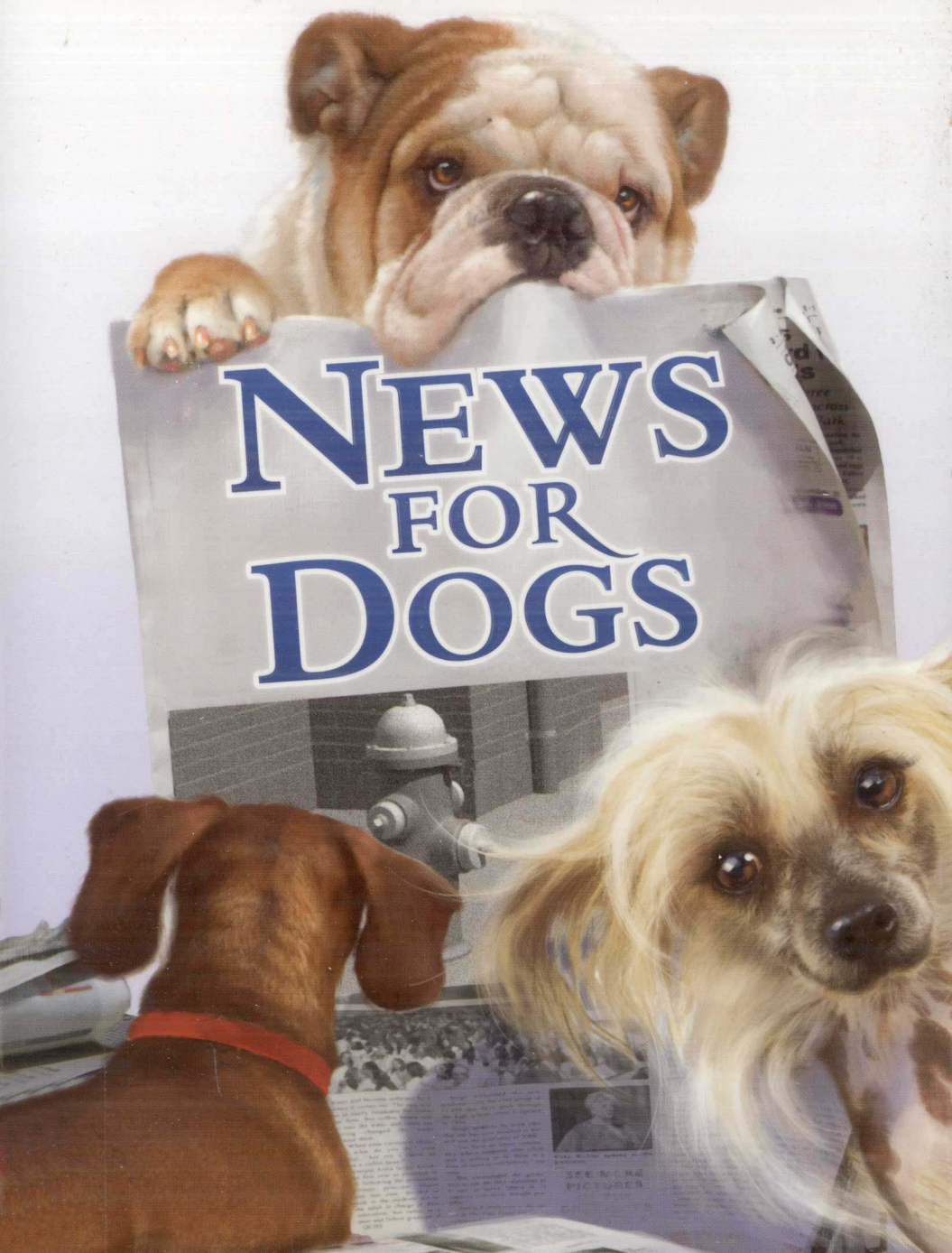


AUTHOR OF *HOTEL FOR DOGS*, NOW A MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

LOIS DUNCAN



NEWS FOR DOGS



BY LOIS DUNCAN

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NEWS FOR DOGS

ALSO BY LOIS DUNCAN

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The Third Eye
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Stranger with My Face
Ransom

CHAPTER ONE

“I think we should start a newspaper for dogs,” Andi said.

“You think — *what?*” Bruce Walker regarded his sister with astonishment. He had arrived home from school to find her sitting on the front steps waiting for him with her two dogs, Bebe and Friday, on either side of her. They looked like mismatched bookends, as Friday was a shaggy white hairball and Bebe, a dachshund, looked more like a sausage.

Elmwood Elementary let out an hour before the middle school, so Andi always beat Bruce home, but she didn’t usually wait outside to intercept him. She did that only when she had something important to tell him or when, like today, she’d come up with some outrageous project.

“I think we should start a newspaper,” Andi repeated. “There’s nothing for people to read to

their dogs these days. Dogs need their own newspaper with articles written just for them.”

“That’s the dumbest thing I ever heard,” Bruce said. “Even if dogs liked the stories, they couldn’t buy newspapers, because they don’t have money. Please, move so I can get into the house. I want to get something to eat before I take Red for his run.”

Andi got up and, with a dog tucked under each arm, trailed him into the house.

“Where’s Mom?” Bruce asked. Back when they lived in New Mexico, Mrs. Walker had been a teacher, but she hadn’t yet found a teaching position in Elmwood, so, temporarily at least, she was a stay-at-home mother.

“She and Aunt Alice went to the mall,” Andi said. She set the dogs on the floor and watched with a fond expression as they raced hopefully to their food bowls. “Whatever you’re going to fix, I’ll have some, too. And so will Bebe and Friday.”

“You can make your own sandwich,” Bruce said, taking a loaf of bread from the cupboard and rummaging around for the peanut butter. “And those dogs shouldn’t snack between meals. They’re fat enough already.” It was all he could do not to add, “and so are you,” but he managed to stop himself

from saying it. Andi was a little too chubby, but not exactly fat, and Bruce, although almost always truthful, was seldom unkind.

So, even though he had told her that he wouldn't make her a sandwich, he made one anyway and then watched with dismay as she tore off the crust and dropped a piece into each of the dog bowls. Bebe and Friday gobbled them up so quickly that they almost choked.

"See how hungry they were?" Andi said. "You may like your dog to be bony, but I want mine to be comfortable. I also want my dogs to have cultural experiences."

Bruce poured a glass of milk to wash down his sandwich and took a biscuit for Red Rover out of a tin on the "dog food shelf." There were lots of cans on that shelf, and Bruce had bought most of them himself. That was part of the agreement he had made with his parents when they reluctantly allowed him to own an Irish setter.

"It will be like feeding a horse," his father had commented, which turned out to be true. Although Red was lean and fit, he did eat a lot.

Mr. and Mrs. Walker had never expected to have a three-dog family. They had given Bebe to Andi

the same Christmas that they had given Bruce his first camera, but the other dogs had popped into their lives unexpectedly. Friday had turned up on their doorstep during a rainstorm, and Andi had found Red Rover, severely injured, huddling in Aunt Alice's backyard. Red had belonged to Jerry Gordon, who lived next door to Aunt Alice, but when Jerry's father was forced to realize how badly Jerry was mistreating the dog, he had agreed to sell Red to Bruce.

Now, as they sat at the kitchen table eating their sandwiches, Andi continued to chatter about her new grand plan.

"Of course, dogs won't buy the papers. Their owners will do that. Babies can't buy things either, but there are lots of books for babies. Parents buy them and read them to their children. That's how it will be with our newspaper."

"Don't call it *our* newspaper," Bruce said. "This is your idea. If you want to waste your time writing stories for dogs, then go for it. You're the writer in the family. You don't need me."

"But I do!" Andi exclaimed. "I need you to be my photographer and take pictures of things that dogs would be interested in."

“Like cats?” Bruce suggested, trying to conceal his amusement.

“That’s one possibility,” Andi said solemnly. “An occasional cat would be all right, especially if a dog was chasing it. But, in general, I think dogs would prefer to read about each other. We’ll have feature stories about dogs doing feats of bravery, and a gossip column for dogs, and articles about things that dogs can do to have fun.”

“And a nutrition column about how bread crusts make dogs fat?”

Bruce placed his glass in the dishwasher. He had hoped his final comment would end the conversation, but when he turned to go out the kitchen door, Andi was right behind him. When his sister got an idea in her head she never let go.

As they stepped out into the yard, Red Rover came bounding to meet Bruce as if he had been counting the minutes until his owner got there. Or his “almost owner.” Bruce was saving up to buy Red, but since Irish setters were terribly expensive, it was taking him longer than he’d expected. He had hoped that he could earn money shoveling snow, but there hadn’t been any major snowstorms the past winter. Now they were well into spring, and

that opportunity was gone. It seemed as if he was destined to go without an earned income until midsummer, when people would need their lawns mowed.

“You know you need money,” Andi said as if reading his mind. “We could earn a lot with a newspaper. There are so many dogs in this neighborhood, we’d have a huge readership.”

“You’re a nut,” Bruce said. “Come on, Red, let’s go!”

He handed the dog his biscuit as he hooked Red’s leash to his collar and looped the strap over his own wrist. When Bruce opened the gate, the big dog plunged through the opening with so much enthusiasm that he almost yanked Bruce off his feet.

Bruce broke into a run to keep up as Red galloped along the sidewalk, his glossy coat shining in the sunlight and his plumed tail waving like a banner. He was the most beautiful animal Bruce had ever seen and was so filled with life and vitality that neighbors, out in their yards preparing their flower beds, broke into smiles to see the two of them run by. It was almost impossible to believe that only six months ago, Red had almost strangled to death

when Jerry Gordon had harnessed him to a coaster wagon.

It was Andi who had helped Bruce nurse him back to health. Even though there were times when she drove him crazy, Bruce had to admit that she was a pretty good sister.

I shouldn't have put her down like that, he thought guiltily. *She was so excited about the idea of a dog newspaper. And, dumb as it sounds, there might actually be people who would buy it, if only because an eleven-year-old was the editor.*

Andi was a good writer, he had to give her that. Ever since she was little she had been writing poetry, and she'd started submitting poems to magazines when she was ten. So far she had made no sales, but her poems were published regularly in the school newspaper.

She probably could write articles, Bruce acknowledged. But he didn't know what she'd find to put in them. A gossip column for dogs was really stretching it.

Bruce was so engrossed in his thoughts and in the challenge of keeping up with Red Rover that he wasn't really noticing where they were going until

he glanced ahead and saw that they were approaching the intersection where Jerry had caused Red to almost be hit by a car. Ever since then, that intersection had given Bruce chills, and he avoided it if at all possible.

We won't cross that street, he told himself. Instead, we'll circle the block and head back home.

He began to rein in Red as they approached the corner. When he heard the whir of wheels behind them and recognized the sound of a skateboard, he moved to the edge of the sidewalk and pulled Red over to permit the skateboarder to pass.

But the skateboarder *didn't* pass. He remained behind them, slowing as if deliberately keeping pace with them.

That's odd, Bruce thought. Why doesn't he swerve around us?

He wanted to turn his head to see who was following them, but was worried that he might stumble, so he just kept running and listening to those wheels. Then he felt the front edge of the skateboard nudge the back of his left leg. First it was just a little bump, as if it were an accident, and then enough of a thump so it really hurt.

“Hey, knock it off!” Bruce yelled over his shoulder. “There’s plenty of room for you to pass us!”

The skateboard hit him again. This time it struck the calf of his right leg with so much force that he almost tripped. Bruce jumped over onto the lawn of the house to his left. It was obvious now that the idiot behind him was not just a klutz, he was actually launching an attack.

“Whoa, Red!” Bruce shouted as the leash went taut between them.

“*Whoa, Red!*” yelled another voice, echoing his tone so exactly that it was clear that the person behind him was making fun of him. Bruce felt his stomach clench, because this was a voice he recognized and, to his ears, it was the nastiest voice in the world.

“What do you think you’re doing, Jerry?” Bruce demanded. “If you don’t know how to steer that thing, go home and skate in your driveway!”

He wasn’t exactly afraid of Jerry Gordon, but he didn’t like the thought of getting into a fight with him. Actually, Bruce didn’t like the idea of fighting *anybody*. He was small for his age and not built for physical combat, but it wasn’t just his size that made

him a peace lover. Bruce was a friendly boy, who genuinely liked people, and most people liked him back. But Jerry had hated Bruce from the first time they met, when Bruce had petted Red Rover without asking Jerry's permission. And Jerry was the sort of enemy who could make your life miserable.

The worst thing of all about Jerry, other than his being cruel and vicious and selfish and spoiled rotten, was that he was able to make grown-ups think he was adorable. He was blond and good-looking and could switch on a sweet fake smile that lit up his face like sunshine. When the Walkers had first come to Elmwood, his father's aunt Alice had beamed as she told them, "That dear boy, Jerry, has a smile that just melts your heart!"

But now, when there weren't any adults around to impress, Jerry's expression was more of a sneer.

"What do we have here?" he exclaimed. "I do believe it's the shrimpy little dog-stealer! I hope you know I'm going to get Red Rover back from you."

"I don't see that happening," Bruce said, trying to sound sure of himself. "Your dad told me I could buy him. He said you weren't ready for the responsibility of a dog."

“People change their minds,” Jerry said. “My dad will change his. He was mad at me for a while, but I’m winning him over. That dog is mine, and nobody takes my stuff. Look how he’s shaking! He knows the voice of his master!”

Bruce glanced over at Red Rover, who had started to tremble. All the joy of their lovely run seemed to have left him.

“Get over here, Red!” Jerry commanded. “I’m taking you home with me!”

Red looked pleadingly at Bruce and began to whimper. He lowered his head and tucked his bright tail between his legs.

“Don’t let him scare you, old boy,” Bruce said soothingly. “Jerry is full of hot air.”

“That’s what you think!” Jerry shouted. He shoved his foot hard against the sidewalk and shot past Bruce on the skateboard, aiming straight for Red Rover.

The dog didn’t wait to be hit before reacting.

With a yelp of terror, Red leapt forward so fast that the leash jerked free from Bruce’s wrist and his dog plunged off the curb into oncoming traffic.

CHAPTER TWO

There was a blare of horns, a terrible screech of brakes, and shouts of fury from drivers who were swerving all over the road in their frantic efforts to avoid hitting the terrified dog.

“Red!” Bruce shouted. “Get back here!”

It was like reliving a nightmare. Six months ago, when Jerry had hitched Red to a coaster wagon, that wagon had rammed Red’s hind legs and sent him plunging out into the middle of this very street. A car had crushed the wagon as Red tore free of the wreckage and kept on running. Now the same thing was happening again, but this time there was no wagon, just a terror-stricken animal trying to dodge the wheels and fenders of a stream of cars.

“Red!” Bruce shouted again and, without pausing to consider his own safety, raced into the street. This caused even more commotion, as the drivers