

CHAPTER TWO

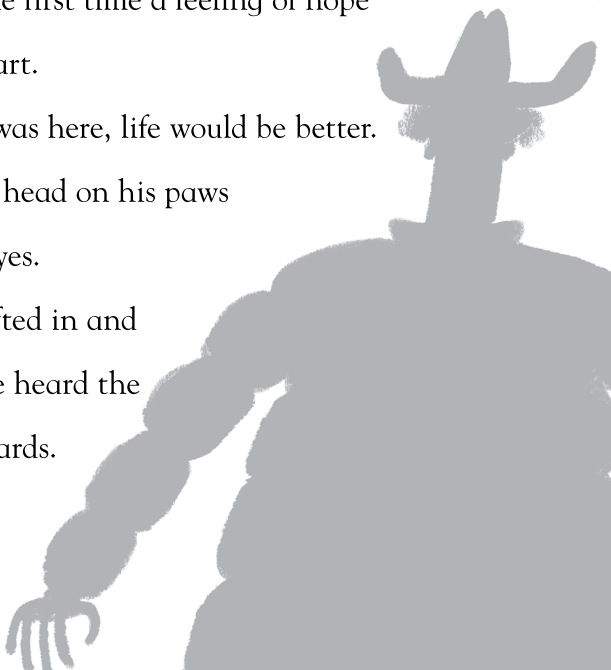
# Deep water

That night Maxwell listened to Paisley breathing softly in the dark. Already he felt stronger and less afraid. He remembered the strange sound he had heard and for the first time a feeling of hope stirred in his heart.

Now Paisley was here, life would be better.

He rested his head on his paws and closed his eyes.

But as he drifted in and out of dreams he heard the creak of floorboards.



Then Dabsley leapt from the shadows,  
grabbed both dogs and threw them in  
a sack.

“What’s happening?” cried Maxwell.

He listened to the slamming of  
doors and suddenly it felt as if  
everything good was coming to  
an end.



It was raining hard when the van stopped on  
the bridge.

“You know what to do,” said Dabsley.

“Maybe we should let them go,” said Ferris,  
whose heart was young and not as dark as  
Dabsley’s.

But Dabsley just scowled. “Do it,” he said.

“And do it properly.”

“I want to go home,” whispered Paisley.





And although Maxwell didn't know how, he placed his paw over hers and said, "Then you will. I promise."

Ferris heard the whimpering from the back of the van and wished he was at home in bed. But Dabsley glared at him, so he reached over the back of his seat, picked up the sack and opened the passenger door, stepping out into the wind and rain.

He stood on the bridge and gazed down at the fast-flowing river, feeling the sack wriggle beneath his fingers.

“Everyone deserves a chance,” he whispered, untying the rope that Dabsley had knotted around the neck of the sack. Dabsley stared at him through the window and he dropped the sack over the edge, listening for the splash as it hit the water below. Then he got back in the van, wiped the rain from his eyes and turned on the radio so he wouldn’t have to think about what he had done.



The shock of hitting the cold water was so great that Maxwell gave a startled yelp, his paws scrabbling against the inside of the sack in an effort to free himself. But the river was in full flow and within seconds they were underwater, fighting for their lives. As the current swept them downstream, Maxwell grabbed at Paisley’s collar and tore at the neck of the sack with his paws, tumbling out into the black, churning water.

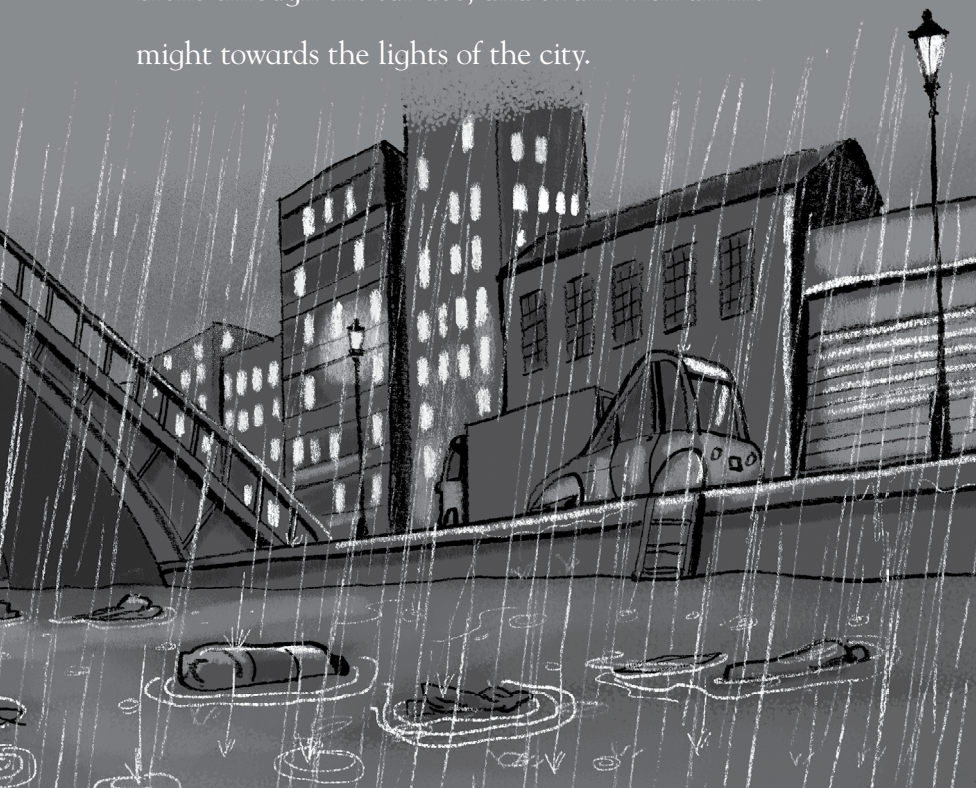
High above him, stars glittered in the midnight sky and a silver moon shone down upon the chimney pots of the sleeping city. Maxwell just had time to breathe cool air before the water swept over his head and pulled him down into the darkness. For a few moments, he was so overwhelmed that he stopped struggling and allowed himself to be dragged down to the weeds and stones, twisting and tumbling along the murky river bed. For most small dogs, this would have been the end of things.



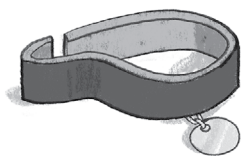
But this was not *any* small dog.

This was Maxwell Mutt.

And although it would be a while before Maxwell knew what the world was about, he had caught a glimpse of the moon and the stars. He had seen the buildings, trees and alleyways and he ached to walk among them and know what it meant to be alive. So Maxwell Mutt reached up with his paws, and broke through the surface, and swam with all his might towards the lights of the city.







It was only when he reached  
the riverbank that he saw Paisley's  
empty collar and realized she was gone.

In the distance he heard the rumble of trains,  
the shrieking of sirens and, beneath it all, the rush  
and flow of the river.

Maxwell remembered the strength of the  
water and wondered how fast and far Paisley had  
been taken. He looked at the shadowy streets  
and wondered how many things there were in  
this strange and endless world. He wondered if,  
somewhere among them, she might still be alive.

And then, as he remembered his promise, the  
wind blew a shred of cloud across the moon and  
he heard a sound like someone crying, somewhere  
on the other side of the river.

