



Madcap Dogs: Revealing Their True Glory

Ron Chandler

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Dogs are the catalysts for human tenderness and daring in the warm short story collection Madcap Dogs.

In Ron Chandler's endearing short story collection *Madcap Dogs*, canines bring the best out of their human companions.

In these lighthearted, Southern-set small-town tales, dogs are emotional bridges for people in crisis; they surprise their human companions in easy, delightful ways. In "Ain't No Fence High Enough," a greyhound is sold by his tyrannical owner to a dog fighter, only to escape and make his way to a girl in need of a furry friend. In "Caveat Emptor," an attorney makes an excellent impression on his formidable boss when he reveals that the lessons he applies in litigation were learned from his ferocious pooch. In "Unpredictable Blue," a hunting dog, loathed by his owner's wife, makes a life-saving discovery. And in the folkloric entry "The Bear of the Bog," a bear falls in love with a human on a hike.

Many of the stories play with perspective, imagining the world through a dog's perspective; one deviates from this format to focus on a bear. The animals' interior lives are depicted as pure and childlike; they are confused by but accepting of human behavior. The result is an entertaining series of flights of fancy—with some notable moralizing deviations. In "Harlequin," for example, a Great Dane who feels unappreciated and unwanted runs away from home; the story proceeds with a shifting perspective and approaches pert television movie territory.

Still, the prose is efficient and flush with humor. In "Incorrigible Mr. Cheever," for example, the centered dog behaves unlike any canine his family has known before; the humans struggle to understand him. His perplexing and funny behaviors include sticking his paw in lemonade and licking it, and sliding down the stairs on his back; the visual gags land with ease. The human drama surrounding these antics is also compelling; his humans are introduced in distinct terms and hold attention. Here and elsewhere, the canine silliness is a ruse, used to secure interest before the stories explore human dysfunction. From the outright villainy of the people in the first tale to a complicated, illegal rescue of animal test subjects in "Clandestine Caper," human backdrops of loneliness, anxiety, or criminality are softened by the actions and perspectives of animals.

In the entertaining short stories of *Madcap Dogs*, guileless canines get into situations whereby the depths of their people's complicated lives are plumbed.

BEN LINDER (March 9, 2024)

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