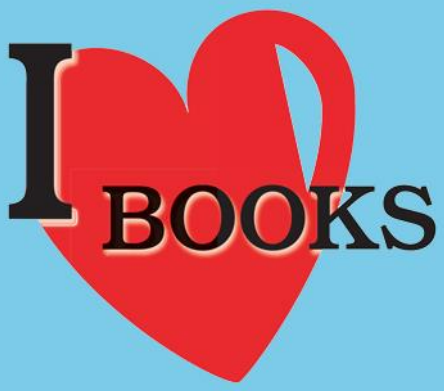


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Opening extract from

Rover and the Big Fat Baby

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Chapter One



Rover was asleep.

But, really, he was only pretending to be asleep. He closed his eyes and snored and farted.

Hey, pal!

Yes, Rover?

Too much information there.

OK. Sorry, Rover. I'll start again.

Rover was asleep.

But, really, he was only pretending to be asleep. Rover was actually awake.

Wide awake.

Because Rover never slept.

He liked to be sure that if anything happened,

he'd know all about it. Sometimes Rover knew about things even before they happened.

It was early in the morning and Rover had been up all night, delivering poo.

Rover was a business dog. Probably the most successful business dog in Ireland. He was quite old. In fact, Rover was very old. He was more than a hundred years old in dog years. And even older in wasp years. He'd been a leading business dog for almost twenty human years.

But the thing was – Rover's brain wasn't old. His legs and his tail had slowed down but his brain hadn't. His brain was wide awake and working twenty-four hours a day. So, Rover was still Ireland's most successful business dog. Although there was a dog in Wicklow called Cindy who was doing very well too.

Cindy chased sheepdogs away from the sheep, because the sheep paid her to do it. Wicklow is full of mountains and the mountains are covered in sheep. There are more sheep than people in Wicklow. And this is the big secret: sheep are more intelligent than people.



Really?

Is that you, Rover?

No, the reader.

Oh, someone's reading the book! How exciting!

Yeah, but, like, are sheep really brainier than people?

Yes.

Then how come they just stand on the sides of mountains and go, like, 'Baa'?

Good question. They stand on the sides of mountains and go 'Baa' because they want to.

But that's stupid.

Not really. Humans love to stand on the sides of mountains too. They pay lots of money

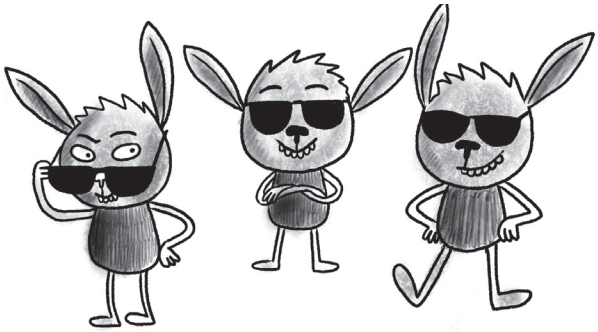
to go all over the world, to countries like Peru and Canada, so they can climb up the sides of mountains and stand there. One of Rover's owners, Billie Jean Fleetwood-Mack, had climbed mountains in Argentina, Kenya and even a tiny mountain in Holland.

Yeah, but she didn't go 'Baa'.

That's true. But she wanted to. Years later, Billie Jean wished she'd gone, like, 'Baa'.

Back to the story.

Chapter Baa – Sorry, Chapter Two



Rover had been up all night, delivering poo. It was summertime and summer is always a busy time for the Gigglers.

Who are the Gigglers?

That's a good question. The Gigglers are small, furry creatures who look after kids and make sure that the grown-ups always treat them properly. But they do it so quietly that hardly anybody has ever seen them. The Gigglers hide themselves so well that hardly anybody knows that they even exist.

'Oh, look, there's a Giggler!'

'What's a Giggler?'

'Eh – I don't know.'

‘Then how do you know that you saw one?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘Then you probably didn’t see one.’

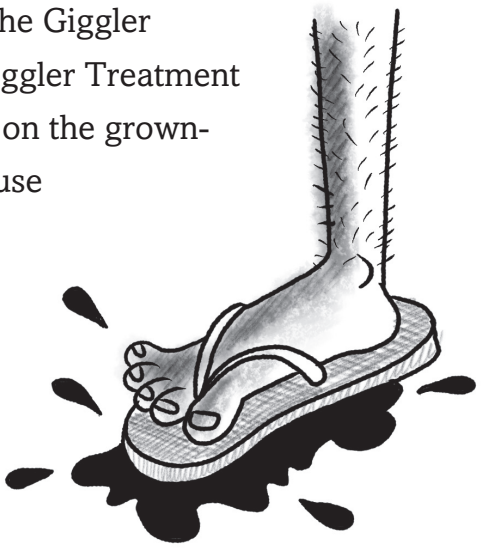
‘OK.’

‘What was it you probably didn’t see, again?’

‘I can’t remember.’

But just because the Gigglers are hardly ever seen doesn’t mean they aren’t there. Because they are. Wherever there is a child, there is a Giggler somewhere very near, looking after the child.

If an adult is mean to a child, he or she will get the Giggler Treatment. The Giggler Treatment is usually dog poo on the grown-up’s shoe or, because it’s summer in this story, the grown-up’s sandal.



Or flip-flop.

The Gigglers keep giving the adult the Giggler

Treatment – that is, poo on the flip-flop – until the adult stops being mean to the child. And summer is like the Gigglers' Christmas. Because the kids are home from school and they drive their parents and guardians and minders and everybody over the age of twenty-five mad.

'You're driving me mad!'

Those were the most popular words spoken in Ireland during the months of July and August.

'You're driving me mad!'

They were music to the fluffy ears of the Gigglers. And Rover liked them too. When Rover heard those words – 'You're driving me mad!' – he sat back and thought, 'You're making me rich.'

The Gigglers needed a steady supply of top-quality poo and, as everybody knows, if you're looking for poo, a dog is your only man. It's quite amazing how much poo comes out of a dog. All dog lovers know this.

'Will you look at that poo!'

'What a dog! Good boy, Bonzo.'

Dogs are walking poo factories and they never shut down for the holidays. If the Gigglers needed

poo, the dogs of Dublin were there to deliver. Or, more exactly, one dog in Dublin was there to deliver. And that dog was Rover.



Most dogs are eejits. That's why we love them.

'Oh, look at the way Bonzo ran into that tree!'

'He's gas.'

But Bonzo isn't gas at all. He's just a dope. He produced the poo but he hadn't a clue what to do with it. He just left it on the path or in the garden, and carried on chasing a wasp or a bee or the shadow of his own tail. He had no idea how valuable that poo was.

But Rover did.

Rover looked at dog poo and saw money. The Gigglers needed a supply of dog poo. They weren't dogs themselves and their own poo wasn't suitable. In fact, Giggler poo wasn't really poo at all. Because the Gigglers poo flowers.

No way.

It's true. The Gigglers poo flowers. The next time you're at a wedding and you see the bride walking up the aisle, carrying a lovely bright bouquet of—

Giggler poo?

Exactly. Not all cut flowers are Giggler poo but some of them are. The point is, Giggler poo isn't suitable for the Giggler Treatment because no grown-up is going to step on flowers and think they are being punished. So, the Gigglers needed a much pooier kind of poo.

Dog poo.

Correct. The Gigglers needed a steady and a large supply of dog poo during the summer. The kids were at home, driving everyone mad.

'You're driving me mad!'

'Me too!'

‘You’re driving us mad!”

‘Me too!’

‘You’re driving *everyone* mad!!’

‘Us too!’

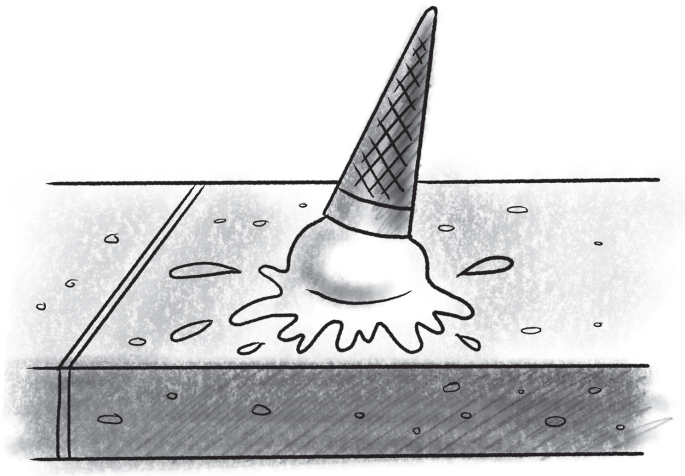
There were mad adults all over Dublin being mean to children, and the Gigglers were run off their little feet trying to keep up.

‘A dad is just after throwing his son’s ice cream out the car window,’ said the smallest Giggler.

‘Why?’ said the biggest Giggler.

‘The son said it wasn’t white enough.’

‘That’s no reason to throw it out the window.’



‘Giggler Treatment?’ the smallest asked.

‘Giggler Treatment,’ the biggest Giggler agreed. ‘Text the order to Rover.’

She watched the smaller Giggler’s fingers and thumbs thumping out the text on her gigPhone.

What’s a gigPhone?

Use your imagination.

OK.

The smaller Giggler read out the text before she sent it.

‘Seventeen poos, please, Rover. ASAP. And no hard ones. X.’

‘Very good,’ said the biggest Giggler.

‘Activate?’

‘Activate.’

‘I love this bit,’ said the smaller Giggler, and she pressed the ‘send’ button.

All the Gigglers went, ‘Whoooosh!’

Excuse me . . .

Yes?

What does ASAP mean?

I don’t have time to answer. But I will – as soon as possible. But now we have to dash on to a new

chapter, to explain two very important things.

Is the Big Fat Baby one of the very important things?

No.