

CHAPTER 1

SCAREDY-DOG

 Duke the bulldog panted in the warm afternoon sunshine. He watched his friend Nova walk to the end of the diving board.

 “I call this move the Butterfly!” she announced, jumping up and down.

She bounced off. **BOING!** She launched into the air, flapping her front legs.

Whoa, that looks scary! Duke thought.



Nova landed in the lake. Water droplets shot up as she hit the water. Then she swam to shore and climbed onto the grass, shaking her golden-yellow fur.

“Be careful, Nova!” cried Peanut. The little dog was stretched out on a beach towel next to Duke. “I don’t want to get my fur wet!”

“You don’t know what you’re missing!” Nova replied, and she shook her head again, hitting Peanut with one last sprinkle of water.

“Aaaargh!” Peanut cried.

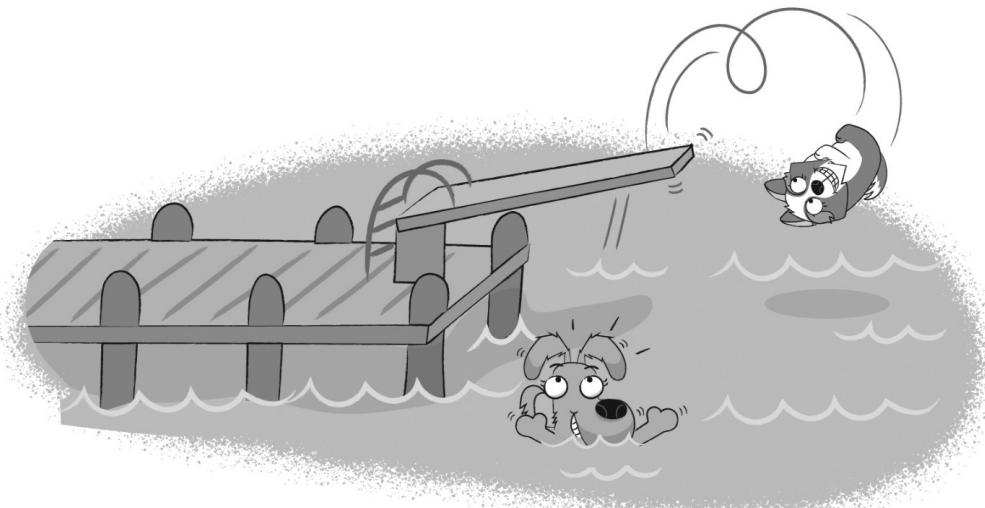
Duke laughed. “It’s just water, Peanut.”

“Oh yeah?” Peanut asked. “Why don’t you jump in, then?”

Duke frowned. Peanut knew why Duke wouldn't jump in. He wasn't afraid of water. But heights—yikes!

"Hey, look at me!" Harley called from the diving board. "I call this one the Flipperoo!"

Harley launched off the board using her short, powerful legs. She somersaulted in the air.



SPLASH! She slammed into the water. Then her head popped up.

“What do you think of that one?” she asked as she doggy-paddled to the shore.

“I liked it,” Nova replied, and she bounded toward the diving board. “I want to try it!”

Harley shook the water off her fur, and Peanut frowned.

“I keep getting wet!” he complained.



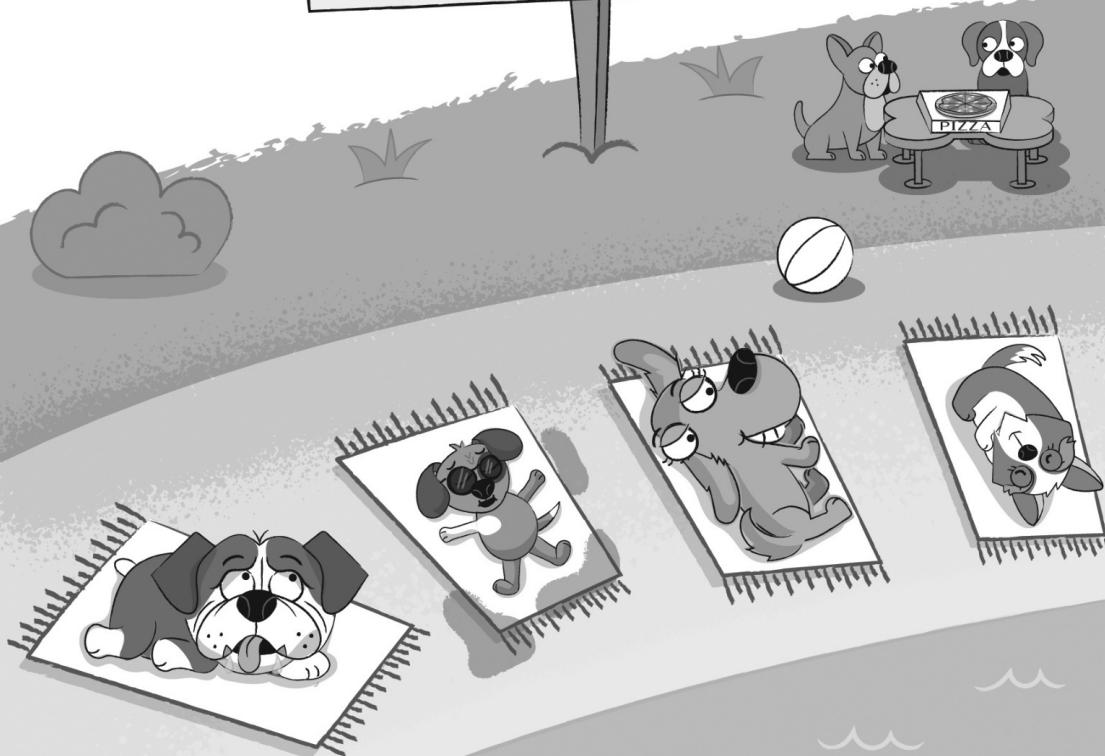
“Well, maybe you shouldn’t have come to the lake, then,” Duke teased.

Peanut leaned back and slid his sunglasses over his eyes. “It’s Saturday! Lake Barksdale is the place to be.”

Duke gazed around. Sunlight glittered on the dark blue surface of the lake. On one side was a sandy beach, and on the other side, a grassy meadow. Dogs swam in the water, dug in the sand, played volleyball on the shore, and snacked at picnic tables. The welcome sign informed visitors that Lake Barksdale was:



THE BEST LAKE FOR SWIMMING!
THE BEST LAKE FOR PICNICKING!
THE BEST LAKE FOR HAVING FUN!



Typical, Duke thought. Everyone and everything in Barksdale wants to be the best. And everyone and everything in Barksdale is the best. Everyone except us.

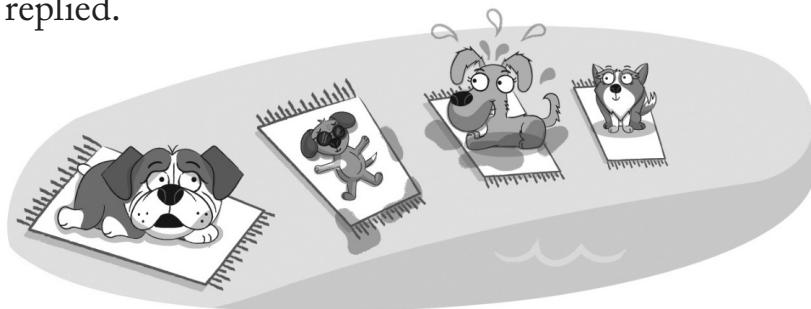
Duke, Peanut, Nova, and Harley were four friends known as the Underdogs. They weren't the best at anything. Except, maybe, at being themselves. And that was just fine with Duke.

Nova tried to somersault off the diving board. But instead of curling her body into a ball, like Harley had, her legs spread out in all different directions. She landed on the water with a **SPLAT** instead of a **SPLASH!**



She ran out of the water, laughing. “I’m going to need some practice,” she said. “Hey, Duke, you wanna try the diving board?”

“I think I’ll just dip my paws in the water,” Duke replied.



“Aw, come on, it’s not even that high,” Nova urged.

Duke didn’t answer right away. Nova had recently tried to help him get over his fear of heights—one of the many things he was afraid of. It hadn’t worked, but Duke had been proud of himself for trying.

“*Weeellllll*,” he said slowly, “it *is* hot. And jumping in would cool me down.”

Harley pulled Duke off his blanket. “You don’t have to do anything fancy. I’ll give you a push if you want.”

“No, you definitely don’t have to push me,” Duke said, suddenly feeling nervous. But he followed Harley and Nova up to the diving board on the end of the dock.

Harley took off. **“THE ROCKET!”** she yelled. She bounced on the end of the board once . . . twice . . . and the third time, she shot straight up into the air. Then she landed in the water back paws first, with her front legs down at her sides.

