



The Barker's Dozen - Reminiscences of an Early Police Dog

Robert Warr

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The detective got the praise, but the dog did the digging.

I had reached the top of the stairs when I heard a small gasping cry from a room towards the back of the building.

'Shall I kill the dog, Mr O'Neil?' A cold voice asked and my heart fell.

'No Sean. We need her to ensure our host's further co-operation.' A more cultivated, but infinitely colder man replied with a cruel sarcasm, 'anyway the poor dog didn't write that note so I think the guilty should suffer.'

'What are you going to do then?' There was an air of gloating anticipation in the first voice.

'Nothing much,' O'Neil replied. 'I think I'll just cut off a finger, just so he knows I mean what I say.'

Beside me, Canary gave a small shocked meow and glancing at her, I saw her claws extend.

'Not now, little one,' I spoke reassuringly. 'This is dog's work. When I've finished they won't be interested in hurting your human.'

I looked round the doorjamb to see a middle-aged man struggling against a tough, labouring type who was trying to lay his victim's hand flat on a table. O'Neil stood with his back to the door a large vicious knife dangling loosely in his right hand.

On the other side of the room, a partly open window looked out on a dingy yard. I needed a distraction so I threw the dynamite, as one would toss a dead rat, over the head of O'Neil and, to my complete amazement, watched it fly straight through the window.

I hurled myself towards O'Neil and bit him very hard just below the back of the knee. It was a bite to be proud of; I felt my teeth shear through trousers, skin and flesh until they grated on bone. He screamed, the sound shocking in that small room and, straightening suddenly, overbalanced backwards, his cruel knife flying from his hand.

I am not a terrier and know that when you are outnumbered it is better to bite and run rather than just keep savaging your first target. I gathered myself and jumped for the window. It was a tight fit, but I managed to squeeze through but not before something heavy cracked down on my right hip and I fell into the rough yard outside.

'Get that dog,' I heard O'Neil scream, his voice distorted into a pained falsetto.

'You want us to bring the dog?' a new voice asked, somewhat sleepily.

'No, you fool, just the tag. Leave the dog in a gutter somewhere.' The voice paused, and then continued, 'I'll give a guinea to whichever one of you brings me its tail.'

To stay was to die! I snatched up the dynamite and looked around...

The book consists of twelve linked stories that deal with the cases of Richard Thompson who is a Scotland Yard detective in Victorian Britain. Unlike Sherlock Holmes the hero is a member of the official police service. What gives these stories their special twist is that they are narrated by Snuffles, who is the Inspector's Springer Spaniel.

Snuffles is an extremely likeable narrator although he is quite arrogant in some of his opinions and has a tendency towards bad puns, he is, however, a dog it would be a pleasure to know.

The settings for these stories range from the foggy streets of Victorian London to the grand country houses familiar to us from the Poirot stories and Downton Abbey. The prejudice that existed between different classes forms a theme (uncomfortable to our modern views) that runs through the book giving it a true flavour of its period.

Although Richard Thompson is a very good detective we learn that most of his cases are actually solved by Snuffles who interviews the animal witnesses. The dog is left with the problem of telling his master what he has learnt without revealing that he can talk. All I will say is that he is a most resourceful Spaniel.

Between each of the cases there is a journal entry written by Isobel Fraser a young American heiress who has been sent to Britain by her parents to end her infatuation with an adventurer. Her presence turns the book into a romance as her relationship with one of the main characters proves

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