

Thereby Hangs a Tail: A Chet and Bernie Mystery (Chet and Bernie Mysteries)

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Following the acclaimed *Dog On It*, the second mystery in the Chet and Bernie series featuring an irresistible canine narrator.

Spencer Quinn lives on Cape Cod with his dog, Audrey. He is currently working on the next Chet and Bernie novel. ONE

The perp looked around-what nasty little eyes he had!-and saw there was nowhere to go. We were in some kind of warehouse, big and shadowy, with a few grimy high-up windows and tall stacks of machine parts. I couldn't remember how the warehouse fit in, exactly, or even what the whole case was all about; only knew beyond a doubt, from those nasty eyes and that sour end-of-the-line smell, a bit like those kosher pickles Bernie had with his BLTs- I'd tried one: once was enough for the kosher pickles, although I always had time for a BLT- that this guy was the perp. I lunged forward and grabbed him by the pant leg. Case closed.

The perp cried out in pain, a horrible, high-pitched sound that made me want to cover my ears. Too bad I can't do that, but no complaints- I'm happy the way I am (even if my ears don't match, something I found out about a while back but can't get into right now). The perp's noises went on and on and finally it hit me that maybe I had more than just his pant leg. That happened sometimes: my teeth are probably longer than yours and sharper, too. What was that? Yes, the taste of blood. My mistake, but a very exciting one all the same.

"Call him off !" the perp screamed. "I give up."

Bernie came running up from behind. "Good work, Chet," he said, huffing and puffing. Poor Bernie- he was trying to give up smoking again but not having much luck.

"Get him off ! He's biting me!"

"Chet wouldn't bite," Bernie said. "Not deliberately."

"Not deliberately? What are you-"

"On the other hand, round about now he usually likes to hear a confession."

"Huh? He's a goddamn dog."

"Language," said Bernie.

Those nasty eyes shifted around, looking wild now. "But he's a dog."

"True," Bernie said.

I wagged my tail. And maybe, on account of the good mood I was in- what was better than a job well done?- shook my head from side to side a bit.

"Aaiieeee! I confess! I confess!"

"To what?"

"To what? The El Camino jewel heist, for Christ sake."

"El Camino jewel heist?" said Bernie. "We're here about the Bar J Guest Ranch arson."

"That, too," said the perp. "Just get him offa me."

"Chet?" Bernie said. "Chet?"

Oh, all right, but how about that taste, human blood? Addictive or what?

Hours later we had two checks, one for the arson, one for the jewel heist, and a good thing, too, because our finances were a mess-alimony, child support, a bad investment in some company with plans to make Hawaiian pants just like the Hawaiian shirts Bernie wears on special occasions, and not much work lately except for divorce cases, never any fun. We run a detective agency, me and Bernie, called the Little Detective Agency on account of Little being Bernie's last name. My name's Chet, pure and simple. Headquarters is our house on Mesquite Road, a nice place with a big tree out front, perfect for napping under, and the whole canyon easily accessible out back, if it just so happens someone left the gate open. And then, up in the canyon-well, say no more.

"This calls for a celebration," Bernie said. "How about a chew strip?" Was that a serious question? Who says no to a chew strip? He opened the cupboard over the sink, where the chew strips were kept; at one time, a very nice time, they'd been on an open shelf, lower down. "And while we're at it . . ." Uh-oh. Bernie reached for the bottle of bourbon, standing by the chew strip box.

We sat out back, watching the light change on the far side of the canyon as the sun went down, Bernie at the table sipping bourbon, me under it, trying to take my time with the chew strip. This wasn't any chew strip, but a high-end bacon-flavored rawhide chew from Rover and Company, an outfit owned by our buddy Simon something or other, whom we'd met on a missing-persons case, our specialty. Bacon smell-the best there is-rose all around me, like a dense cloud. I glanced up at Bernie through the glass tabletop. Could he smell it? Probably not. The puniness of his sense of smell-and the sense of smell of humans in general-was something I've never gotten used to.

He looked down at me. "What's on your mind, boy? Ten to one you're thinking about how you chased that guy down." Wrong, but at that moment he reached over and scratched between my ears, right on a spot I hadn't even realized was desperate for scratching, so I gave my tail a thump. Bernie laughed. "Read your mind," he said. Not close, but I didn't care-he could believe whatever he wanted as long as he kept up this scratching, digging his nails in just so, an expert. He stopped-too soon, always too soon-and said, "How about Dry Gulch? Hell, we earned it."

I was on my feet, gulping down what was left of the chew strip. The Dry Gulch Steakhouse and Saloon was one of our favorites. They had a big wooden cowboy out front-I'd lifted my leg against him once, not good, I know, but just too tempting-and a patio bar in back where my guys were welcome. We went in the Porsche-an old topless one that had replaced our not-quite-as-old topless one after it shot off a cliff on a day I'll never forget, although I've actually forgotten most of it already-brown with yellow doors, Bernie driving, me riding shotgun. Loved riding shotgun: what was better than this? I stuck my head way up, into the wind: smells went by faster than I could sort them out, a kind of nose feast that I'm afraid you'll never-

"Hey, Chet, a little space, buddy."

Oops. Way over on Bernie's side. I shifted closer to my door.

"And ease up on the drooling."

Drooling? Me? I moved over as far as I could and sat stiffly the rest of the way, back straight, eyes forward, aloof. I wasn't alone in the drooling department, had seen Bernie drooling in his sleep more than once, and Leda, too, Bernie's ex-wife, meaning humans drooled, big time. But had I ever made the slightest fuss about it, or thought less of them? You tell me.

We sat in the patio bar at the Dry Gulch Steakhouse and Saloon, Bernie on the end stool, me on the floor. The big summer heat-not just heat but pressure, like a heavy blanket is always weighing down on you-was over, but it was still plenty hot and the cool tiles felt good. Bernie pointed across the street with his chin. "What's that?"

"What's what?" said the bartender.

"That hole in the ground."

"Condos," the bartender said. "Ten stories? Fifteen maybe?"

Bernie has dark, prominent eyebrows with a language all their own. Sometimes, like now, they grew jagged and his whole face, normally such a nice sight, darkened. "And when the aquifer runs dry, what then?" he said.

"Aquifer?" said the bartender.

"Any idea of the current population of the Valley?" Bernie said.

"The whole valley?" said the bartender. "Gotta be up there." Bernie gave him a long look, then ordered a double.

A waitress in a cowboy hat came by. "Is that Chet? Haven't seen you in a while." She knelt down, gave me a pat. "Still like steak tips?" Why would that ever change? "Hey, easy, boy."

Bernie had a burger and another bourbon; steak tips and water for me. His face returned to normal. Whew. Bernie worried about the aquifer a lot and sometimes when he got going couldn't stop. All our water came from the aquifer-I'd heard him say that over and over, although I'd never laid eyes on this aquifer, whatever it was. I didn't get it at all: there was plenty of water in the Valley-how else to explain all that spraying on the golf courses, morning and evening, and those beautiful little rainbows the sprinklers made? We had water out the yingyang. I got up and pressed my head against Bernie's leg. He did some light scratching in that space between my eyes, impossible for me to get to. Ah, bliss. I spotted a French fry under the stool next to Bernie's and snapped it up.

A bourbon or two later, Lieutenant Stine of the Metro PD-a trim little guy in a dark suit-walked in. Bernie had worked for him sometime in the distant past, before my adventures in K-9 school (washing out on the very last day, a long story, but it's no secret that a cat was involved) and had played some role in Bernie and me getting together, the exact details a bit foggy.

"Hear you cleared the El Camino case," Lieutenant Stine said. "Nice job."

"Luck, mostly," Bernie said.

"And a full confession to boot."

"Chet's doing."

Lieutenant Stine glanced down, saw me. He had a thin face and thin lips, didn't smile much in my experience, but he smiled now, somehow ended up looking a little dangerous. "He's a good interrogator," he said.

"The best," said Bernie.

I thumped my tail.

"Understand a tidy reward went along with that," the lieutenant said. A few stools down the row, a guy in a Hawaiian shirt glanced over.

"No complaints," Bernie said to Lieutenant Stine. "What are you drinking?"

A minute or so later, Bernie and the lieutenant were clinking glasses. I'd lost count of Bernie's bourbons by now; counting isn't my strength, not past two.

"Glad I ran into you," Lieutenant Stine said. "There's a little something that might be up your alley."

"Li...

Other Books

Ondankbare hond. In de tweede Chet en Bernie-thriller wordt het onnavolgbare duo ingehuurd om een zeer kleine, maar ook zeer bijzondere hond te beschermen: Princess, regerend kampioene van vele hondenshows in Amerika. Hun dienstverband duurt echter maar tien minuten - Chet moet weer eens bewijzen dat gehoorzaamheid niet zijn sterkste eigenschap is... Als Princess en haar steenrijke eigenaar toch worden ontvoerd, zetten Chet en Bernie zichzelf weer terug op de zaak, of ze nu welkom zijn of niet. De zoektocht naar Princess wordt al snel onheilspellend en levensgevaarlijk als onze helden afreizen naar Californische spooksteden, een verborgen legerbasis en nog veel meer plekken die Chet eigenlijk alweer vergeten is.

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