

The BOOK CASE

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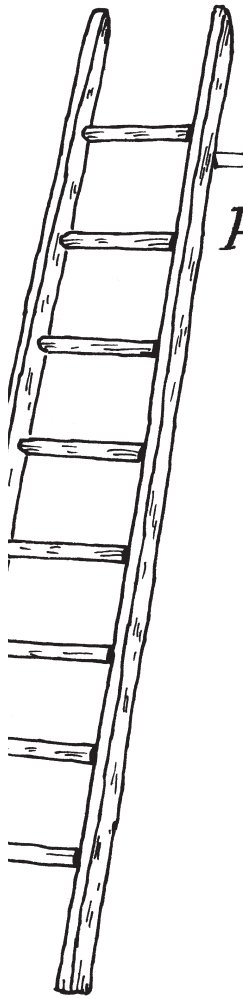
Good Dog, Bad Dog: Double Identity





The BOOK CASE

An Emily Lime mystery



Dave Shelton

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For Ness Wood



'Excuse me, miss?'

'Yes?'

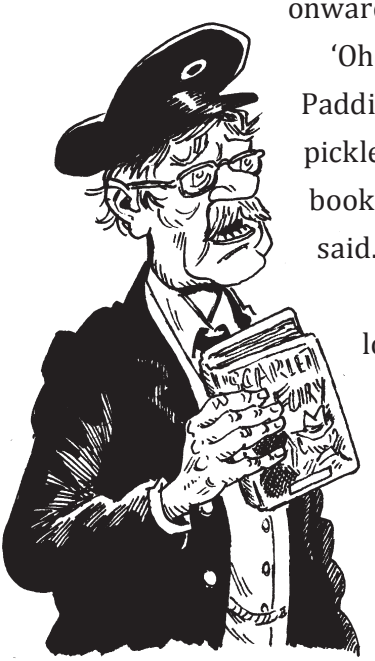
'Sorry to bother you, but a lady over on the other platform asked me to give you this.'

Daphne Blakeway looked round from the timetable she had been examining to find that the man talking to her was a railway porter. He looked old – older, even, than his voice sounded – but harmless enough. He handed her a book. As it happened, Daphne was desperate for something new to read, so she took it from him almost without thinking.

‘Oh,’ she said. ‘But why? And who?’ She scanned the other platform. ‘The young lady with the dog with the enormous ears?’

‘Oh no, miss. This was an older lady. Shortish, wideish, in a tatty old fur coat. And a hat – so I didn’t really get a good look at her ears.’ The porter squinted across the track. ‘Can’t seem to spot her just at present. Said she was on her way to take the book to St Rita’s herself, but then saw you – she recognized the uniform, you see – and wondered if you might save her the bother. You *are* going to St Rita’s, aren’t you, miss?’

‘Yes. I was meant to arrive there last night, actually, to start there today, but I got stuck in London when my onward train was cancelled.’



‘Oh yes, that accident outside of Paddington put everything in a right pickle. But would that be all right? The book, I mean. It’s for the library, she said.’

‘Really?’ Daphne took a closer look at the book. Her eyes widened as she took in the cover. ‘*Scarlet Fury: A Smeeton Westerby Mystery*, by J. H. Buchanan.

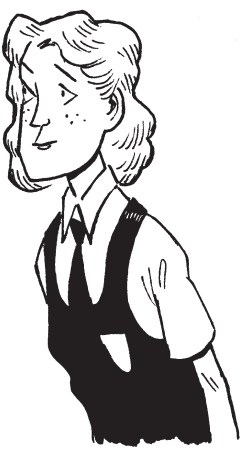
It doesn't seem quite the usual sort of thing for a school library, I must say.'

'Ah well, I suppose you could say that St Rita's is not quite the usual sort of a school, miss.'

'No? Oh well, in any case, I'll be happy to take the book, of course. Oh, I say, do you know when the next train to Pelham comes in? Only I'm not sure if I've time for a visit to the tearoom.'

The porter consulted his pocket watch, holding it at a variety of distances from his bespectacled eyes in an effort to get it in focus.

'Well, miss, let's see . . . Ah yes. Pelham train is due in any minute.' He turned to squint away down the track, and indicated a plume of smoke in the middle distance. 'See? Here it comes now. But you'll still have time to grab a bun or some such if you look sharp. Old Wilf – he's the conductor – he'll want to fill up his thermos flask before they set off again. He's a devil if he doesn't have his tea. You get yourself over there and sort yourself a bite to eat – you look like you could do with it. I'll get your suitcase on board, if you like.'



‘Oh, thank you!’ Daphne raised her voice as the noise of the arriving train grew. ‘That’s very kind.’ She dashed off to the tearoom, stuffing the book into her satchel as she went, leaving the porter to heave her small but weighty case into an empty carriage. When she returned, with some dainty sandwiches in a paper bag, the porter ushered her in through an open carriage door.

‘There you go, miss. Your case is up on the rack there. You have a safe journey now.’ He shut the door after her. Daphne poked her head out of the open window.

‘Thank you so much.’



‘A pleasure, miss,’ said the porter. ‘And the best of luck to you at that school of yours.’ He gave her a little wave, turned, and walked away. ‘Lord knows you’ll need it.’

But these last muttered words were lost in the noise of the train getting up steam. The porter raised a smile and tipped his hat to old Wilf the conductor, passing the other way with his freshly refilled flask. Then, after a suitable pause, he gave a blast on his whistle, waved his flag, and watched as the train pulled away.



Daphne looked out at him from the carriage. She'd had a rotten journey so far, but this funny old man had cheered her with his small kindnesses. She watched him now, half hidden by steam, patiently helping another passenger – a tall breathless man, who Daphne assumed had just missed catching the same train. Perhaps, she thought, her day had just got better, and it would all go smoothly from now on. And as the train picked up speed, she turned her attention to her sandwiches and the book, and she dared to smile a little.