You know - my pedigree. You must have a pedigree? You're a perfect border collie.'

'Actually I'm not,' Digby said. 'My mother was. But I think a little of something else crept in from my father.'

'Oh well - first cross,' Streak summed up. 'Anyway, you and I are unusual here. Most of the inmates are mere mongrels. Brought in off the street.' He sounded rather dismissive. 'You'll have heard some of them, I dare say?'



Digby shuddered. 'That endless barking! It's horrible. Some of them sound so frantic. And scared. And who's that really strident one that keeps yelling, "I'm the boss! I'm number one!"?'

'A big hulk of a dog who's always exercised alone. I've seen him. He's a bully. I can't see he's got any chance of being housed.'

'Housed?' Digby seized on the word. 'You . . . you mean . . .?'

'Let me explain,' Streak said importantly. He lay down on the floor. Digby went to the recess in the wall where he had his sleeping blanket. He settled himself on it, resting his head on his paws, and regarded Streak steadily. 'You won't stay here,' the greyhound continued. 'A good-looking fellow like you is in great demand. I've seen how the outsiders linger by your pen.'

'Outsiders?'

'The human visitors. They prefer young animals. More appealing. You'll soon be picked out. And you'll have a new home.'

'But I don't want a new home,' Digby whined. 'I want my old one.'

'I know,' Streak answered kindly. 'Digby, you must forget all that. If your master decided to bring you to this place, then it's not likely he wanted to keep you. I'm sorry,' he added, seeing the abject expression on Digby's face. 'It's best to know where you stand. This is a home for abandoned and starving animals. It sounds awful, doesn't it? Don't be too downhearted. It's better to live with an owner who comes here and chooses you than one who abandoned you. Cheer up! You've more chance than I have. I've been here ages.'

Digby forgot his own misery for a moment. 'What happened to you?' he muttered.

'Past my best,' Streak replied succinctly. 'I was a racer. A champion. I could outrun everybody. Oh, I was well

looked after then. But I got injured and I couldn't run any more. The men had no more use for me. So they dumped me here. I didn't realize at first what was going on. But I've learnt a lot while I've been here and I've been able to piece it all together. So you see - your future's not as bleak as mine. Who would want to provide a home for a greyhound who can't run any more?' Streak looked mournful. He got up. 'There; now I'm feeling sorry for *myself*. That doesn't do any good.' His bony head lifted as he heard a clatter. 'Food wagon's coming,' he announced briskly. 'I'll go now. We'll talk again.'

'Yes. Yes, please,' Digby answered eagerly. He liked the quietly spoken animal and was sorry he had to leave. 'So I might have a new home?' he murmured to himself, trying to accustom himself to the notion. 'But what about Tam? Won't I ever see him again? I don't think I could bear that. I wonder if he ever thinks about me?'

A young woman arrived with food. Digby licked his lips as the pellets rattled into his food bowl. He hadn't entirely lost his appetite. He stepped nervously from his bed, wagging his tail politely. His flattened ears betrayed his uncertainty.

'You're still not sure of me, are you?' the girl said kindly. 'We'll get used to each other, never fear. We're all dog-lovers here. And you're a fine boy, aren't you?' Digby's tail wagged more vigorously. He was indeed in the pink of health. His soft black and white coat gleamed. His nose glistened. His brown eyes were clear and intelligent. He was alert but jumpy; any sudden noise could make him flinch or flee according to its intensity. The girl gave him a gentle pat. Digby winced without meaning to. His tail dangled. 'Well, you're going to win someone's heart,' the girl remarked. She bustled about. Digby waited for her to leave before he approached his food.

Other dogs were barking in their eagerness to be fed, to be noticed by the girl on her rounds. The ones on the other

side of the block had to wait longest. Some of them, consumed by frustration, made the building ring with their cries. Digby cringed and wolfed his food, ready to dart away at the slightest provocation.

'Poor things,' he whispered after swallowing his last gulp. 'This is a frightening place.'

When the block quietened he went automatically to the grille and peered out. Despite Streak's words he was unable to accept that he would never see his home or his human family again. The dull ache that had been with him since his abandonment flared up again. Why had he been brought here? What had he done? Even the walk to this place had been fun, as all walks were, except for the traffic noise along the main road. He hated that. But his master had shown no displeasure at his nervousness, no anger. Digby knew that his highly strung nature sometimes led to a loss of patience on the humans' side. But he'd never been punished for it. He had always felt the family made allowances for him, even though Tam, by comparison, seemed so calm and unflustered. And it had ended so horribly suddenly, his relationship with the family. The day of abandonment had shown no sign of being any different from any other. There had been no forewarning that anything was wrong. Right up to the moment when he and his master had entered this strange place, Digby had believed that he was simply on an outing. Once inside, however, he had known something was amiss. The appearance of the bleak compound, the tension in the air and the sharp scents of fear, hopelessness and anger, washed over the collie like the breaking of a dull wave. At once he was engulfed and, before he had any chance to make sense of it, his master was gone and a stranger was leading him deeper into the interior.

Since then an ache of longing and a kind of numbness had held him in their grip. He had paid no attention to the human visitors. What good to him were their faces, their

voices, when all he wanted were those he had grown up with? Now, as he watched, people were entering the corridor in ones and twos. A man on his own came towards the collie and spoke to him. Digby dropped to his feet, disheartened. The voice was harsh-sounding and grating, about as unlike the ones he had been used to as was possible. Digby curled himself up on his blanket, shivering slightly and licking his chops repeatedly. 'I was loved,' he told himself. 'Surely I was. Wasn't I? There was affection and - and - kindness.' He thought of the daughter of the house. 'Millie was the best. She cared for me: I know it. Why did she let me come here?' Digby wanted to howl in his misery but he smothered the inclination. He knew it would bring a flurry of strangers to stare at him. So he lay quietly and tried to think about Tam. Finally he murmured, 'I hope Streak can visit me again.'

'I'm number one! I'm the boss! There's no one like me here! Look at me!' The big dog was bellowing again, trying to attract the attention of the visitors.

'Knock it off, will you?' another dog yapped. 'It's all we ever hear. Me, me, me! That's all you know.'

'Yes, belt up, will you, Number One?' snarled a third, using the big dog's nickname. 'Give us some peace.'

'Miserable runts, safe in your own pens!' roared Number One. 'You wouldn't dare face me in mine!' Exploding with frustration, the dog barked even louder, pausing only to race round and round the restricted space of his pen in a kind of frenzy.

Digby cowered on his blanket, disliking the coarse sounds, but so wrapped up in his own misfortune that he was unable to think for long about the other dogs' unhappiness. 'When will I get out of this?' he whispered to himself. 'Will Millie come to see me?' He let out a little whine. 'But she can't! She never goes out by herself. Oh!' He closed his eyes, trying in vain to blot out the noise. 'And what happens if *nobody* comes for you, like poor old Streak? Do you stay here for ever?' He started to howl, the prospect held such horror.

At once two or three other animals answered, howling their own fears into the void. There was a scrabbling at the wall adjoining Digby's pen. Streak had jumped on to his shelf and was peering down at his neighbour.

'Stop that!' he snapped. 'You'll put yourself in a panic.'

Digby looked up, his ears flat against his head. His howling subsided. 'Streak,' he whispered hoarsely, 'what will happen to you?'

'Don't worry about me,' the greyhound answered. 'I'm an old hand here. I'll take what comes.'

His reply left Digby with a feeling of dissatisfaction. He had been hoping for some reassurance in case he ended up in the same plight.

'Just try to settle down,' Streak advised. 'Don't expect too much. You'll find it a lot easier. Time passes and then, one day - bingo! It'll all be over.'

'What will?'

'Your incarceration.'

'What does that mean?'

'Oh, you know - being cooped up here.'

'But you can't be sure, can you?' Digby persisted. 'Does every dog here find a home?'

Streak changed the subject. 'I'm coming round,' he said. 'I want to hear more about you and your brother. Perhaps I'll find a clue as to why you're here and he's not.'

It was quieter now. Number One had stopped barking. The food trolley had reached him. Streak came trotting into Digby's pen with his light, elastic steps. Warm spring sunlight bathed the enclosure from the windows above the rear passage. Digby sat up and watched Streak admiringly.

'No one would know you were injured,' he commented.

'I'm not any more,' Streak told him, waving his long thin tail in greeting. 'I sometimes dream I'm racing again. I can see the hare target ahead of me, always keeping its distance no matter how hard I run. I know I can't catch it and yet I try. I go faster. And faster. But it's always ahead of me, tantalizing me. Behind me comes the pack. I can hear their gasps as they try to match me. But they can no more catch up with me than I can catch that hare. I'm out on my own, my legs bunching and opening in flowing strides; bunching, opening again, eating up the ground. I feel I'm