

ON CAUTION

BARK vs. SNARK

A QUEENIE AND ARTHUR NOVEL

SPENCER QUINN



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ONE

ARTHUR

AH, SUMMER. MY FAVORITE SEASON of the year by far, way better than . . . those other ones, the names not coming right off the bat. And here's something you should know about me: Whatever doesn't come right off the bat, doesn't come, period. So I don't even bother trying to remember! Who needs bother? A life free from bother is the life for me! You should try it! But don't try too hard. Trying too hard turns out to be bothersome all by itself. Nothing's simple, as humans like to say, although it's not the kind of remark I like to hear. I prefer "Who's a good boy?" And "Anyone want a treat?"

On a nice warm summer day like this one, I love to lie under the big shady tree out front, meaning out front of the Blackberry Hill Inn. That's our B and B up in the Green Mountains, very green at the moment, as I'm sure I could have seen for myself had my eyes been open, which they were not. How peaceful to simply lie in the shade, eyes getting a nice rest, but at the same time nose and ears taking in all sorts of things, like the smell of the flowers in the

garden, especially the purple ones, which reminded me of Mom's perfume. Mom is not my actual mom, if I'm understanding things right, but I call her *Mom* in my mind. She's the actual mom of the twins, Harmony and Bro. That's our core group here at the inn—me, Mom, Harmony, Bro. Perhaps I should include one other party, but do I have to? The truth is I don't want to include Queenie, so I won't include her or even mention her name.

But what was I thinking about? Quee—that is, the party I'm not mentioning—has a way of knocking me off track. Ah! Summer, that was it! Summer, with the aroma of the apples on the apple tree getting stronger every day, and the cool water smell from Blackberry Creek on every breeze, even though the creek was a bit distant—no way I was going for a walk down there in this heat, although a swim would have been nice, and just floating around even nicer. And what about all the lovely summery sounds—for example, the beating of butterfly wings over my head, and the approaching flip-flop of someone in flip-flops coming from the road? Who? Not just anyone but Bro. I know the sound of Bro walking, no matter what he's wearing. There's also such a thing as the smell of Bro walking, only in the air when he's wearing his old sneakers. When that happens I can smell him from a long long distance, possibly all the way across town.

Flippety flop, flippety flop. Bro came closer.

“Hey, Arthur,” he said. “Back in dreamland?”

Dreamland? Certainly not. I opened my eyes, couldn't have looked more wide awake and rarin' to go, although going anywhere was not in my immediate plans. And there was Bro! What a nice sight! Flip-flops, shorts, T-shirt, his face all ruddy from the sun, his teeth and the whites of his eyes so white, his toes dusty. If I had even a bit more energy I'd have licked off that dust. As it was, I just wagged my tail. Actually not, since I seemed to be lying on it.

“Look what I've got!” Bro said, and from behind his back he produced a Frisbee. A Frisbee? Was there something exciting about a Frisbee? Not that I could think of.

He held it closer, maybe giving me a better view. A smallish Frisbee, bright green, like a traffic light. Green, as I knew from riding in the car, means go. Was there some . . . what would you call it? Connection, maybe? Some connection between the color of this Frisbee and . . . and . . . I got a little lost. But one thing was for sure: I was starting not to like this Frisbee. On a cooler day, I might have considered burying it in the tomato patch.

“Are we gonna have fun with this or what?” Bro said.

Meaning *what* was a choice? If it was, then—

Bro spun the Frisbee into the sky. “Arthur! Go!”

Go? *Go* coming up again, and so soon? Did this have anything to do with me? Where, exactly, was I supposed to go? So many questions! I watched the flight of the

Frisbee—a rather pleasant sight—and told my mind to take it easy. Which was just what it wanted to hear! How did I know? Because right away my eyelids started getting heavy, a sure sign of a mind growing nice and relaxed.

“Arthur?”

What was this? Bro was still around? I love Bro, of course, and was happy to be near him. But did we need a whole lot of back-and-forth right now?

“Come on, Arthur,” he said. “We haven’t got much time to learn this.”

Uh-oh. We were learning something? Not another trick? I already knew one excellent trick called playing dead. A real crowd-pleaser, but Bro hadn’t been satisfied so we’d moved on to shake-a-paw, which I never got the hang or the point of. There’s only so much learning you can take in this life.

Meanwhile Bro had trotted over to the Frisbee—flippety flippety flop, flippety flippety flop—and was now trotting back. Always a pleasure to watch Bro or Harmony when they’re on the move. They’re good at sports, especially hockey and baseball. Baseball had just finished, with their team, named the Bobcats, for some reason, winning something or other, possibly the championship. Mr. Salming, the coach, gave Harmony the game ball, which is now in my possession. I keep what’s left of it under the padded chaise on the patio.

But back to Bro, now trotting my way, Frisbee in hand.

“Arthur! On your feet!”

Was that a nice way to ask?

He crouched down, scratched between my ears, did a fine job, although too brief. “Come on, Arthur. It’ll be fun.”

That was much nicer. What a great kid! So great that I came pretty close to getting up. In my mind I sort of did, although my body remained stretched out on the lawn, the short grass soft and comfy, almost like the putting green at the golf course, where it’s possible I was no longer welcome. How had that happened? Before I could remember, Mom appeared from around the side of the inn, over by the shuffleboard court, carrying hedge clippers and wearing a kerchief on her head.

“Hey, Mom,” Bro said. “How long do you think it’ll take Arthur to learn Frisbee?”

Mom came over. Hey! What was this? Bro was somehow now as tall as Mom, or even a bit taller? When had that happened?

She gazed down at me. “Until the twelfth of never,” she said. “What are we going to do with you, Arthur?”

Why, same as always—love me to death! No need for any changes. Just keep doing what you’re doing.

“The twelfth of never means it’s hopeless?” Bro said.

Mom gave him a smile. She’s a beautiful woman with real sharp eyes that warm way up whenever she smiles. I

could watch her all day and sometimes I do, except for the napping parts, of course.

“Nothing’s hopeless,” she said.

“Oh, good,” said Bro. He took a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket and handed it to Mom.

She smoothed it out and read it aloud. ““Something new at the county fair—a Frisbee-catching contest for dogs! Show the folks what your pooch can do. No entry fee and lots of prizes, including a year’s supply of ChewyChewChews, the best chewy around, and a brand-new mountain bike for the winner’s human.”” She glanced at Bro. “The fair starts on Tuesday.”

“So we have three whole days,” said Bro.

“That’s the spirit,” Mom said. “Come on, Arthur. Dig deep.” And she headed off toward the hedge that borders the road, the clippers over her shoulder.

“Mom?” said Bro. “The mountain bike sure would be nice.”

“I hear you,” Mom said, not looking back.

Bro turned to me. “Arthur? What are you doing?”

Interesting question. I seemed to be up and on my feet, and not only that, but digging what looked like the beginning of a quite deep hole in the lawn. There’s a kind of digging where you use just the front paws, but for big jobs you want to get the back ones involved, too. And I was getting the back ones involved, oh, yeah, baby, involved and good, clumps of earth flying this way and that, blades

of grass scattering away on the breeze, and even a wobbly earthworm or two, probably with surprised looks on their faces, if they had faces, which I really wasn't sure about. But who cared? What fun this was, digging, digging, digging. Thanks to Mom, for giving me the go-ahead. Dig, Arthur, dig! Dig all the way to—

“ARTHUR!”