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John, Red Dog's beloved best friend, died in an accident, and Red Dog became a totally free spirit, wandering at will over miles of the North West of Australia – the mining district known as the Pilbara. He was the Dog of the North West, famous and loved by many people – though not by everybody.

Red Dog and Red Cat

Red Dog used to call in quite frequently on the caravan park where Nancy, Patsy, and Ellen were living whilst the new houses were being built. It was a pleasant enough place, with tubs of flowers set out on either side of the pathways, and people's washing hanging on lines.

The only thing wrong with it was that there was a rule that stated NO DOGS, and a caretaker who not only did not like dogs, but was determined to enforce the rule. His name was Mr Cribbage, and whenever he saw Red Dog he tried to shoo him away. Later on Red Dog was to cause Mr Cribbage a considerable amount of trouble, but right from the start he also caused some trouble for Red Cat.

Red Cat definitely approved of the rule about NO DOGS. In fact Red Cat hated dogs so much that if he had been dictator of Australia, he would probably have had all the dogs executed. There was no rule forbidding cats in the caravan park, and so Red Cat very much liked it there. Red Cat was the boss of all the cats in Dampier.

He was a ginger tom, big, muscly and mean. He had green eyes and tatty ears, he had a slantways scar on his nose, he had a white bib on his chest, and a tail that was barred in lighter and darker shades. He had great big paws, and when he stretched them out, the claws would spring from their sheaths like curved swords. When he sat on your lap and purred, you could feel the vibration shaking the bones in your head. When you dangled a string in front of him to make him play, you made very sure that your fingers were out of his reach. When he caught a rat, you could hear the crunch of its bones as Red Cat munched it up. When he yowled and wailed at night to attract the lady cats who were the mothers of his kittens, it sounded as though a baby was being tortured to death. When he ate his dinner, he could, if he chose, wolf it almost as fast as Red Dog. Red Cat had never lost a fight.

If Red Cat saw a dog, his policy was to jump on its back, dig his claws in, and ride it around the caravan park until it was too tired and terrified to run any more.

Then Red Cat would jump off and swipe it across the nose, leaving four parallel scratches that trickled with blood. Then, when the dog rolled over and surrendered with its paws in the air, Red Cat would parade proudly away, the tip of his tail waving with self-satisfaction. More often than not, the dog would not come back to risk this treatment again.

Red Dog liked chasing cats, and had plenty of rake-marks on his snout to prove

it. He was a cleverer dog than most, but like most dogs he had never really managed to learn that a dog always loses a fight with a cat, because eventually the cat will turn round and lash out. Red Dog was an optimist, and he sincerely believed that just because a cat runs away to begin with, then he must already be the winner. Anyway, it was such fun doing the chasing that, as far as he was concerned, it was worth getting scratched for it later.

When Red Dog explored the caravan park for the first time, he walked around the back of Nancy's allotment, and came face to face with Red Cat. Red Dog was overcome with excitement, and leaped forward to give chase. He stopped a fraction of a second later, however, because Red Cat did not turn and run. He sat quite still, and opened his mouth and hissed. Red Dog was impressed by the pink tongue and the two rows of shiny white teeth. He pounced again, but still Red Cat did not run. This time he flattened his ears and hissed again, even louder. Red Dog sat back on his haunches, puzzled by this unusually valiant cat, but something made him have another try. Red Cat bushed up his tail, made the fur stand up on his back, flattened his ears, hissed, and hit out so quickly that Red Dog didn't even know what had happened until his nose began to sting and drip with blood.

Just as Red Cat wasn't going to be frightened by Red Dog, neither was Red Dog going to be frightened by Red Cat. He bared his teeth and growled. Red Cat bared his teeth and hissed. Red Dog barked in anger. Red Cat spat. Red Cat tried to spring on to Red Dog's back, so that he could ride him around with his claws well stuck in, but Red Dog dodged out of the way just in time. Snout to snout, growling and hissing, neither animal would give ground. Red Cat scratched Red Dog again. Red Dog tried to bite, but missed. Then Nancy came round the corner and interrupted the whole confrontation.

There was now a new vet in Roebourne, which was much closer than Port Hedland, and the new clinic wasn't even properly completed yet. The young vet looked at the deep slashes in Red Dog's nose, and tutted as he cleaned and stitched them. 'It's funny,' he said, 'but I saw a dog just like this last week. Had a thorn in his paw. Different owner, though. And the week before, somebody else brought in a dog just like this for immunisation. It's weird. Hard to believe there's so many dogs that all look the same.'

Nancy smiled to herself. Red Dog was everybody's dog now, and anyone would take him to the vet if there were need of it. People were taking bets to see how long it would be before the vet realised that all the different Red Dogs that looked the same were in fact the same Red Dog. So far he had been to the clinic five times, and the vet had still not put two and two together.

When Red Dog returned to the caravan park he sniffed around until he found the freshest trail that Red Cat had left behind. There was something about that cat that interested him. He eventually tracked it to a patch of silver saltbush, where it was lying in wait for rabbits, and for just a short time they put on a repeat

performance of the hissing and growling.

Eventually it all seemed too much bother, however, and people were surprised to see them sitting side by side watching the evening coming down, listening to the kangaroos thumping out in the wilderness, just like two old folk on a bungalow verandah.

They were unlikely friends, but friends is what they certainly became. Red Cat still hated dogs, but for Red Dog he made an exception. When Red Dog turned up at the caravan site, Red Cat would come bounding up, bump him under the chin with his head, and wind in and out of his legs, tracing figures of eight, whilst he just stood there looking embarrassed. Red Dog still chased cats, but he made an exception for Red Cat. If anyone threatened his friend, it was Red Dog who ran up growling to defend him. He and Red Cat made quite a few dogs and foxes regret that they had ever ventured into their domain.

One evening Nancy took a picture of Red Dog fast asleep under the bougainvillea with Red Cat sleeping on top of him. She had two copies printed, sent one of them to a magazine, and had the other framed so that she could put it up on the wall.