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Author: Jackie Drakeford

You couldn't meet a nicer chap than Tom, but he's the noisiest beggar on Earth. It is unintentional and wholly natural: he could win awards for it. He likes to come out with the lurchers, and is on the receiving end of more lectures about keeping quiet than you would ever believe, but it doesn't seem to work. Take last Sunday.

Tom is a gem in the preliminary stages of ferreting. He'll clear any amount of brash in no time flat, chase roe deer off the land, net up the worst places and never complain, no, not even when the bank gives way and he falls into eighteen inches of icy water. Our little ferreting team works well together, and we let Tom make all the noise he wants, including several calls on his mobile, because we will then let the bury rest while we find some others to net. Then tea and a snack, The Lecture About Quiet, and back we go to the first bury, which is the serious one that we want to show the landowner results from. Buck takes out his mobile and ostentatiously switches it off. This is a Hint.

And this is Tom. He chats to the ferrets as he picks them up and lifts the nets for them. He walks like a centipede in galoshes, straight over the bury. He belches, gets glared at, and apologetically has an attack of hiccups. He sniffs repeatedly until I hand him a tissue and then he stands right there and trumpets his nose into it. Actually, I'm not entirely sure that the last noise was his nose. When, despite this, the rabbits start bolting, he'll give us a commentary on what is happening his side of the hedge until someone can get there and glare at him again.

This particular day, the land had never been ferreted, the rabbits would have bolted with a brass band playing outside, and we were moving and shaking. We were on an old rubbish tip, and the ground gave way periodically, accounting for even more moving and shaking, but it had to be Tom who hit his head loudly on something,

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crashed through two broken pallets, well they were broken after that, and smacked down through a small elder tree, shivering his timbers to the extent that I didn't have the heart to glare at him. Then his mobile went off and we all glared at him including the lurcher. He tried to explain that it must have switched itself on in his pocket while I started giggling uncontrollably which started Buck off as well. Oh we do 'ave a laff. My lurcher, however, takes her work very seriously, and stalked off to monitor a rabbit hole as far away from this group of imbeciles as she could get. The rabbit she caught out of that was a very loud one, and you could see the poor dog was getting a headache.

Picking up nets, digging a hole for the paunch and gutting out the rabbits seemed to take no time with Tom's running commentary, his obvious enjoyment of the day, and his willingness to get his hands dirty or stung in tackling jobs he would never have dreamed of a few months ago. You could not meet a better lad. One day we're going to be very brave and take him lamping.

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Lurchers might be silent workers, but they can be incredibly noisy puppies, and a lot of them are talkative outside the work environment, with a huge vocabulary of yowls and whines. This is especially true of young dogs just starting work, who find it all so very exciting. The concert in the back of the car can be irritating, but most of them will grow out of it given time, and it is best ignored.