



Bentley had the same nightmare every night: he was in the Perfect Pedigree Pooch Show. He sat proudly on the stage. His coat shone. His teeth gleamed.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said the judge. “Winner of best in show is ...”

Bentley’s chest swelled with pride, and he stepped forward. Many of his ancestors had won best in show: Great-grandma Grace, Grandpa Hudson, his mum and dad. Now, it was his turn.

“... Colin the sheep!” announced the judge.

Bentley’s mouth opened. He felt sick. Beaten by a sheep!



The room grew cold and dark. The audience was laughing at him. Bentley wanted to run, but he was frozen to the spot ...

Bentley crouched beside a tall wire fence on a building site. This time, he wasn't dreaming. He'd run away from home, and now a strange human was chasing him. If the human caught Bentley, he would check his microchip, find out where he lived, and take him back home. His owners would take him to the Perfect Pedigree Pooch Show – and he'd be beaten by a sheep ...

A voice called through a hole in the fence. "Over here." It was a friendly voice, and not a human one.

Bentley decided to take a chance. He squeezed through the hole. On the footpath was a shaggy dog with short legs and a stumpy tail. "This way," the dog said. It led him into a park, where there was a huge clump of harakeke. They hid behind it.

"I'm Scruff," said the dog, wagging his tail. "I'm the local guide for the lost or strayed. What's your story?"

Bentley's voice trembled. "I was scared I'd let everybody down if I didn't win best in show."

Scruff growled. "Humans! Who are they to judge us?" He sniffed Bentley. "Stick with me. I'll look after you."



They went to meet the other dogs in the neighbourhood. “Some are strays like me,” said Scruff, “but most live with humans. We look after each other around here.”

Bentley was impressed. Scruff strutted about as if he owned the world. The other dogs wagged their tails at Scruff as he passed by. They let him gnaw their bones and chew their chew toys. Scruff was best in show in the competition of life.

“How do you do it?” asked Bentley. “You’re so confident. You act like you’re top dog.”

Scruff put his ears back. “What you really mean is, why do I feel good about myself even though I’m not a pedigree with a pile of prizes?”

“Well, yes,” Bentley admitted.

“I’m confident because I know who I am,” said Scruff.

“I know my heritage.”

“What’s heritage?” asked Bentley.

“It’s like knowing your pedigree, but better,” replied Scruff.

“It tells me who my real ancestors are. And they’re not just a list of pure-bred prizewinners.”

“How can I learn about my heritage?” asked Bentley.

“Wait until tonight,” said Scruff. “There’s a full moon. That’s the best time.”



Bentley followed Scruff through the city and down to the docks. They walked to the end of the jetty. Waves lapped at the rocks. A yellow moon glowed in the sky. The hairs on Bentley’s neck stood up.

“Ah,” said Scruff. “You can feel it, too. Welcome to the inter-howl.”

“What’s the inter-howl?” asked Bentley.

Scruff scratched behind his ear. “Humans have the internet. We dogs have the inter-howl. All our information is stored on it. Mostly it’s about where to get the best bones. But it also has every dog’s heritage. All the way back in time to the ancient snow-covered forests. Do you know what we were then?”

“Cold?” sniffed Bentley.

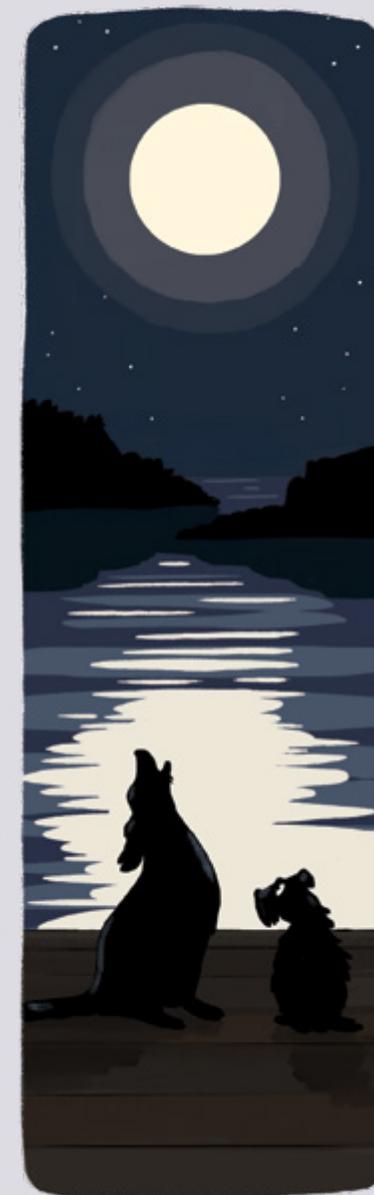
“No,” grinned Scruff. “We were wolves!” Bentley felt a thrill pass through him. “So, what do I do now?”

“Upload your howl,” said Scruff. “And the inter-howl will tell you your heritage. Make sure it’s loud and clear.”

Bentley took a deep breath and howled.

“Now we wait,” said Scruff.

They gazed at the moon.



“Knowing about your heritage will give you confidence,” said Scruff. “You’ll know who you are. A real dog, descended from real wolves!”

And then Bentley heard it. The sound of the inter-howl. It sang to him of his wolf ancestors from thousands of years before. It sang of good dogs. It sang of bad dogs. The inter-howl asked, “Which kind are you, Bentley?” Bentley felt a warm glow inside. He felt strong and brave.

At that moment, a van pulled up. It was the human again. The one who had chased him before.



“Dog catcher,” warned Scruff. “They return some dogs to their old homes. Some are given new homes. Others ...” His voice fell to a whisper. “We don’t know what happens to them. But don’t worry. I’ll look after you.”

Bentley knew what he had to do. “No, Scruff,” said Bentley. “This time I’m looking after you.”

Bentley walked bravely towards the human, wagging his tail. As the human grabbed Bentley, Scruff slipped past them and into the night.

The dog catcher checked Bentley’s microchip. He found out where Bentley lived and took him home. Bentley was washed and dried. His coat shone. His teeth gleamed.

At the Perfect Pedigree Pooch Show, Bentley wasn’t nervous. His chest swelled with pride. Not because of his glossy coat and perfect ears. And not because he’d just won best in show.

Bentley was proud because he knew who he was and where he’d come from. Bentley knew his place in the great howl of life.

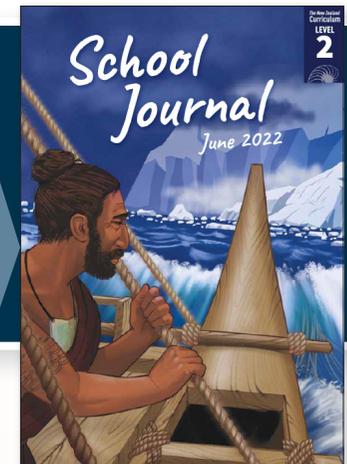
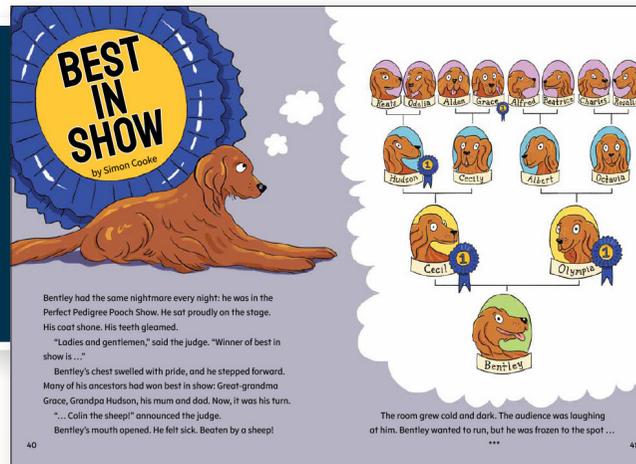


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