



JACK-JACK

**RETURN
OF THE
CHICKENS**

**BEN
GARROD**

illustrated by
CHARLI VINCE

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1 BEST OF ENEMIES



There don't seem to be any chickens in my new home in the Yookay, a place with plenty of rain, lots of wind, and too much cold, but thankfully, cockerel-free. I do have to share my home with Newbie, the crossest cat I've ever met, but she's not ruling the roost yet.

Something unusual has been going on over the last few days. The humans have been clearing bushes and weeds, and putting up posts and mesh fencing in our gang's garden. Others have been whacking bits of wood with hammers or cutting bits in half, using long strips of metal with jagged teeth. I've been helping Ben by lying in the dancing, dappled sunlight. One morning, I heard two of the humans talking. I know a load of human words, but I must have got mixed up, because I heard 'chicken house' a



few times. It made me realise I don't

understand humans as well as I thought





I did. I've met enough of them to be pretty sure I know what a 'chicken' is. I also know what a 'house' is. It's where you put humans when you want them to go to sleep or watch television. I didn't go in many houses when I was younger, but now I live in one, I know it's also where you humans keep all your stuff. So much stuff. I own my blue collar with the glittery paw print medallion, but other than that, all I own is the wag in my tail.



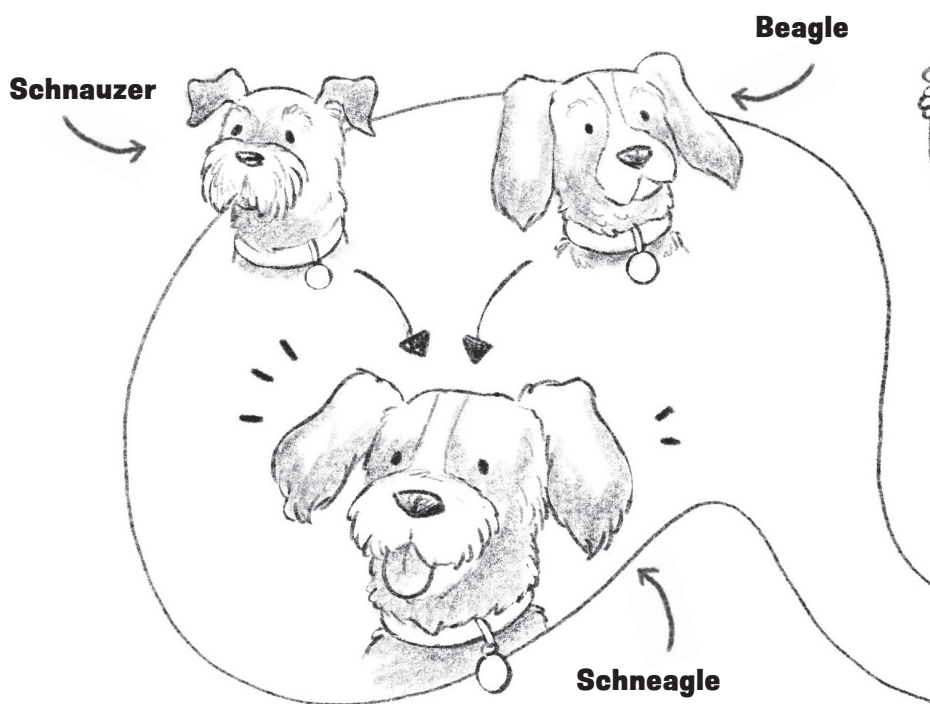
So when I put the words 'chicken' and 'house' together, it made no sense. Was it a house made from chickens? No, that couldn't be it... I'd already seen wood and nails. And you can't glue chickens together to make walls. Can you? A house for chickens? Oh no, not that. Please, not chickens. First, chickens

don't need houses. I'm sure they live up trees, or in bushes, or underground, or something.

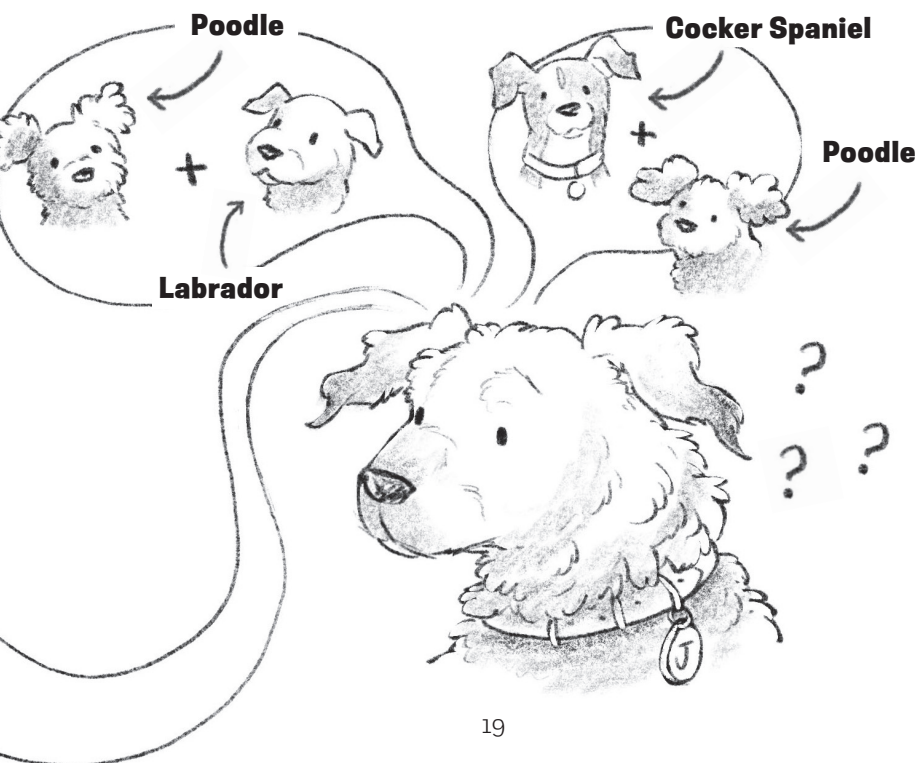
Second, and more importantly, we... do... not... need... chickens. Of all the things I missed from Africa, chickens were at the bottom of that list. Especially cockerels. Noisy, shouty birds like Sidney, who either wanted to start a fight or sit and look at their own reflections in puddles. Once Sidney even tried to start a fight with his reflection in a puddle. No, beaks and barks don't mix. I would tell you more, but at that moment my nose distracted me. Someone new was in our garden.

Humans seem able to see really far, but us dogs can smell really far, and I see the world through my nose. Just then, mine was letting me know there was a dog in the garden and that he didn't belong to our canine club. We can usually tell what a dog is from their smell. Yes, I know they're a dog, but what sort of dog? We all smell a little different, you see.

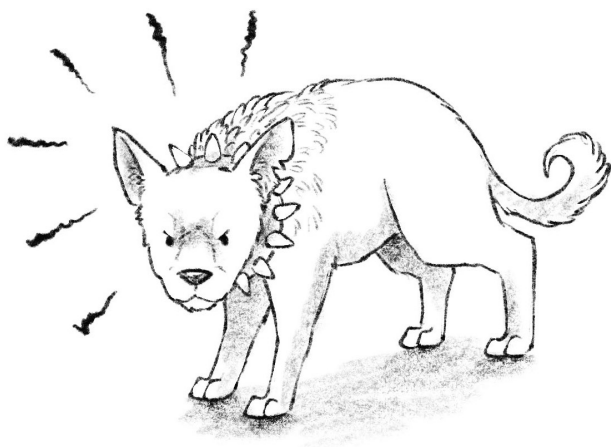
Take Trotty, he's a Terrier, through and through. He smells like a Terrier and I can smell that his mum and dad were Terriers and their mums and dads and their mums and dads... well, you get what I'm saying. It may seem odd to you, but us dogs smell in colours. Terriers have a pale orange smell, and Pointers, like Billie, are fizzy blue. Poodles smell grey and a Labrador is bright yellow, with green spots. Me? I'm sparkly green, with blue flecks.



Sometimes, by looking at or smelling, a dog you can tell the different types of dogs in there, but sometimes it's impossible to work out who is in the mongrel mix. A Schnauzer and a Beagle make a Schneagle. A Labrador and a Poodle make a Labradoodle, and a Cocker Spaniel and a Poodle make a Cockapoo. So, does that mean a Jack Russell and a Poodle make a Jackapoo? Sounds confusing.



Anyway, the stranger in our garden had a smell I couldn't place. I couldn't tell what he was. I could smell him before I could see him, but he soon came into view, walking along the path from behind a bush. He must have been visiting with some humans who didn't live here. He was scruffy with short legs and a long tail curled at the end.



His ears stood up in little triangles and one was torn and flapped when he trotted towards us. He had a

dark snout and a pale brown body with tufts of long fuzzy hair. He was only slightly bigger than Trotty, which meant he was small, but he wore a collar with pointed metal studs. He walked with a swagger, just like a gorilla I knew in Africa. He acted as though he was a big dog, and not a very friendly big dog either. It was bad enough having Newbie ruin our morning, without this little mutt barging in.

Just then, Newbie reappeared at the far end of the garden.

'Smash, no!' his human shouted suddenly, with about as much effect as a butterfly singing in a thunderstorm. 'Leave the kitty alone.'

Apart from thinking Smash was possibly the worst name imaginable for this teeny-weeny pooch, I reckoned anyone silly enough to chase that cross old cat would get what they deserved. Newbie could look after herself. And then it happened. Smash charged towards our Newbie.



He was going at full speed. Newbie hadn't noticed him. His ears were back, his eyes wide, and he was growling so low only us dogs could hear. He was not running over to play. As Smash got closer and closer to unsuspecting Newbie, who was contemplating a binkybonk (that's my word for little things that creep, crawl, hop and fly) with rage in her eyes, he passed each of us.

He **z o o o o o m e d** past Trotty.

Dashed past Sprout.

Zipped by Ralph.

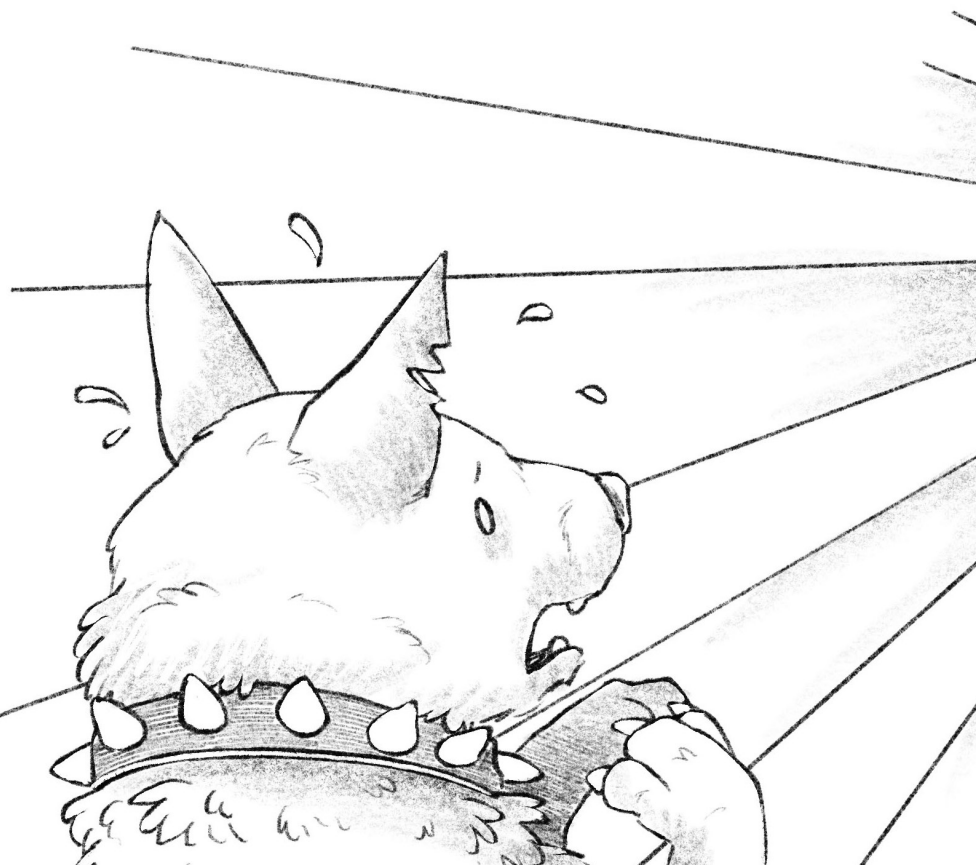
Billie barely noticed.

And because no one actually liked Newbie, no one tried to stop him. There was only me between him and her now, and then who knew what would happen...?

Well, something I can't explain happened. Sometimes we do things without deciding to, don't we? Like scratching. Or maybe turning my head to

the side, resting it on the table and letting my tongue fall out to find a chip and snaffle it into my mouth. Not my fault. The same sort of thing happened now.

My body took over. I did not like Newbie. At all. Not one bit. She was mean. She was cross. She was bossy. But she was ours. And I was not going to stand around and see her get hurt. I hurtled straight towards them both.



I remember the next few moments clearly. I moved fast as a cheetah, strong as a zebra, graceful as a mongoose. I bared my teeth like a majestic lion, before calling out like a powerful gorilla, making Smash lose his balance and stopping him from hurting our cat. She was so happy, she ran up for a big cuddle and called me 'the world's most useful scary dog'.



Trotty and the others remember it differently. They said I had the speed, power and grace of a blindfolded hippo on roller skates, tumbling down an icy hill. Apparently, my majestic roar sounded like a noise made by a badger, but not by its mouth. They said I crashed into Smash and sent him flying, and that Newbie was so surprised to see me, she



leaped into the air and landed between my paws. It also appears I misheard her... she actually said I was 'the world's most useless hairy log'. Oh.

Newbie picked herself up and peeled my tail away from where it was draped over her head. She walked off, but not before turning back to tell me I wasn't completely useless. She whispered a very quiet 'thank you'. And just like that, my new best friend is a cross cat with a mean little face and a snoring problem.

A lady came over, clipped Smash onto his lead and led him away. She looked angry and shouted at me, but it's amazing how little I understand humans sometimes. We never did see Smash again, and that is probably a good thing. Later on that night, I was so exhausted by my heroic deed that I didn't even ask Ben what he meant when he said Ronnie and the girls would be arriving soon.

