

DOG TOWN



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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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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. More bones. Yet when he closed his eyes, images of cats swam across his mind. They beckoned to him, calling 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' to be 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 Harry the way a gooey chocolate cake teased 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.

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.

Chapter 4

A Death Wish

JUNIOR had excellent night vision. A fact he did not like because it made it easier to see trouble at night.

It was now later that night, and six pint-sized lapdogs marched toward Stumpy Tail Square for a special kind of race. Junior didn't like these night races, but if Harry was going, someone had to keep him out of trouble.

Harry led the way. Junior followed next in line. Then Fleabag and three other small dogs named Pablo, Kevin, and Teena.

Marching toward the secret entrance into Big Rover was a foolhardy mission. (These dogs had the combined martial art skills of an Olympic papier mâché champion). Yet they marched anyway.

Fleabag appeared at Junior's side. "Hey, I almost beat you today," she said with a grin.

"You let me win, Fleabag," Junior said. "It's better to lose fairly than to win unfairly."

"As if I'd *let* you win. I broke a nail at the last turn."

Junior glanced behind him. The shadows appeared darker tonight.

"I have an awful feeling," he said. "I just want to make my concerns known now, in case something bad happens and I have to say 'I told you so'."

Fleabag rolled her eyes. "You always have a bad feeling. For example, you said we'd get sick if we ate that dead fish on the beach."

“It was smelly and rotten—”

“Then you said we’d get worms if we ate dirt.”

“I stand by that claim.”

“And then you said we’d choke on the teddy bear’s eyes.”

“What are you trying to say, Fleabag? That I worry too much?”

“You’re more cautious than a Boy Scout at a pedestrian crossing.”

Junior felt his scowl deepen. “I’m serious, Fleabag. This sixth sense is worse than normal.”

She sighed. “Everything is going to be fine. We’re going to creep up on the big dogs and yell ‘boo’ at them, just like we do every week. You do realise, my good friend, that by never kicking up your heels, you’ll wind up kicking yourself later.”

“Wow, Fleabag. That was profound.”

She poked her tongue out at him. “That’s what I get from hanging around you too much. Now come on, the others are waiting on us.”

The others were at a place known as Stumpy Tail Square. It was a grassy area with wooden tables and chairs, popular with the Furless Ones for picnics and barbeques.

A sign stood near the main road banning all dogs from the area. None of the dogs had developed the skills that made reading possible. They knew of this ban from walks with their Furless Ones who would point at the sign as the dogs tugged at the lead to chase down the scent of a sausage.

They were here, not in defiance of the Furless Ones’ laws, but because Stumpy Tail Square backed onto the border that separated Little Rover and Big Rover.

The dogs met at this spot before and after a

night race, accessing Big Rover through a hole in the fence.

Junior could recall the exact day his best friend, Harry, had found the hole in the fence. It had been when the two of them were out chasing lizards. Since that day, Harry had been organising guided tours into Big Rover, and Junior had been urging him not to.

Fleabag had come up with a compromise. Harry could run these races, and Junior could impose some strict rules.

Such as: numbers on these outings were strictly limited; most dogs had to book days in advance; and bookings were essential.

Six small dogs were now lingering around a small Bottlebrush plant. Some of them licked the nectar off the dropped flowers because they were sugary-sweet. These dogs never got treats at home. Some dogs sniffed around the tables hoping to find stray pieces of sausage. Some wished they had stayed at home. Yet all waited with bated breath for Harry to give them ‘the signal’.

Harry pulled his head back though the gap in the fence. He lifted a paw.

“The coast is clear,” he said with glee. “The big dogs are nowhere in sight.”

“Marvellous news,” Junior said in a dull tone. “Because I would hate to cancel.”

“You know there’s only one reason to cancel,” Harry said. “And there is not a raindrop in sight.”

Harry turned and addressed the gathered dogs. “Step right up and be prepared to be scared. Vet surgeries are less terrifying than where you are about to enter. Even your neighbour’s front lawn is less foreboding than tonight’s Tour of Terror.”

The small dogs let out a combined gasp of fright.

“But wait, there’s more,” Harry continued. “Nothing in your wildest doggy dreams will prepare you for your own starring role in a little flick I like to call, Dog Eat Dog.”

“Harry!” Fleabag scolded. “You’re spooking the pup.”

The pup she referred to, Pablo, was an ochre-coloured Pomeranian on his first trip into Big Rover. An already fluffy dog, the nearer Pablo got to the big dogs the more he puffed up. He now resembled a twelve-inch pompom.

“He’s making it up,” Fleabag told Pablo. “It’s perfectly safe inside Big Rover.”

“Sure it is,” Harry said. “And to prove it I’ll go first.”

Junior held his breath as he watched Harry disappear through the hole.

Then a paw waved at them to follow.

The remaining dogs had little choice but to abide by their code of loyalty and follow him through. Junior led the way as they hurried toward the rendezvous point which was a truck tyre.

It was dark and a little crowded inside the tyre. (If anyone is interested to know how many lapdogs can be squeezed inside a truck tyre, the answer is six.) Huddled together, the dogs started shaking, some with excitement, most with fear.

Teena, a Welsh Corgi, said nervously, “This is my second time in Big Rover. I’m not sure if I’m scared or excited. I’ll think I’ll let you know tomorrow.”

Her little brother, Pablo, piped up and said, “Oh, I know I’m scared.”

“Someone’s fur is tickling my nose,” Kevin said. He was a French Bulldog who was another first timer to Big Rover, having been given the booking as a birthday present. “Has anyone bathed in lavender? That scent plays havoc with my nose hairs.”

“Quiet, everyone,” Harry whispered. “It’s best if the big dogs are taken by surprise.”

The big dogs Junior wanted Harry to avoid waking prematurely were at the far end of Big Rover. They were secured on chains inside six-foot-square steel reinforced enclosures. They ate once a day, and by Junior’s calculations they had last eaten three hours ago, right at dusk. But dogs are dogs and will force food into a full belly if necessary.

“I’ve changed my mind,” Pablo said, giving Junior a wide-eyed stare. “Harry said this would be fun. Being eaten by a big dog is hardly what I’d call fun. I’d like to go home now.”

“Too late, Pablo,” Teena said. “I’m staying and you’re coming.”

Pablo sighed heavily. Dog Law declared that he had to do whatever his big sister told him to do.

Junior put a comforting paw on Pablo’s shoulder.

“You’ll be okay, mate,” he said.

“But I thought we were only going as far as the border,” Pablo mumbled.

“You’ve waited so long for this,” Harry said. “Trust me, Pablo. Nothing is going to happen to you.”

“You’ll be fine,” Teena added. “Just stick close by my side, and when the times comes, run like the vet’s got a needle in her hand.”

“That’s the most important rule,” Junior said in earnest. “Everyone, stick together. No wandering off.”

“And let Harry, Junior, and I stay out in front,” Fleabag added. “We’ve had more experience at this.”

Harry had a big grin on his face. “When the big dogs strike – and strike they will – stay close beside your buddy.”

Junior allocated the dogs into teams of two. He teamed himself up with Pablo.

“Is everyone ready?” Fleabag asked.

By entering Big Rover, the dogs were in direct violation of Dog Law. Junior felt the need to remind Harry of this.

“Why are we forcing Pablo to come with us if he’d rather go home?” Junior asked Harry. “We’re already breaking Dog Law. Must we add abduction to our list of crimes?”

Harry gave Junior a knowing smile. “The big dogs are well secured inside their pens.”

“Where they’re meant to be,” Junior said. “Instead of breaking a good number of Dog Laws like we are.”

Harry flicked Junior a look of annoyance. “You’re killing my vibe, brother. Come on.”

Then Harry jumped out of the tyre.

Arguing with Harry was about as unproductive as barking at a garden gnome, Junior realised.

In a matter of seconds, the dogs bailed out of the truck tyre. Then they took the same route as was their habit – Harry way out in front as though he was pulling on an invisible leash while the rest followed with the cheerlessness of dogs forced to wear silly hats.

Cautiously, they headed north along Princess Avenue, where they resisted the urge to wee on old sofas. Then they turned right onto Here Boy Road, a place where fruit went to die by the glorious smell of

it. They stopped for a moment when they reached the T-intersection.

At this junction, a metal sign leaned to the right. Like the sign at Stumpy Tail Square, this one had strange letterings that were indecipherable to the dogs.

They did not need to understand the strange markings to know if they went left they'd be on Rusty Street. More importantly, this intersection signalled the point of no return.

Rusty Street led the dogs to Barks A Lot Boulevard. One street away from where the big dogs lived.

The small dogs headed along Rusty Street. Junior, however, hung back. He stood staring up at the sign as though expecting it to tell him something. If any dog could understand a foreign language, it would be Junior. But the sign gave him no hints about why his nerves were rattled.

Fleabag appeared at Junior's side, startling him. He shuddered, because if she could sneak up on him, so could a big dog.

"No wandering off," Fleabag said. "We're supposed to stick to the buddy system. Your rules, remember?"

With a heavy sigh, Junior re-joined the line. He gave his buddy, Pablo, a forced smile.

"Pay no attention to me," Junior told the pup. "I'm more cautious than a canary in an underground mine."

"Oh, I'm a bit excited now that we've crossed into Big Rover," Pablo said, his wide-eyed look belying his courageous words.

"It's all about having fun," Fleabag said from behind. "And you know what? I'll bet those big dogs

are actually soft and sweet on the inside.”

“I beg to differ,” Junior scoffed. “They’re mean and vicious. Mark my words. They’ll eat us one of these days.”

“I doubt that. Hasn’t it ever struck you as odd that we always manage to get away unharmed?”

Junior tilted his head. “What are you saying? That the big dogs *let* us escape?”

“Come on now,” Harry said from the front of the line. “You know we always escape because the big dogs are stupid. It takes their huge heads half the night to figure out how to unbuckle their collars.”

This gave all the dogs a chuckle. All except Junior.

“Quit being so negative, will you?” Fleabag told him harshly.

“Sorry. I just have a bad feeling.”

Her tone softened. “Look on the bright side, Junior. The sooner you get this over and done with, the sooner you can go home and curl up in your basket. So relax, will ya.”

But Junior would never be able to relax.

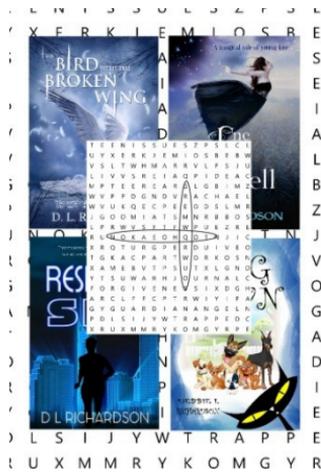
Not while the scent of big dogs hung in the air.

I hope you enjoyed this taste of “Dog Town”. It’s easy to purchase the complete book to find out what happens to Harry and his friends.

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