

LESLIE GENTILE



ADVANCE READING COPY
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SHAMUS
THE URBAN REZ DOG P.I.

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Ontario

We acknowledge financial support for our publishing activities: the Government of Canada, through the Canada Book Fund and The Canada Council for the Arts; the Government of Ontario, through the Ontario Arts Council, Ontario Creates, and the Ontario Book Publishing Tax Credit. We acknowledge additional funding provided by the Government of Ontario and the Ontario Arts Council to address the adverse effects of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Shamus the urban rez dog, P.I. / Leslie Gentile.

Names: Gentile, Leslie, 1959- author.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20230198821 | Canadiana (ebook) 20230198856 |

ISBN 9781770867079 (softcover) | ISBN 9781770867086 (HTML)

Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.

Classification: LCC PS8613.E5555 S53 2023 | DDC jC813/.6—dc23

United States Library of Congress Control Number:

Cover art: Julie McLaughlin

Interior text design: Marijke Friesen

Manufactured by Houghton Boston in Saskatoon,

Saskatchewan in May, 2023.

Printed using paper from a responsible and sustainable resource,
including a mix of virgin fibres and recycled materials.

Printed and bound in Canada.

DCB Young Readers

An imprint of Cormorant Books Inc.

260 Ishpadinaa (Spadina) Avenue, Suite 502, Tkaronto (Toronto), ON M5T 2E4

www.dcbyoungreaders.com

www.cormorantbooks.com

This book is dedicated to:
the memory our much-loved family dogs

Hudson, 2012–2022

Dyesal, 2009–2022

Brothers and best buddies forever

and to all the joy-filled days ahead with

Sitka, Nexi & Tala

I blame the cat. Okay, sure: a well-behaved dog should stay in his yard, even if he *does* know how to open the gate. But there I was, snoozing under the lilac bush, when good old Mr. Tibbles sauntered right by me along the top of the sagging picket fence and smirked. So, what's a self-respecting mutt to do? Give chase, of course!

And I gotta say, it was awesome. You should have seen the look of panic on that tabby's face when he saw me coming at him. He took off like a pack of wolves was after him — well, like a big goofy rez dog was hot on his tail. Which I was. Mouth open, tongue hanging out, ears flopping in the breeze ... I tell you, it was epic. And I was gaining on him when that moving truck came barreling around the corner. Tibbles scrambled up the nearest tree, while I nearly got hit by the truck.

Squealing tires, the driver yelling out the window, and some fast footwork by yours truly, and I was in the clear. I managed to duck out of the way of that looming front bumper

just in time and then sprinted towards home, taking a short-cut across Mrs. Maguire's yard.

So, yeah, I chased the cat, but I did not — repeat, I did not — dig up Old Man Melnyk's rosebush. After years of Melnyk blasting me with his garden hose whenever I came near his fence, I got the message loud and clear: stay the heck away from his place. The guy is clearly not a dog lover.

But, because I was seen running around on the loose, I got blamed for digging up his roses. And, because I'm a dog, I can't defend myself. So, somewhere out there in this town-house complex is another dog devious enough to go into Old Man Melnyk's yard and dig up his prize rosebush. And smart enough to get me blamed for it.

The name's Shamus. I'm a special kind of dog. I'm what's known as a rez dog. That means I'm a mix of different dog breeds and I come from a Native reserve. As far as I know, I am a mix of German shepherd, husky, and border collie. I was a surprise from the kids' Uncle Doug.

He's a great guy. He's a teacher, and a real dog lover. He's really great at dog training too.

Anyway, Uncle Doug shows up every few weeks to visit the family and brings cool stuff for the kids. Including me. When he arrived with me a few years ago, at first Mom kept saying that I couldn't stay. In the end, she weakened, and I moved right in.

I was about a year old when I arrived. Up until then, I had been living with a woman named Maudie on the reserve. Maudie was an older lady, and she began to get sick and lose her eyesight. It got to be too much for her to have a fun-loving dog like me around. Sometimes I'd get loose and go wandering. It was great fun until I got picked up by the dog-catcher and got put in a place called the dog pound.

Now *that* was terrifying. I was locked in a cage with a concrete floor and fed dry food once a day. The place was filled with miserable, scared dogs who howled all day and night. The whole time, I was petrified. My heart was pounding, and I didn't sleep or eat. My whole world had fallen apart.

Then Uncle Doug showed up, got me out of the pound, and took me home to Maudie. Boy, she hugged the stuffing outta me! And I sure was glad to see her too.

But then, as she held me, she told me that even though she loved me, she just couldn't keep me with all of her health problems. I gave a little whimper and licked her face. I wasn't sure what it all meant, but I could tell that she was sad.

Maudie gave a big sigh and told me that Uncle Doug was going to take me to a really good home where I'd have kids to love me and look after me. She hugged me again and then handed me over to Uncle Doug.

"Don't you worry, Maudie," he said, giving my ears a rub. "This guy will have a great life with his new family."

We went for a long ride in his truck. I snoozed most of the way with my head on his lap, then sat up with my head hanging out the window, catching the breeze as we drove. I love a good car ride, I gotta say.

Next thing I knew, I was at the townhouse complex, and he brought me to the house to meet Mom and the kids. I was thrilled. The kids were thrilled. Mom, not so much.

She sat on the couch, frowning, telling Uncle Doug that they couldn't afford a dog. Then she leaned down to pet me and looked right into my big, brown eyes. She'd had bacon for breakfast, and she smelled so good. There was also a whiff of something on Mom that reminded me of Maudie's workshop. I couldn't resist and gave her my happy doggie face wash. That's when she fell for me and let me stay.

"I'll show Rainey and Cole how to train him, so he'll become a really well behaved dog," said Uncle Doug. I was a little offended by that, since I considered myself to be a pretty good dog already. But if it meant that I could stay with those kids, I was open to a little training, seeing as it usually means getting a steady supply of treats.

Originally, Maudie had named me Amos. But Mom said, "Why don't we call him Shamus instead? Because I can tell — sooner or later, this dog is gonna 'shame us!'" The kids and Uncle Doug laughed delightedly, and I grinned happily at them all, just thrilled to be out of doggie jail.

The name Shamus stuck. And I'm not gonna lie, there *may* have been the odd time that I've caused a wee bit of embarrassment for Mom and the kids. Let's just say it's part of my charm. Whenever Uncle Doug shows up for a visit, we take the time to go through some training, and he shows the kids what to work on with me, like "sit" and "stay" and "shake a paw." Which is okay by me, because between you and me, dog training sounds really official, but really it's all a big treat fest. And I'm always up for that!

Now the kids and I are a team. Rainey and Cole are twelve-year-old twins. Cole loves reading all about something called astronomy, which is pretty boring for a dog, but he's always ready to throw a ball or Frisbee for me.

Rainey is just as fun — she does lots of reading too, something she calls mystery stories. But she's always ready to take me for a walk. Although she's big into street hockey. Not really my thing. Well, it could be if they'd let me play. Which they never do. I always get tied to the fence so I don't grab the ball and take off with it for a rousing game of Chase the Dog. Which I did, once. Now *that* made the game a whole lot more fun. But the kids don't see it that way, so now they tie me up to make sure that I don't get in there and try to play.

They let me do great stuff like climb on their beds, even though Mom says they're not supposed to. She says I might

have fleas and that I'll get the beds dirty. As if I could have fleas, with the number of baths she gives me. Sheesh!

Anyway, things were going great until the day I was spotted by a neighbor on the loose chasing Mr. Tibbles. Apparently, cat-chasing is frowned upon. It was around the time the new tenants moved in. After that, the whole family was in trouble. Until yours truly saved the day.

2

A few days after the Great Mr. Tibbles Chase, Cole and I were in the lane in front of our townhouse playing a little Frisbee. Now that's a great game. Cole throws it, and I scramble after it, catch it in midair, and smugly trot back to him, tail wagging. Then the real fun begins. I make him wrestle for it, before I finally let it go so that he can throw it again.

Max from Number 23 joined us. Max is what's known as a Cree. I've also heard him describe himself as Urban Indigenous. As far as I can tell, it means that he no longer lives on his home nation but lives here in the city like we do. So, because I'm from a reserve, well, that makes *me* an Urban Rez Dog.

"Hey, did you see that Number 26 finally rented?" Max called out. Max wears thick glasses and is tall and skinny, and he always seems a bit nervous. He slouches a bit, which makes me think of an old greyhound I used to know. I ran

over to Max and nudged him on the leg with the Frisbee so he could play catch too.

“No kids, though. I watched them move in yesterday.”

He grabbed the Frisbee and tried to get it from me. I like to make them work for it. You can’t make it too easy, or they’ll get bored and just want to throw the Frisbee back and forth. Which, to me, is only half the game.

I finally let go, and Max sent it sailing over my head to the entrance of Number 44. I was just very delicately nosing around on the very edge of the yard for it when the door opened, and Old Man Melnyk yelled, “Get that maniac dog outta my rosebushes!” and shook his cane at me. Even though I wasn’t anywhere near his rosebushes.

Cole grabbed my collar and dragged me away, and Max snatched the Frisbee from where it lay on the branch of a rhododendron bush.

“Sorry, Mr. Melnyk, that was my fault,” Cole said.

“You darned kids keep that blasted dog away from my roses! He’s a menace! He dug up my new Gloriana climbing rose the other day. I’m going to inform someone if I see him running loose again!” he yelled and slammed the door.

“Sheesh!” Cole said to me. “Shamus, did you get loose again?” He rubbed my ears. “You gotta stay in the yard, buddy.”

I grinned at him. I do love a good ear rub.

Then he said to Max, “You gotta watch where you throw, Max. Old Man Melnyk hates Shamus, you know that! Plus, I don’t think he likes us Native kids either.”

Max hung his head and pulled up the hood of his hoodie as though it would help him hide.

“Sorry, Cole,” he said.

My family is what humans call Indigenous, or Native, and we all come from the same reserve.

A few years back, a whole block of the townhouse complex opened up to Indigenous families who were living in the city for something called an Urban Indigenous Housing Project. So now there are two lines of townhouses that face each other across the laneway, with us Indigenous families living on one side, and all the other people living on the other side facing us. Mom calls them “settlers.” And some of them don’t seem to like us Native families. The only reason that I can figure is just because we look different. Which doesn’t make a lot of sense to me, but hey, what would I know? I’m just a dog.

Personally, I can’t see what the big deal is. I judge someone on whether they’re a dog person or not, not the color of their skin. Judging them for how they look seems pretty stupid to me. Take dogs — a dog can be red or black or brown or white, or even a combination of different colors, and underneath it all, we’re all pretty much the same — just dogs, right? What really matters is whether you’re a friendly pooch or a

snarling, nasty mutt, ready to growl and snap for no good reason. I figure it should be the same with humans.

Anyway, back to our game. I sat down and grinned expectantly at Max and Cole, waiting for the next Frisbee throw so we could get back to our wrestling match.

“Sorry, Shamus,” said Max, patting my head. “I guess we’re kind of boring.” He started to throw again, and the wrestling match was back on. It was great! After a while, even I got tired of the game. Max headed back home, and Cole and I headed inside our place.

What with the Frisbee game, it had been a great day, even if Old Man Melnyk had yelled at us. But then Mom came home from work. And she seemed really upset.

3

Mom dropped her purse on the kitchen table and slumped in a chair. I could tell that she'd been crying. It's hard enough when my kids cry, but when Mom cries, well, it's a little scary. I whimpered and lay down on my dog bed, wondering if I had done something to make her so upset. Like chase a certain cat.

"What's wrong, Mom?" asked Cole. I could tell by his voice that he was worried too.

Mom drew in a deep breath, tried to smile, and said carefully, "There's been some trouble at the jewelry store. Stock has been disappearing one piece at a time from the shop, and now — well, now some expensive rings and watches have gone missing."

Cole sat down across from Mom, and Rainey stood beside her, looking anxious.

I crept closer and laid my head on Mom's lap, looking up at her and whining softly. I didn't know what it all meant, but

I could tell it was bad news. At least she hadn't heard from Old Man Melnyk. Yet. She ruffled my ears, but I could tell her heart wasn't in it, because she didn't give them a really good scratch. There's that perfect spot just behind my — sorry, I'm getting sidetracked. Just then Rainey spoke.

“Oh, Mom,” she said. “What does Mr. Rigby say about it?”

Mom sighed. “He hasn't really said anything. Everyone is really worried at work. We're not sure if the pieces have been misplaced somewhere in the store, or what's happened.”

She tried to smile, but I could tell she was just trying to make us all feel better.

“It'll be okay, you'll see.” She hugged Rainey and smiled at us all. She might have reassured Cole and Rainey, but she didn't fool me. I could tell she was really worried.

4

I knew she was still upset later when she told Cole to phone and order pizza for dinner, which almost never happens unless it's somebody's birthday. Now birthdays I love, especially when there's extra kids over for a party. They all give me their crusts and leftover pizza. And then the birthday cake! There's always at least one piece for me. I love cake, especially when there's ice cream with it. I love how cold it is, and how it makes you sneeze when — okay, okay, I know. I'm off track again. That tends to happen when I start to think about food.

That's when the doorbell rang, which is my cue to get to work. I raced over to the door and stood there barking as loudly as I could, in case nobody had heard it. I could smell the pizza before Cole opened the door. Rainey grabbed my collar and held me back, apologizing to the delivery guy, who stood there looking nervously at me.

Clearly, he was not a dog guy. I could tell by the way he looked at me. In fact, this guy was a cat person. He had two, as far as I could tell by all the cat hair on his pant legs.

But how many cats he had wasn't nearly as important as trying to sniff out just what toppings were on those pizzas. I'm not too fond of Hawaiian, since pineapple makes me burp. The ham's great, but the pineapple is too much for me. My absolute favorite is what they call the Deluxe Meat Lovers. All that pepperoni and sausage and — anyway, Cole was taking the two pizzas into the kitchen, and Rainey was setting the table. I trotted importantly in after Cole to make sure the pizza got to the kitchen safely.

Mom was still in her room, and I could hear that she was talking on the phone. Over the sound of the pizza boxes being opened by Cole and cutlery being clattered around the table by Rainey, I thought I heard her say Uncle Doug's name, so I figured she must have called him. She sounded like she was crying.

Did I mention how great my hearing is? I don't mean to brag, but I can be all the way upstairs on Cole's bed, and I can hear a cookie drop in the kitchen. You want to talk about the humans' five-second rule? I can make it from Cole's bed to the kitchen to scoop a dropped morsel in under five seconds, I swear.

Rainey called up to Mom to let her know that the pizza was here. Mom called down for us to go ahead with dinner without her. Which was fine with me, because when Mom's not there, the kids will slip me a whole piece of pizza.

And bonus — she wasn't there to insist the kids had to eat their crusts. Crusts are really the dog part of the pizza. Everyone knows that, except moms. Why they make the kids eat crusts, I'll never — Cole had started to open the pizza boxes, so I headed over to the table. Rainey grabbed a piece of Hawaiian, and Cole and I had a big slice of Deluxe Meat Lovers. Cole even pulled my dog dish closer to the table so I could be right there beside them. What a guy.

We all pigged out, as Cole and Rainey call it, and Mom still hadn't come down. I could tell that the kids were worried about Mom, because without being nagged three times over, they cleaned up the table and loaded their dishes into the dishwasher. Then they did their homework. Without arguing with each other. I could tell that things were serious around here.

5

“Let’s go to the playground, where we can talk,” Cole said quietly to Rainey as they put their books away, “and Mom won’t hear us.”

Rainey clipped my leash on me. I stood there grinning, my tail thumping against the front door. I love a good walk. It might just be my favorite word, after *food*.

Cole went upstairs and knocked on Mom’s bedroom door.

“Mom?” he said. “Rainey and me are going to take Shamus for a walk, okay?”

Her answer was quiet, but I could hear her say to make sure I was on my leash. That didn’t dampen my enthusiasm, even though I was a little offended at the idea that I’m not well trained enough to walk off leash. If people could just control their stupid cats better, I wouldn’t be distracted and feel obliged to chase them.

As we headed out, I barged ahead and took the lead so I could see what was coming. It was a really nice evening, and

I grinned contentedly, my tongue hanging out, as I led the way to the complex playground.

Max was there when we got there. He was swinging slowly on a swing, scuffing his feet in the dirt.

“Hey, guys,” he said. He was trying to look cheerful, but I could tell that he was feeling down. I went over and licked his hand and sat next to him.

Max lives with his mom, who is really nice. She smells good — a nice blend of lavender and cedar.

Cole and Rainey joined Max on the swings. They all just sat, slowly rocking, not talking. With a sigh, I lay down to wait them out. This wasn’t what I’d had in mind when they’d said, “Walk.”

“Your mom still looking for a job?” Cole asked.

Max sighed and said, “Yeah. She says it shouldn’t take too long to find a new one. She really liked the restaurant where she was working, but they only had evening shifts, and she didn’t like having to leave me home alone all the time. I didn’t like it much either. She’s trying not to worry, since it’s been over a month now. Oh well.” He sighed again.

He scuffed his toes in the dirt and continued, “But she’s got a new boyfriend, and she’s pretty happy about that. I haven’t met him yet.”

They all sat, swinging slowly. I whimpered softly. I could tell they were all a bit sad.

Finally, Max said, “Hey, you know the people who rented Number 26? They’re opening up a new store in the strip mall where your mom works. You know, that place that’s going to be selling beading supplies and incense and crystals and stuff? It’s right next door to Rigby’s Jewelers. I told my mom about it, so she dropped her resume off there.”

Rainey said to Cole, “Maybe Mom could get a new job working there too, if she loses her job at the jewelry store.”

“Your mom’s gonna lose her job?” asked Max. “I always thought that Mr. Rigby was really happy with her.”

“He is,” said Rainey. “Ever since she got all the silversmiths from the reserve to sell their jewelry at the store, it’s been really busy. Mr. Rigby was really happy with her for setting that up. They keep selling out of all the earrings and pendants and bracelets that they bring in, Mom says.”

I thumped my tail when I heard “silversmiths.” It made me think affectionately about Maudie, back on the reserve. I loved to lie at her feet as she worked at her workbench. She always talked to me and explained what she was doing as she worked. I loved all of the scents in her workshop, and whenever Mom came home from work, she had hints of the same distinctive smells of jewelry — yep, I know. Sidetracked again. Sorry.

“We’re not sure what’s going on,” said Cole. “Mom said that at first they thought some rings and stuff had just gotten

misplaced, but now it looks as though things are getting stolen. And it could be an inside job.”

“Wow!” said Max. “Well, anybody who knows your mom knows she’s not a thief. Mr. Rigby doesn’t trust anybody but your mom, I always thought. Not even his son and niece, and they’ve worked there for years! I heard the lady from Number 26 talking to my mom yesterday,” Max continued. “She reads tea leaves and does fortune-telling stuff. She offered to read my mom’s tea leaves for free. My mom was all excited about it. Apparently, her tea leaves said that her future looked great. And success and happiness would come her way. I sure hope so!”

At this, I yawned and scratched behind my ears with my back foot. The sweet spot. Then I hunkered down for a snooze.

6

As we headed home from the park, we passed by Number 26. There was a big black SUV with the trunk open. A man and woman were unloading boxes from the back of the car and taking them into the house.

“That’s the new people,” whispered Max. “The ones that own the new store at the mall.”

As we came up next to the car, the woman smiled at us, took one look at me, and gushed, “Oooh, look at the lovely doggie!” She bent down towards me. I dragged Cole over to her, my tail wagging, and gave her my signature face wash. She laughed and rubbed my ears.

“What a beautiful boy,” she crooned. I have that effect on people — what can I say? I am a pretty good-looking rez dog, after all.

Just then I sneezed. She laughed and kept petting me. She had a really strange scent, something I couldn’t quite peg. It wasn’t food, nothing like a really nice lasagna or pizza smell,

it was ... more like something called perfume, like Mom sometimes wears. That gets me sneezing too, but not like this. This really tickled my nose. I sneezed again.

“Look, Mitch,” she called to the man, who was grunting under the weight of a heavy box he was wrestling out of the trunk. “Just look at those eyes!” she exclaimed. “He’s obviously a really wise old soul!”

I sneezed again, but I wagged my tail and, not gonna lie here, puffed out my chest. I didn’t know what she meant by that “old soul” comment, but I can spot a compliment when it comes my way. And obviously she could see my rez dog pedigree shining through.

As she leaned in to hug me, I started sneezing nonstop. Cole pulled me away and apologized to her. He didn’t have to pull too hard, let me tell you. She had a weird, musky smell to her. Not like anything I could identify, and I consider myself fairly knowledgeable when it comes to human scents.

And I know that humans don’t like to roll around on something that has a great smell, like us dogs do.

Like my buddy Spunky, a spaniel who lives in Number 8. Every time his family give him a bath and make him smell all sweet and flowery, he busts out of the yard and hightails it to the garbage bins for a good roll in whatever he can find. There was this one time —

A giant white poodle shot out of the open door and came right at me, barking and snarling. I yelped and scrambled to get away from those sharp, razor-like teeth.

Rainey yelled, "Hey! Please get your dog!"

Cole yanked on my leash, but I was already scrambling out of the way.

The woman just laughed. She grabbed the poodle's jewelled collar and crooned, "Now, Hepzibah, don't be jealous!" The snarling poodle strained to get at me, barking nastily. "She doesn't like me petting other dogs," explained the woman. She didn't seem terribly fazed at her dog's behavior.

The man rushed out of the house with a leash and snapped it quickly on Hepzibah's collar. He struggled to haul her back into the house, while Hepzibah growled and tried to lunge at me. I stood guard in front of my kids in case she got loose again. I was shaking a little, but I don't think anybody noticed. It was more excitement than fear. Really.

"Oh my goodness," said the lady. "She's usually very friendly, but I think her chakras have been out of alignment since our move. Once she settles in, I'm sure she'd love to get to know your dog."

I sneezed in disgust. As far as I could tell, the only thing Hepzibah wanted to know was how to get her teeth into my hide.

I watched warily as the man shoved Hepzibah inside and shut the door, leaving her to bark at us from the living room window. A real welcome addition to the complex, I could tell.

“Sorry about that, kids,” said the man. He had a really big smile, but to me it seemed like he was just baring his teeth at us. It didn’t quite reach his eyes, and they seemed — watchful.

“She’s a real sweetheart when you get to know her, really,” the man said. I wasn’t convinced.

Behind them in the window, I could see Hepzibah snarling and tearing apart a cushion. That “real sweetheart” was shredding the cushion and sending the stuffing flying all over the living room.

The man shook hands with Cole and Max and then ruffled Rainey’s hair. She grimaced. I know she hates that.

“My name is Mitch,” he said. “Mitch Masters, and this is my wife, Aura.”

“It’s so lovely to meet new neighbors,” gushed Aura. “We’re opening the new shop in the mall. We’re so excited to move in!” She put her hand on her heart. “There’s such great energy here! I can tell that this place is such a place of love.”

Sheesh! Even I could tell that was a bit much. Except for Hepzibah, who was now attacking another cushion, Mr. Tibbles, and Old Man Melnyk, this was a pretty okay place.

But “place of love”? It sounded a bit flaky to me, and I’m just the dog.

Just then a delivery car pulled up. The driver called out the window, “Did you folks order some Thai food?”

The smell wafted out of the car window towards us. It smelled so good I started drooling. I love Thai food, but it doesn’t really agree with me. Once, Cole gave me some leftovers after Mom made a Thai curry, and I inhaled it all so fast that the hot spices didn’t really hit me until it all landed in my stomach. A few hours later, I was moaning and urgently scratching at the door to go out. Mom made me sleep outside that night until my system was cleaned out. Which, after a very rough night, it was. So, while I appreciate the smell of a good Thai curry, I have learned to leave it well and truly alone.

We said goodbye to the new tenants and headed for home. As we rounded the corner to Max’s unit, I could hear Mitch yelling at Hepzibah. I smirked. Clearly, Mitch had found what was left of the cushion.

7

Saturday morning, Cole and I were still flaked out on his bed, the sheets all crumpled up and the quilt sliding off onto the floor.

Rainey came in, still in her jammies, and shook Cole urgently by the shoulder. I lifted my head, yawned, and gave her a lick on the face, my tail thumping against the bed.

Cole groaned and buried his head in the pillow.

“Wake up, Cole!” Rainey was pretty insistent when she wanted something. I decided to help her and started giving Cole a really enthusiastic face wash.

He started to giggle and then shoved me away. As he got up, I snuggled deeper against the pillow.

“Get up, both of you!” said Rainey. “Uncle Doug is here!” She leaned in to Cole’s ear. “I can hear him with Mom, whispering about the missing jewelry. And it sounds serious.”

At that, Cole and I scrambled out of bed, and we all tiptoed into Rainey’s room, the kids crowding around the heat vent.

You can hear everything being said in the kitchen through it, and Mom and Uncle Doug's voices came through loud and clear, even though they were talking quietly.

I hopped up on Rainey's bed and snuggled in with all of her stuffed animals. I could hear just fine from there.

"So, just what evidence is there?" Uncle Doug asked.

Mom sighed. "Well, we've noticed for some time that a few things have gone missing, and we just put it down to bad record keeping. Two watches, and then a few weeks later, a couple of rings. Mr. Rigby refuses to get a computer, and his niece, Edith, records all new stock and then all sales in a notebook. We just assumed that there'd been a few book-keeping mistakes that we just hadn't noticed. But the other day he discovered six sets of engagement rings and wedding bands were gone! That's too much for a simple mistake."

"Wow, that is a lot," said Uncle Doug thoughtfully.

Mom continued talking. "None of the jewelry from any of the Native silversmiths was stolen, thank goodness. And the really scary thing is that it looks like an inside job. There's no way anyone could have known that Mr. Rigby always hides new shipments in the back room closet, under a loose floorboard. Wrapped in a towel. Inside an old blue bowling ball bag. With a box of old polka records on top to hide the loose board. That's his idea of a security system. Once all the

new stock is catalogued, it goes into one of the locked display cases.”

“You’ve got to be kidding! said Uncle Doug. “Well, that’s ... creative, I guess.”

“Well, believe it or not, it’s worked great until now,” said Mom sadly. “And even though he doesn’t trust his son and niece with the security system, it’s more because he thinks they’re both incompetent and — well, useless. Which they are. Mortimer gets really nervous and does a terrible job when he tries to repair anything, and Mr. Rigby has to redo all of it. Edith is really lazy, and when a customer comes in, she just disappears into the back room and pretends to do bookkeeping. Which is a good thing, because she’s really lousy with people. Mr. Rigby knows that they’re both terrible employees, but they’re his relatives, so he’s stuck with them. He doesn’t believe that they would steal from him. And so that leaves me. I’m positive that I’m now his main suspect.”

“Oh, come on, you can’t believe that. He must realize that you wouldn’t steal from him after all these years!” protested Uncle Doug.

“You don’t understand, Doug.” Mom sounded like she was starting to cry. “I’m the only one who knew about that secret hiding spot. He kept that from all of us, even his own family. I only found out about it accidentally when I walked

in on him slipping some new watches into the bowling ball bag while the hole in the floor was exposed and the box of polka records was pulled out of the way. He very reluctantly explained to me what he was doing. And swore me to secrecy.”

Cole and Rainey looked at each other in horror.

“But, Gail,” protested Uncle Doug, “you’ve worked there for five years now. He knows you’re honest. And look at all the new business you’ve brought in by arranging for all of our community’s artists to sell their silver jewelry through his store!”

“It doesn’t seem to matter.” Mom sounded so miserable. “He just can’t believe that a member of his own family would steal from him. I can tell by the way he’s started to look at me that he’s starting to suspect me. And I can’t help it — I’m really worried.”

Rainey and Cole looked really worried too. I whimpered softly. I could tell that this was really serious.

8

Believe it not, for a dog, I know a lot about jewelry. Maudie, my old owner, was a well-known Coast Salish silversmith. I loved to lie at her feet in her workshop and listen as she described what she was working on.

“This brooch is going to be a raven. A raven sat up in the big cedar tree this morning, talking to me, so I told him that I’d make a piece of jewelry just for him.”

I loved all the smells in the workshop. Maudie kept a little pot of tree pitch in a bowl, and when she used her torch to heat it, it smelled great. It made the workshop smell like we were out in the woods. As the pitch cooled, she’d explain that she used it to hold the silver in place while she engraved it.

And as she carved away on a piece, she’d tell me all about her designs. “Some people think that our art is just ovals and swoops, but really, it’s a language, and it tells our stories.”

There was the gas from her torch, which smelled like eggs and always made me hungry. When she took a hot piece

and threw it in the water bath, I heard the hiss of cooling water and then the clink when she lifted it out to drop it in the cleaning bath. Now there's a word that makes me cringe. Baths are not my thing. I loved to lie at her feet when she used the polishing wheel, the vibration and gentle whirl putting me to sleep.

Jewelry has distinct smells to a dog, and I knew all of them — the silver, the gold, and the metallic smells from the different compounds she used.

So, since Mom's in the jewelry business too, I feel a strong connection to her. She comes home from the jewelry store carrying some of the scents that I know so well, and it makes me all warm and fuzzy and makes me remember Maudie.

Maudie was a very famous artist in her day, and lots of people loved the bright, shiny pieces of jewelry that she made. I know how important that stuff is to people. I'm not quite sure why, but I know that it is. And if Mom was in trouble because of it, well, now I was really worried.

9

Uncle Doug stayed for the weekend. I could tell that he was worried about Mom too, but he did his best to cheer everyone up. Saturday night, he made his famous spaghetti for dinner, and he told lots of jokes to make the kids laugh. Usually, when Uncle Doug is over, Mom joins in with all the teasing and fun. Tonight, though, while she did smile a few times, she mostly kept pretty quiet.

After dinner, Uncle Doug announced that since he'd done all the cooking, the kids could clean up.

They groaned but got to work. Mom and Uncle Doug went into the living room, and I could hear them talking quietly; I heard the word *jewelry* a few times.

I hunkered down by the table so the kids wouldn't forget to give me any leftovers. Mom hadn't eaten very much, so fortunately there was quite a bit of spaghetti left on her plate. Rainey scraped it into my dog bowl and added some crunchies. I waited as patiently as I could until she was done

so I could dive in and start chowing down. I gotta say, Uncle Doug does make a great spaghetti sauce. Not too heavy on the spice, which I appreciate, because I burp all night if there's too much —

There was a knock on the back door, and Rainey opened it to let Max in.

"Hey, guys, guess what?" Max said excitedly. "My mom got a new job!"

"That's great news, Max!" said Cole.

Max leaned down, scratched my ears in the sweet spot, and continued proudly. "She'll be working at the new store beside Rigby's Jewelers. The one owned by the new people in Number 26!"

"That's awesome, Max," said Rainey. She sighed. "I wish things were going as well for Mom."

"They still don't know who's doing the stealing?" asked Max.

"No," Cole said glumly. Then he added quietly so Mom and Uncle Doug couldn't hear, "And it looks as though Mom is the chief suspect right now."

"Wow," said Max. "That's pretty scary. I sure hope they catch the real thief soon."

That's when Uncle Doug came in from the living room. "Hey, Max! How's your mom doing?"

"She's fine, thanks. She just got a new job, so she's really happy about that."

“Hey, that’s great news!” said Uncle Doug. “Now that’s something to celebrate! Who’s up for ice cream?”

The kids all cheered, and I barked excitedly.

Uncle Doug served everyone an ice cream cone, including me. We headed out to the backyard, and Rainey held my cone while I got to work chowing down on it before it melted.

I just love how cold it is, even though it always make me sneeze. When you finish lapping up all the ice cream, you get to crunch away on the cone to get the last little bit of ice cream in the bottom.

I gave one last sneeze and lay down contentedly at Rainey’s feet while the kids finished their cones.

10

Sunday evening, I slipped out when no one was looking and headed out on patrol. Sometimes, when Mom puts me out in the yard, I *might* just happen to jiggle the gate open and head off on a little tour of the complex. Just to make sure everything's okay, you understand. And root around a little in the garbage. The kids and Mom were watching TV, so I thought I'd just take a stroll around the complex and make sure I wasn't missing out anything.

I was just nosing around the dumpster when I uncovered our first big clue. Not that I had any idea what a clue was. Here's what happened.

I was checking for any good scraps when I heard footsteps quickly coming towards the bins.

I ducked behind the dumpster so I couldn't be seen. I didn't want to get busted for being out on the loose again. With my luck, it would be Old Man Melnyk. I could hear

the lid being lifted and heard a grunt as someone tried unsuccessfully to throw their whole load in the bin all in one go.

I peeked around the edge, keeping my head low. It was the new tenant, Mitch. I furtively watched as he lost his struggle with the bags. One of them fell at his feet. He muttered under his breath and looked around to see if anyone had seen him. Then he kicked the bag off to the side, shut the lid of the bin, and quickly walked away.

When I was sure the coast was clear, I slunk out to inspect the newly dropped garbage for any decent scraps.

Pay dirt! The bag had split open when he dropped it, so the contents were spilling out, like a buffet just ready for me to rummage through it. Which I did. In the mix was some leftover Chinese food, which I scarfed down in record time.

It was when I was nosing around the rest of the wrappers and garbage for any other choice scraps that I came across a familiar scent that set me off sneezing. It was just like the perfume that the new lady named Aura wore.

Even though I was sneezing, I bravely kept nosing through. It was then that I noticed another scent that seemed vaguely familiar. It was under the Chinese food containers and all those stupid papers that smelled like Aura's perfume. I dug it out triumphantly and gave it a real thorough once-over with the old nose.

I couldn't quite place it at first, but then it hit me. It smelled like jewelry. Jewelry and curry! In fact, it was the exact same kind of spice blend that Mrs. Rigby uses to make her special curry. She makes it every Thursday night for dinner, and Mr. Rigby takes the leftover curry to the jewelry store for lunch every Friday.

I know all this because when I had just moved in, the kids took me down to the store to show me off to everyone who worked with Mom. It was a Friday, delivery day, and everyone was busy unwrapping new stock. The smells in that place took me right back to Maudie's workshop, so I started to wander around the place.

Which is how I learned all about Mrs. Rigby's curry. A warmed-up plate of it was just sitting there on Mr. Rigby's desk. It smelled so good ... how was I supposed to know that Mr. Rigby was coming back to finish it?

I pulled loose from Rainey as she struggled to hold on to my leash. I dashed over, put my front paws up on the desk and scarfed back that plate of curry so fast it was completely gone before Cole and Rainey could drag me away.

Boy, was Mr. Rigby mad. He had a big rant about how that was his special lunch. How he'd had leftover curry every Friday as far back as he could remember, and what was he supposed to do for lunch now?

That was when Mom made Cole and Rainey drag me out

of the store and take me straight home while she rushed out to Curry in a Hurry, a takeout place in the mall, to buy a replacement lunch for Mr. Rigby.

Later, when she came home, Mom was still mad at me. She told the kids how Mr. Rigby had spent the rest of the day complaining to her that the spice blend from Curry in a Hurry just wasn't the same as Mrs. Rigby's. He'd also told her not to bring "that good-for-nothing mutt" — meaning me, if you can believe it — back to the store. Ever.

In the middle of her tirade, my eyes got all buggy, and I started panting and whimpering. Mom yelled at Cole to get me outside fast. And a good thing too, because I barfed up that curry all over Mom's begonias. Not my finest hour.

Which is how I know all about Mrs. Rigby's special curry spice blend. Some would say I know it a little too well.

But now, I was confused. Here was one of Mr. Rigby's store papers with a stain on it from Mrs. Rigby's special curry spice blend for Curry Lunch Friday in the garbage, here at the townhouse. How had it ended up in Mitch and Aura's garbage bag? And why was it here and not in the mall garbage? I know they have these really big bins of garbage in the back of the mall, but sadly, I've never had a chance to investigate them. I knew this had to be important.

I carefully picked up the smelly papers as well as the curry-smelling store paper and trotted quickly back to our place.

I was innocently lying under the lilac bush, trying to look as though I had been there the whole time, when Rainey stuck her head out the door to look for me.

I picked up the papers and trotted over to her, dropping them at her feet.

“That’s gross, Shamus!” she complained, stepping back.

I sat down, frustrated. Clearly, she couldn’t smell what I could smell. I gave a little bark and then nosed the papers towards her.

Finally, she bent down and picked them up.

“Okay, what it is?” she said, looking them over. “Hey ... wow!” Then she patted me madly on the head and rubbed my ears.

“Good dog, Shamus!” she said excitedly. “This could be a big break in the case!” She hugged me and then explained to me, “I read all kinds of detective stories, Shamus, so I know all about solving mysteries! This is an important clue. If we want to solve these thefts, then we have to find clues. Way to go! This is our first big lead!”

Rainey raced into the house, calling Cole. Then I could hear her on the phone, telling Max to meet us at the playground.

I sat grinning, so pleased with myself. While I could tell by the smells that this was an important find, I wasn’t really sure just what it all meant.

11

Rainey, Cole, and I trotted over to the swings and waited for Max to show up. Which he did a few minutes later, looking sadder than ever.

“What’s wrong, Max?” asked Rainey.

He sighed and looked down at the dirt. “Oh, my mom’s new boyfriend,” he said sadly. “It’s all she can talk about. ‘M.T. this’ and ‘M.T. that.’”

“Oh, Max,” said Rainey sadly. “I’m so sorry.”

Max sighed again and said, “I really thought with her working days we could spend a bit more time together. But now she’s spending a lot of her extra time with her new boyfriend.”

“That’s rough, Max,” said Cole. “But we could have it worse. Our mom could go to jail for theft! She’s Mr. Rigby’s main suspect!”

That made Max look up in disbelief. “Ho-lee, you guys!” he said.

“But we have some evidence, thanks to Shamus. We just need some more solid proof. We need to solve this crime before they take Mom to jail. Are you in?”

Max straightened up his rounded shoulders and shoved his glasses up his nose.

“You bet!” he declared. “What’s the plan?”

“We start with the clue Shamus found,” said Rainey. “I need to spread it out to show you guys.”

We headed over to the picnic table, where Rainey spread out the smelly papers that I had found.

“Yuck!” said Cole. “That’s pretty gross!”

“Hey,” said Rainey, “some of the most important clues are found in the garbage! And Shamus found this. It could be really important!”

I sat with my chest puffed out and thumped my tail proudly.

“These papers are from the new people in Number 26. You can tell by the stinky incense smell on it,” said Rainey.

“That and the business name on the label,” said Max. “Crystals, Beads, and More. And there’s the mailing label for the new store with their address on it!”

Rainey nodded. “Exactly!” she said. “Now look at this!” She showed them the paper that smelled like Mr. Rigby’s Curry Lunch Friday. “This one’s address says Rigby’s Jewellers. It’s a receipt for some rings from a wholesale company. You can see here where Mr. Rigby spilled some of his Friday

curry on it. So how did that end up in Mitch and Aura's home garbage?"

"Just what does it mean, anyway?" asked Cole.

Rainey was exasperated, I could tell. "It means that somehow, Mitch and Aura must be involved in the thefts from Rigby's!"

"It does?" asked Max. He didn't sound very convinced.

"Of course it does!" said Rainey. "I don't know how, but I just know it does!"

Max glared at Rainey. "That's the store where my mom just got hired! You can't possibly believe that they have anything to do with the missing jewelry — that's crazy!"

"Why not?" said Rainey. "They just opened up their store next to Rigby's. It makes sense to me!"

"My mom finally gets a good job, and you want to wreck it by accusing the owners of stealing from Rigby's? Thanks a lot, you guys!" yelled Max. "And these aren't clues! It's just stupid garbage, scrounged by a dog!" Max stormed off towards his townhouse.

"Max, come back!" called Cole. "Please, Max, we're sorry!"

But Max ignored him and kept walking. I lay down and whimpered softly. I hate arguments.

"Oh, Rainey," sighed Cole. "What do we do now?"

Rainey shrugged miserably. "I didn't really think about it — I forgot that Max's mom got a job at the new store. I

can't see her being involved in the robberies, but if Aura and Mitch are involved, she'd lose her job if they get arrested. If they went to jail, the store would have to close before it even opens."

Rainey looked like she was going to cry. "I feel so bad, Cole," she said. "I didn't think about how this could affect Max and his mom. And I sure don't want to fight with him over this."

"Me too, Rainey. I never expected Max to get so mad."

They sat together in silence for a few minutes. I whimpered softly. I hate it when my kids get upset.

"These papers have to be a clue," Rainey said finally. "How else did papers from Rigby's store get mixed in with papers in Aura and Mitch's garbage? They have to be involved somehow."

"But how do we know what it means? And how can we get the police to believe this is important evidence? Or tell them that Shamus found it?" Cole sighed glumly.

"We get *more* evidence!" declared Rainey. "We need to start watching Mitch and Aura. And maybe even plan a stakeout at the new store!"

I barked excitedly. I had no idea what a stakeout was, but it sounded delicious. If there was a steak involved, I was in! Not gonna lie, I'm a dog that loves a good steak!

Later that night, I snuggled in with Rainey, with my head on a stuffed bear that stared cheerfully at me.

As she scratched my ears, she said, “I can’t help worrying about Mom, Shamus. It’s kind of scary to think that she could be charged with theft.”

I licked her hand. I’m a sensitive guy, after all.

Rainey sighed and continued. “We just have to figure out who’s doing the stealing. I figure all those detective books I read should come in handy. And the four of us can solve the crime and clear Mom’s name.”

I snuggled in against her arm.

“We need more clues, Shamus. We have to try tailing Mitch and Aura and see if we can find more evidence.” She yawned. “Tomorrow we start as detectives and solve the mystery.”

That made me yawn too, and before we knew it, we were both fast asleep, with the teddy bear keeping watch.

12

The kids had school on Monday, so I hung out in the yard and took care of things. You know, snoozing in the sun, barking at the odd squirrel in a tree ... important dog stuff. It's exhausting, but I like to know that the family is safe while I am on duty.

Mr. Tibbles sauntered by, glancing in the yard to see if he could stir up some more trouble. I knew he was just dying to get another reaction out of me, so I just lay there and pretended to be asleep.

I had developed a very sophisticated plan when it came to Mr. Tibbles. A surefire way to finally fix that darned cat for good. Over the next few weeks (or just days, frankly — it all depended on how long I could hold out), I planned to ignore him every time he walked by our yard. That way, every time he sashayed by, he would get a little bit braver. And I would just wait him out. I figured I could lure him into coming really

close to me. Right in the yard maybe. Then, when he was really close and totally not expecting it, I planned to jump up, bark madly, and take off after him. I planned to scare the cat crunchies right out of him.

Mr. Tibbles looked pretty disappointed when he couldn't get a rise out of me, so he headed off down the road towards Spunky's place, probably to see if he was out in his yard. I grinned to myself. I'd get him back soon enough.

Old Man Melnyk came out and started pruning his roses and fussing in his garden. I kept my head down, because even when I am safely shut in our yard with the gate closed, I know that if he saw me, he'd yell something mean and shake his trowel at me. Definitely not a dog guy.

Early in the afternoon, I was awakened from my nap by Hepzibah, the big nasty poodle, marching by with her head in the air like she was really important. Holding on to the end of her leash was that funny-smelling lady, Aura. She was carrying a small bag of garbage, and they were headed to the garbage bins.

I waited until they had thrown out the bag and were heading back towards their townhouse, and I figured I was safe enough to check things out. I took a quick look over at Old Man Melnyk's yard to make sure the coast was clear. He'd gone back inside, so I crept over to the fence, jumped

up with my front paws, and rocked it gently. With a click, the gate swung back towards me. A little trick I'd learned that my family didn't know about.

I slunk out, looking around to make sure Old Man Melnyk didn't see me out on the loose.

I trotted quickly along the fence line that bordered all of the townhouses, trying to blend in as I made my way to the garbage bins.

I sniffed my way around the bins and all the new bags of garbage, and I managed to track down the right bag. It was pretty easy, given the strong smell of Aura's perfume. That and the fact that she hadn't bothered to put it into the big bin but had left it on the ground just like Mitch had.

I sneezed and then tore open the bag and nosed around inside. Pay dirt! Right on top there were more papers from Rigby's jewelry store. I know that jewelry smell almost as well as I know smells in our house. I pulled the papers out and then pulled out some more papers that smelled exactly like Aura's weird smell. I scooped them all up in my mouth and headed back before anyone noticed that I was out. I hid the papers under the lilac bush in our front yard and then gently nosed the gate shut so no one would know that I'd been loose. I was pretty worn out at that point, so I lay down for another nap and waited for the kids to come home.

13

I woke up to hear Cole and Rainey arriving home from school, so I got up, stretched, and met them at the gate with an eager grin, my tongue hanging out. This might just be the best time of the day, when the kids come home, always happy to see me.

“Hi, Shamus,” said Rainey, giving me a big hug.

“Hey, boy, whatcha been up to?” asked Cole. I trotted over to the bushes and pulled out the papers I had stashed there from my garbage bin raid. I dropped them at their feet and sat, grinning proudly.

Rainey dropped her backpack and knelt down. “Would you look at this!” she said to Cole. “Shamus has more clues for us!”

Cole knelt down beside her and gingerly picked at the papers. “These are more papers from the jewelry store,” he said. “See the return address from the wholesale watch company they buy from? And there’s the store’s address.”

Rainey nodded. "Yup, and these papers are from Aura's store. You can see their store address printed on the label there. So again, how did papers from Rigby's store end up in the same garbage bag here at the townhouse complex? Mitch and Aura have to be involved in the robbery!"

I thumped my tail on the ground. They were so smart, these kids. Picked up right away on all these smells. I was very proud of them.

"Good dog, Shamus!" said Rainey hugging me. "You make a great detective!" I licked her face happily.

"What do we do next?" Cole asked Rainey.

"First, we get a snack," she replied. I wagged my tail eagerly at the mention of a snack. I was starved. "Then we plan our next course of action."

That's when Max showed up, walking slowly through the gate and looking uncomfortable. "Hey, guys, how's it going?" he asked. I could tell he was trying to sound like he wasn't nervous, but a dog knows these things. I went over and gave him a lick on the hand to let him know I understood how he felt.

"Hi, Max," said Rainey.

"Hey," he said. He kept his eyes down on the ground. "Um ... look, I want to say I'm sorry for getting mad at you the other day," he said finally. "I was just really upset to think about the owners of the new store being involved in the

thefts. It would mean the store would close, and my mom would lose her new job. But then I thought about how much worse it would be to have your mom go to jail for stealing. It's just ... I was hoping that my mom would finally find a good job and be appreciated for all she has to offer."

"Thanks, Max," said Rainey softly. I really hoped my kids would accept Max's apology, so I thumped my tail on the floor encouragingly.

Max looked up at Cole, and his eyes were all watery. Then he burst out: "And no matter how it all turns out, well, I know that your mom would never steal anything!"

Cole nodded, blinking lots, and then said, "Thanks, Max."

I grinned at them all. I'm happiest when everybody gets along. It's way more fun, and a lot less stressful for a sensitive guy like me. I remember this one time — that's when Rainey showed Max the papers I'd dug out of the garbage.

"Shamus found more clues! Check this out!" said Rainey. She held out the papers for Max to see.

Max whistled. "Wow!" he said when he read the labels. "But will the cops believe this is important evidence? I mean, do you really think that they'll believe a bunch of kids? And Native kids at that?"

Cole sighed glumly. "Yeah, you're right, Max," he said.

Rainey frowned and then said, "Maybe we need to go with Shamus to the garbage cans next time. We could take

pictures with our phones so that we have solid evidence of where it was found.”

Max and Cole nodded at that idea.

“Good call,” said Cole. “We just have to keep watch to see when they throw out their garbage. And then sneak over and rummage through it. Although, it could get pretty gross.”

“Yuck,” said Max.

“You want to solve this case or not?” asked Rainey.

I grinned up at them all. I was up for another trip to the garbage bins. It’s kind of my thing. A specialty if you will. It’s the thrill of the hunt. You never know just what you’re going to find. I remember this one time —

“Let’s go in and have a snack,” suggested Cole. “And we can plan our next move.” The kids headed inside, so I scrambled in after them so I could get in on that snack.

14

Cole made up some crackers and peanut butter on three plates, and Rainey poured three glasses of milk and put them on the table.

I waited, drooling eagerly by my dog dish. Cole dropped a couple of peanut butter-covered crackers in my bowl, and we all tucked in.

I love peanut butter! It's good, but boy, it's a surprising amount of work to eat that stuff. You chew and you chew, and swallow and swallow ... it's like your mouth gets glued shut with all that peanuty goodness. Don't get me wrong, I really do love the stuff, but wow — it's a real workout. A guy's tongue could get dislocated from all that work!

I finally got it all swallowed and took a big, sloppy drink of water from my bowl. Cole made up some more crackers, and we all got back to work eating.

When we had finished, the kids began to make plans

while I worked on getting the last of the peanut butter out of the edges of my dog dish.

“Okay, I suggest that we keep watch on our suspects,” Cole said. “We need to know what time they get home from their store every day, for example.”

“We can’t just hang out in front of their place,” objected Max. “They’ll get suspicious.”

“Well, how about we go play a little street hockey in front of your place?” suggested Rainey. “We can see their unit from there, and it won’t look suspicious. Just a group of innocent kids playing street hockey.”

Cole nodded. “Sounds good,” he said. “But then what?”

“Well,” said Rainey, “when they get home, we’ll watch to see if they do anything suspicious, I guess. After that, we’ll figure out our next steps.”

I sighed and hunkered down on my dog bed. I knew what “street hockey” meant. It meant that I had to stay tied to the fence by Max’s townhouse and watch, because apparently dogs can’t play street hockey. They have all these weird rules that don’t involve chasing a dog around after he deftly snatches the hockey ball and takes off. I mean, where’s the fun in just trying to shoot a ball into a net? Apparently, the object of the game is to get the ball past the goalie. That’s usually Rainey, since she’s so good. Oh, I get how they try to

take it away from each other with their hockey sticks. That totally makes sense. But not adding in a good old-fashioned dog chase? What's up with that?

The kids got their goalie net and hockey gear out of the garage, and Rainey put my leash on me. Then we all headed off down the street to set up near Max's townhouse.

Rainey tied me to the fence, and I hunkered down with a bored sigh, licking my chops for any stray bits of peanut butter that I may have missed.

The kids set up the net and started to play. Rainey was in goal. And let me tell you, she's good. I watched as Max and Cole tried again and again to get the ball in the net past Rainey, but she was so quick that there was no way they could get past her.

"Come on, you guys, make me work a little harder!" she taunted.

Max started to grumble, but Cole just grinned at her and tried harder. Finally, he got a ball in the net, and the boys cheered.

Rainey yelled, "*Car!*" and they grabbed the net and moved it out of the laneway to let the car go past. It was the new neighbors, Aura and Mitch. We all watched as they passed by and then pulled into their driveway. I stared intently as I saw Hepzibah was in the back, barking like a maniac at us. I gave a low growl.

“Okay, you guys, let’s just head back to our place and see what they carry into the house,” Cole said.

Max grabbed the hockey net, Rainey scrambled out of her goalie pads, and Cole untied my leash and then picked up the hockey sticks and the ball. We all headed to our townhouse, the kids trying their best to act casual.

For me, that’s easy, being a rez dog. I just trotted along like I usually do, tongue hanging out, nonchalantly looking around as we made our way by the suspects. Playing it cool and casual.

As we passed Number 26, Mitch was lifting bags of groceries out of the back seat. Aura opened the hatchback to let Hepzibah out. It’s a good thing she had a strong grip on that crazy dog’s leash, because Hepzibah leapt out, snarling and trying to jump at us.

“Hello there, so nice to see you all again!” Aura said, trying to sound cheerful as she struggled to hold on to Hepzibah’s leash.

I glowered at Hepzibah and gave a low growl to let her know that I was ready if she got loose. Then I scooted behind Rainey and peered at Hepzibah through the goalie net. I wasn’t taking any chances with that poodle.

“Hello!” called Rainey.

“Hi,” echoed Cole and Max.

Rainey patted my neck. “Good dog, Shamus. It’s okay,” she said to me. We made it safely past the crazed Hepzibah and made it to our townhouse in record time.

“Man, that dog is nuts,” said Max. “If that thing got loose, she looks like she’d tear us apart!”

15

The kids put away the street hockey gear in the garage, and we all headed upstairs to Cole's room. I leapt up onto the bed to make sure I was in the middle of the action.

"Well, what's our next move?" asked Rainey. "I mean, you guys seriously need some practice with your hockey moves, but we can't just watch them drive home every day."

I sat panting, looking back and forth between all of them, waiting for an answer. Personally, I was up for anything but street hockey. That is one boring game for a dog.

"Well," said Max slowly, "maybe we should visit the new store and check it out. What do you think?"

Cole sat thinking. At last, he spoke. "We could to the library and then stop in at the new store — it's just across the street. Mom won't mind if we're going to the library. We can get an idea of the store layout."

I whined and glumly lay down with my head down on

the quilt. The library. Great. I know what that means. Sure, I get a walk in, but we're just getting into our walking groove, sauntering down the street, when we arrive at the library, and the kids tie me to the bench in front of the big stone building. I have to sit outside and wait for them, and sometimes it can take forever. There was this one time when it started to rain, and —

"I haven't finished my library books yet!" objected Rainey. "And I have a new mystery to read!" I sat up and grinned at her in relief.

"We can just *say* we're going to the library. We can stop in long enough for me to return my graphic novels, and then we can carry on to the new store," suggested Cole.

I gave his face a quick wash. This sounded like a much better plan to me.

"It's settled then," said Cole. "Tomorrow, right after school — agreed?" They all agreed, and I barked to let them know I was up for the plan.

As Mom's car turned in to the driveway, Max got up and stretched and said, "I guess I should be going, guys."

"See you, Max," said Cole.

"Bye, Max," said Rainey. I gave Max a goodbye lick on the hand.

Max headed for home, and the kids and I burst out the door to greet Mom.

Mom opened her car trunk as Old Man Melnyk came marching across the road saying, “Mrs. Martin, finally! I’ve been trying to talk to you for days. I need to speak to you about that unruly dog of yours!”

That was my cue to duck under the lilac bush. Cole and Rainey stood in front of me, as if they could hide me from Mom and Old Man Melnyk.

“What’s happened, Mr. Melnyk?” asked Mom.

“That rotten mutt got loose again last week and ran rampant all over the complex! He very nearly got hit by a moving truck. What’s worse, he got into my yard and dug up my new rosebush!”

Mom was shocked, I could tell by the tone of her voice.

“But, Mr. Melnyk, we’re always so careful with the gate! And Shamus never digs up anything in our garden. Are you sure it was him?”

“Well, what other big mutt is there around here running amok, I’d like to know!” Mr. Melnyk was pretty wound up. “He’s the only dog I know of that runs around! And if I see him running loose one more time, I am writing a formal letter of complaint to the Housing Committee! If I have my way, that dog will be *gone*!” Mr. Melnyk turned and marched away before Mom could even splutter out an answer.

The kids gasped, and I gulped, still hidden under the lilacs. This sounded serious. And whatever a Housing Committee was, it sounded as though Old Man Melnyk could get them to send me back to the pound.

16

Quietly, the kids grabbed bags of groceries and carried them into the house. I slunk in with my head low and headed straight for my dog bed, trying to keep a low profile.

As Mom came in and dropped her purse on the table, I could tell that she was pretty mad. In fact, she was glaring right at me. I tried to look as noble as I could.

“This is all I need, after everything else that’s going on!” said Mom.

“But, Mom,” said Rainey, “maybe it wasn’t Shamus. Mr. Melnyk never saw what dog dug up his rosebush —”

“It doesn’t matter if it was Shamus that dug up Mr. Melnyk’s rosebush or if it *was* another dog!” said Mom. “Mrs. Maguire already told me that Shamus got out the other day and chased the neighbor’s cat. Plus, she said that he nearly got hit by a moving truck!”

“Oh, shoot,” said Cole.

Rainey knelt down and hugged me. “Oh, Shamus,” she whispered. “How could you?”

I lowered my head and tried to disappear into my dog bed. Honestly, Old Man Melnyk made it sound a lot worse than it really was. And it wasn’t me who dug up his danged rosebush.

“The Housing Committee really could make us get rid of Shamus. You two have *got* to be more careful with that gate! Now get the table set for dinner, and both of you make sure your homework is all done!” said Mom. And she stormed upstairs.

I gulped, keeping my head low. I could tell that I was in big trouble.

“Shamus, you’ve gotta stop sneaking out!” Rainey whispered. “And please stay out of Old Man Melnyk’s roses!”

I gave her face a quick wash. Okay, I had been out on the loose chasing Mr. Tibbles, but now I was getting blamed for digging up Old Man Melnyk’s rosebush. There was no way to say that it wasn’t me. I sighed again and hunkered down. The best thing I could do at this point was to lie low and try to look like the noblest of dogs until Mom calmed down. And wait patiently for dinner.

Cole and Rainey set the table, and Mom came downstairs and started dinner. I took the time to get in a power snooze.

After they all ate dinner, Cole fed me. I really like the way he mixes a bit of hot water into my bowl of crunchies — it's like gravy. It makes me think back fondly on the occasional times when Mom makes a roast beef dinner. It smells so good that I sit on my bed in the kitchen, drooling and basking in all the fabulous smells of cooking, just hoping that there will be some leftover gravy for my dog crunchies. A bit of hot water is the next best thing. It's almost —

That's when Max came over, and the kids told Mom that they were going to take me for a walk.

"As long as your homework is all done," said Mom.

"It is," said Rainey.

"Mine too," said Cole.

"Make sure Shamus stays on the leash until you get to the park!" said Mom. Clearly, she was still mad about me being on the loose.

I got up and scrambled over to the door. I couldn't wait to get outside. This time, Rainey held the leash. We all headed off to the playground, which is fenced, and a place that I am allowed off my leash.

"So, I asked my mom about us coming by the store," said Max. "She's really excited about working there. She says it would be just fine if we stopped by to visit tomorrow after school. They're working really hard to get it ready to for the grand opening."

“That sounds great,” said Rainey. She sounded pretty pleased. “We can watch Mitch and Aura and look around for more clues.”

After that, we played an epic game of Wrestle Frisbee until it was time to head for home.

“See you tomorrow morning on the school bus,” said Max.

The twins said goodbye, and I gave a small bark. Max gave me a big snuggle and headed home.

When we got home, Cole gave me some fresh water, which I gulped down gratefully. I didn’t even mind when he got out the dog brush and started to brush me to get all the loose hairs out of my coat. Apparently, they get all over the house, and some people, not mentioning any names, complain about the extra vacuuming. It’s not that I don’t like getting brushed, it’s just that I can think of better ways to spend my time. Like giving me dog treats, for example. We have this great game where the kids tell me to sit, and when I do, I get a treat. I can do all sorts of impressive things when treats are —

“I’m really worried, Shamus,” said Cole. “About Mom. It’s scary to think that she could be accused of theft, and maybe even go to jail! She could get locked up, and we’d never see her. Rainey’s so darned confident that we can solve this, but we’re just a couple of kids. What can we do?” I whimpered softly. Now I was worried too, thinking of Mom getting sent away to the people pound.

“And what if Mr. Melnyk really does write a letter about you? You’ve gotta stay in the yard, Shamus! Or they’ll send you away too!”

Cole sighed, gathered up the pile of hair, and shoved it into the garbage can. I gave his hand a lick to reassure both of us. We went inside together, and I headed straight for my dog bed.

Would Mom and I go to the same pound? Or did they have separate ones for people?

17

The next day passed pretty slowly for me. To my complete humiliation, Mom made Cole tie the gate shut with an old pink skipping rope before they all left in the morning, to make sure that I couldn't get out of the yard. So, I passed my day just snoozing under the lilac bush and getting up to stretch and walk around the yard to check that everything was okay.

Old Man Melnyk came out and puttered in his garden for a while, so I made sure I was well out of sight under the lilac bush. After an hour or so, he went back in. I gave a sigh of relief, got up and stretched, and wandered around our small yard. Nothing much was going on, and since I knew I couldn't get out of the gate, I went back to snoozing under the lilac bush. It's a great spot. The afternoon sun shines right in under the bush, and it's always nice and dry. I fit right in underneath it. If I can't get to my dog bed, or, of course, one of the kids' beds, this is my next favorite place for a nap. So,

while it was a pretty boring day, all in all, it could have been worse.

Finally, I heard the school bus round the corner and come to a stop, so I got up, trotted over, and stood grinning with my front paws on the gate to greet the kids. I wagged my tail happily as they untied the skipping rope and came into the yard. Finally, they were home!

“Hi, Shamus!” Rainey gave me a big snuggle, then Cole did, and we all headed in the house, with me bounding in the lead.

A few minutes later, Max arrived, and we all sat in the kitchen and had a quick snack. I got a couple of dog biscuits, while the kids had apples and granola bars. Me, I’m a real apple core fan. I waited patiently until Rainey had finished her apple. She told me to sit, which I did, puffing my chest out to look noble and deserving of a treat. She tossed her apple core in the air, and I caught it neatly. A couple of chews, a swallow, and it was gone. Cole’s followed, and then a moment later Max was finished his apple.

“Okay, Shamus, here you go, buddy,” he said and tossed it to me. That’s part of the fun, the toss. I love to catch treats in the air. It’s so satisfying to snatch something as it sails through the air. I swear it makes it taste better. I remember this one time —

“Well, we’d better get going,” said Cole. I jumped up and

trotted to the door to make sure they didn't forget to take me along.

Rainey clipped on my leash, and we all headed out. I took the lead as usual, and we left the townhouse compound and made our way towards the mall where Rigby's Jewelers and the new store were located.

We made a quick stop at the library, and Cole dropped his graphic novels in the book return slot.

I gave a sigh of relief that the kids didn't decide to go inside. We walked briskly down a couple more blocks until we were at the mall.

As we crossed the parking lot to the new store, Cole said, "Okay, you guys, when we get to the store keep your eyes out for anything suspicious. But act natural — we don't want to give anything away!"

Well, that was easy for me — I'm a dog, so we always act natural. And as a rez dog, I'm a real laid-back kind of guy. Not at all like that snobby white poodle Hepzibah. The way she walks down the road with her nose in her air, like she owns the whole —

Max opened the door to the store and stuck his head in to look around. He saw his mom and called out to her.

"Hey, Mom, we're here! Is it okay if we come in?"

She looked up from the counter where she was laying out stock and smiled at us all.

“Come on in, and I’ll give you the grand tour! Bring Shamus in too, he’ll be fine,” she said cheerfully. “Aura’s fine with dogs in the store, and her dog Hepzibah is at home today.” I was relieved to hear that.

Max’s mom, Denise, seemed really happy to see us. Fortunately for me, she likes dogs, so I knew I was welcome. She’s a tall, thin woman with long black hair, and always smiling. She wore sparkly earrings, which kept catching the sun and flashing in my eyes, making me blink a lot. It also made me think of Maudie. Maudie had a beautiful ring with a sparkly stone in it, and I always loved how it caught the light.

The kids and I walked into the store, and Denise began to show us a display that she’d been working on, with rocks called crystals and a bunch of really smelly things she called incense.

Aura came out of a back room. When she saw us, she quickly shut the door behind her.

“Well, hello everyone! Denise told me you were coming in to see the store before our grand opening!” she said cheerfully as she came to greet us.

She bent down and ruffled my ears, crooning, “Who’s a lovely boy” in a singsong voice at me. I grinned up at her, and I was enjoying the attention until I sneezed. She straightened up and greeted the kids as I rubbed my snout with my paw.

Nice lady, but wow! That smell she had went right to my nose every time I came close to her!

She started chatting with the kids and told them to feel free to look around. Max's mom seemed really proud of her new job, and she began to show them around the store. I tried to look interested, but unless we're talking dog treats or toys, stores don't really interest me, to be honest.

I yawned and lay down next to Cole, where I could stay out of the way but keep an eye out just in case Aura or Denise should break out some treats. I could be on my feet and over beside them in no time flat, if that was the case. In the meantime, I would just wait patiently while they listened to Denise talk about the racks of beads displayed along one wall.

I can't honestly see what's so special about beads. But then I can't get humans to understand the importance of certain things that mean a lot to me. Like the qualities of a really great stick, for example. One time when we went to the beach for a picnic, I found the best stick ever! Nicely balanced in the mouth, a good weight, the perfect length, all smooth with no scratchy bark ... and when Cole and Rainey threw it for me, it sailed beautifully through the air! I scrambled after that stick and brought it back triumphantly, got them to wrestle me for it, and then let them throw it over and over again. We had a blast with that stick all afternoon!

But do you think I could convince Mom to let me bring it home in the car? When I hopped into the back seat with it in my mouth, she took that prized stick away from me and just tossed it —

“So, we’re planning our big grand opening next week!” Aura was saying. “I’m so thrilled to have Denise working with me, because I’d hate to be on my own if it gets busy.”

“What about Mitch, won’t he be working here too?” asked Cole.

Aura laughed. “Oh, no, Mitch couldn’t sit still long enough to work here with me,” she said. “He just loves to be busy. He’s a carpenter and does small renovations for people. As a matter of fact, he did some work on this building last year. He even did a small renovation on Rigby’s Jewelers. That’s what gave Mitch the idea that I should open the store here when this spot came up for rent — he felt it was a perfect location for me, and he was right!” She laughed delightedly and clapped her hands as she looked around the store. “He’s put in all of the display cases for me, and today he’s building some wonderful storage shelves in the back room.”

That’s when the back room door opened, and Mitch stepped out. He was covered in wood shavings, which smelled really nice — fresh-cut wood, which reminded me of being back on the rez with Maudie. Right behind her house it was all wooded, and I loved to —

“Hey, dog,” Mitch said absently as he stepped over me and walked towards Aura, Denise, and the kids.

“Oh! Here’s Mitch now,” Aura said gaily. “Look, Mitch, the kids have come to see the store!”

The kids said hello, and Mitch distractedly said, “Hi, kids.” Then he turned to Aura and said, “I just need you to look at the closet in the back room. I really feel that we need to take out the existing shelves, and I’ll replace them over the next few days. I can build something much stronger than what’s there.”

Aura smiled lovingly at Mitch. “You are the sweetest man!” she gushed. “I mean, they look just fine to me, but if you feel they need to be replaced, I guess I’ll leave it up to you.”

Mitch smiled back at her, but I noticed again that the smile didn’t reach his eyes. They were watchful as he carefully glanced around at all of us. He reminded me of a Rottweiler named Mycroft that I once met. He was a guard dog and watched everybody and everything all the time. When he was on duty, he never relaxed. Just kept alert and watchful. Nothing got by old Mycroft.

And Mitch was just like that dog. He smiled, but he watched everyone carefully at the same time. He would have made a good guard dog, just like Mycroft.

“Take a quick look to see what I mean, and then I’ll get started,” he said to Aura as he made his way past a stack of unpacked boxes, stepping over me as he went. Aura followed

behind him, giving me another quick pat on the head as she passed by me.

When Mitch opened the storeroom door, I caught a whiff of a whole bunch of new smells. I scrambled to my feet, interested, and since he didn't shut the door all the way behind him, I wandered in to investigate. With any luck, there would be some dog treats mixed in with all those weird and interesting scents.

Mitch and Aura didn't notice me, or if they did, they didn't care that I was there. Mitch had his head stuck in the closet and was explaining to Aura just what he wanted to do.

"I think we should pull out these old shelves, and then I can replace them with a freestanding shelf unit. That way, we can pull it out when you want to, and we can access the ceiling and back wall easily."

As they chatted, I wandered around sniffing things and poking my nose into some of the opened boxes lying on the floor. This was one really smelly store! But I have to say, a bit disappointing. I wasn't having any luck locating any treats. Or dog toys. I tell you, there's nothing more satisfying than a really great chew toy, especially when it's got a squeaky —

That's when Aura headed back out to the front of the store, leaving me alone with Mitch. I wandered closer to the closet, where he was now dismantling shelves. He was up on a ladder right inside the closet. He was gently knocking on the wall and

listening carefully. As he waited, I heard a muffled rap come from the other side. I sat down and cocked my head to one side, confused. Mitch knocked again and listened intently, and the answering rap came again.

I sneezed again, probably because of the smelly box I was sitting next to, and Mitch turned, surprised, clearly not happy to see me.

“Hey, you stupid mutt! What are you doing in here?” he said sharply, climbing down from the ladder.

No smile this time, not even a fake one. I scrambled to my feet just as Cole came into the back room.

“Oh, gee, sorry, Mitch. I didn’t realize that Shamus had wandered in here.”

Mitch gave Cole a big, fake-looking smile and a hearty laugh as he reached down and gave me a pat on the head.

“Oh, he’s just fine. I was enjoying having him back here with me,” he said. I looked at him, puzzled. That was not the impression he’d given me before Cole came in.

“Wow, there’s even more stock back here,” commented Cole as he looked around. “This is so cool that you’re doing all this carpentry work on the store. Are these your tools?”

Mitch beamed proudly at him. “Yep, that’s right, kid. I’m a master carpenter, so I can handle all of these renovations on the store.” He sounded like he was bragging. I can tell, it’s like when that German shepherd named Dyesel in Number 2

gets out for a walk, and he looks so smug and confident as he struts down the street.

“Gee, that’s so cool,” said Cole.

Cole began asking him about all of his tools, which gave me an opportunity to nose around the storeroom for any stray treats. I ducked into the closet and gave it a good once-over. I began sniffing into the corner, where I could make out something that smelled vaguely familiar. I stood up on my hind legs to get a better whiff. Jewelry! Just then, my collar got snagged on a cloth shopping bag that was hanging on a closet hook. I yanked my head back, trying to get loose. The bag fell off the hook and right over my face, completely covering my head. I panicked and knocked over a broom, which fell with a loud bang. That’s when I really lost it.

Yelping, I skittered backwards out with of the closet, shaking my head frantically back and forth to try and get the bag off. In my mad scramble, I knocked over a stack of boxes behind me. I was really freaking out now.

“Hey!” yelled Mitch. “Grab that stupid mutt!”

Cole rushed over and pulled the bag off of my head, apologizing to Mitch. Rainey ran into the back room and hugged me. My heart was pounding, and I was shaking.

“Shamus!” she said. “Are you okay, boy?” She gave me a big hug, and then she glared at Mitch. “He’s not a stupid mutt! He happens to be a very smart dog!”

“Sorry, Mitch,” mumbled Cole, handing Mitch the empty bag. “He can be a big, clumsy goofball.”

Mitch laughed, trying to sound friendly again. “Oh, that’s okay, kids. I just don’t want anyone to get hurt around these tools.”

Aura rushed in to see what was going on and looked with dismay at the knocked-over boxes. “I think it’s best that you stay out in the main part of the store, kids. The stockroom isn’t really for the public, especially with all these renovations going on!”

Rainey fumbled with my collar until she got a hold of my leash, and then she straightened up. “Sorry, Aura, sorry Mitch. Shamus is usually very well behaved. We should be going now anyway.”

She pulled on my leash and dragged me out of the back room. Cole and Aura followed behind her.

“Oh, don’t worry kids,” said Aura, trying to sound cheerful again. “Make sure you come to our grand opening! But hang on to Shamus’s leash for that.”

Max looked up from where he was standing with his mom at the incense display.

“We’d better go, Max,” said Cole. “Thanks again, Aura, and we’re sorry that Shamus was such a pest back there.”

Denise gave Max a quick hug and said, “I’d better get back to work. I’ll see you later tonight. I’ll make you an early

dinner because I have another date with M.T.” She smiled happily.

Max sighed as he followed the kids and I out the door.

“Man, that M.T. is all Mom can talk about these days,” he muttered.

We walked along in silence for a few minutes, until we turned in to the park beside the library. Cole sighed and said, “Well, that was a waste of time. I didn’t see any clues, and Shamus got into trouble again. I sure hope they don’t tell Mom about that. He’s in enough trouble right now!”

“Oh, I don’t know about that, Cole,” Rainey said triumphantly. She stopped by a picnic table and held her hand out. “Look what Shamus found in that closet!”

There was a really shiny chain that smelled like jewelry and looked like a tiny leash. I couldn’t see what it could possibly be used for, unless you wanted to, oh let’s say, take a hamster for a walk. I was very confused. Cole used to have a hamster, but he never took it for walks, and frankly, I really don’t think that would be a very good idea. I mean, hamsters are pretty tiny, with very short little legs, and as for taking one for a walk, well —

“Ho-lee!” yelled Cole. “Way to go, Shamus! Good boy!” I grinned happily at him and thumped my tail on the ground. I wasn’t sure just what I had done, but I was happy to take

the praise. Especially after that rather embarrassing incident with the bag.

“What is it?” Max asked, squinting at Rainey’s hand.

“It’s a brand-new gold chain,” said Rainey. “I found it tangled on Shamus’s collar when I pulled that stupid bag off of his head. And check out the price tag on it. It’s from Rigby’s!”

“Wow! There’s the proof we needed! Aura and Mitch have to be involved somehow in the thefts!” said Cole excitedly. “Shamus, you’re a genius!”

I sat smugly with my chest puffed out, grinning proudly at my kids. I wasn’t quite sure how getting my head stuck in that bag and crashing into a bunch of boxes filled with smelly junk highlighted my natural-born genius, but I really couldn’t argue with Cole. I am a pretty smart guy. Sometimes I’m so smart, even I don’t see it. That must be the definition of true genius.

Max didn’t seem too happy, though. “I guess it does,” he said reluctantly. “I sure hoped they weren’t. But how do we get anyone to believe us?” He sat down on top of the picnic table, looking unhappy. “And — what if it means that Mitch and Aura go to jail, and my mom loses her new job?”

Cole sighed. “That would be awful, Max. But we have to clear our mom’s name!”

Max nodded glumly. "I know you're right," he said, and we all headed for home. Cole and Rainey were excited about the hamster leash, but Max seemed worried, and me? I was still a little embarrassed about the closet incident.

18

We got to the townhouse complex just before Mom got home from work, so Max headed off home, and the kids and I headed straight for our place.

The kids opened up the door, and I headed straight for my water bowl. I gotta say, walking is thirsty work! And all that excitement, when I got trapped in the bag. I confess, I was terrified until Rainey pulled it off of me. But, as scary as it was, apparently, I had done something amazing, because the kids sure were happy with the shiny hamster-leash find.

I felt I'd done a good day's work, so I had a nice, big, long drink and then headed over to my dog bed and hunkered down until my dinner was ready.

That's when Mom came home, and I could tell that she wasn't in a good mood, which was my cue to lie low on the old dog bed.

She dumped her coat and purse on the chair beside the front door and headed straight for the kitchen.

“Hi kids, I’m home,” she called. She was trying to sound cheerful, but I could tell she was upset.

I whimpered softly. The kids came in from the living room, where they had been watching TV, to greet her.

“Hi, Mom,” said Rainey, giving her a big hug.

“Hi, Rainey,” said Mom. She hung on to Rainey for a moment.

“Hey, Mom, how was your day?” asked Cole.

Mom sighed. “It was — it was okay. We still can’t account for the missing pieces of jewelry, and it makes for a pretty tense workplace.” Then she straightened up and smiled. “But it’ll all work out, you’ll see. I think Mr. Rigby is maybe getting a bit forgetful and put them somewhere that he just doesn’t remember.”

Cole and Rainey exchanged glances, and then Cole said, “Mom, what if it’s not an inside job? What if it’s someone else?”

“What do you mean?” asked Mom as she began to pull things out of the fridge to make dinner.

“Well, Shamus found some clues. In the garbage. We think —”

“Shamus found clues? In what garbage?” said Mom. She sounded confused. And not very happy to hear that I had been rummaging in the garbage. I gulped and tried to slink down further into my dog bed.

“Just when did he get into the garbage?” She sounded annoyed now.

“Let me explain, Mom!” said Cole. “You know the new tenants in number twenty-six? They’re the ones opening up the store next to Rigby’s.”

“I know them,” said Mom. “Aura and Mitch. They came in and introduced themselves when they signed the lease for their store.”

“Well, anyway, Aura wears that really smelly perfume —”

“It’s called patchouli,” said Mom.

“Yeah, well, it’s pretty distinctive,” said Cole.

“Pretty stinky, you mean,” said Rainey.

“Anyway,” continued Cole, “the other night, Shamus found some garbage they’d thrown away. And it had some packaging from their store, as well as from Rigby’s store. So, that must mean that they’re somehow involved!”

Mom glared at me and then turned to the kids. “First, you make sure that Shamus does *not* get out and wander around the complex, and he sure better not get caught raiding the garbage bins, or he really will be gone!”

I gulped. This sounded serious.

“Second, did it ever occur to you that they might have accidentally brought home some of Rigby’s garbage from the mall somehow?” She stood with her hands on her hips, looking from Rainey to Cole.

“Well, no ...” said Rainey slowly. “I guess that *could* have happened.

“But Mom, don’t you think it’s worth —”

“I do not think it’s worth accusing two perfectly nice and innocent people of theft, when there’s absolutely no evidence to back it up!” Mom was nearly shouting now, something she rarely does. The kids looked stricken. I tried to look as innocent as possible.

“Now, get the table set, you two,” said Mom. “Dinner will be ready in twenty minutes. And after dinner, you two walk Shamus, and then make sure that gate is tied good and tight. I do *not* want to hear about him escaping one more time!”

Cole got to work on the table, and Rainey filled my bowl with crunchies. I sat and drooled while I waited.

As she filled my bowl, Rainey said to me, “Never mind, Shamus, I know you found another important clue. We’ve just got to clear Mom’s name!”

I whimpered at her — I could tell how worried she was about Mom. Then I dove in and tackled my dinner.

19

I hung out on my dog bed until dinner was done, since I could tell that Mom was still mad at me for getting loose and rummaging around in the garbage, even though I did find those valuable papers. At least the kids appreciated them.

Once the dishes and the kids' homework were done, we headed out for a walk.

Rainey clipped my leash on, and Cole opened the door.

"Back soon, Mom!" he called.

Mom answered from upstairs. "Make sure you keep Shamus on that leash!" she yelled.

Wow, you'd think she'd know how well trained her own kids are, I thought to myself. These kids are so responsible. They always, and I mean always, keep me on the leash. Even though I'm such a good dog and would stick around if they ever did let me off the leash. But now that we all know what Old Man Melnyk would do if he saw me off —

“Hey, guys, wait up!” Max called out. We stopped and waited as he trotted over to us, and then we all continued walking to the playground.

“How’s it going, Max?” asked Cole.

“Okay, I guess,” he said glumly. “My mom has another date with her new boyfriend, so she came rushing home, got all dressed up, and rushed out again. She did have time to make me a quick dinner, though.” I licked his hand as he seemed pretty down.

“Geez, that sounds rough, Max. I know you were hoping to spend more time with her with her new job,” said Rainey. “But hopefully he’s a nice guy, and you’ll all get along.”

“I sure hope so.” Max sighed.

We all walked along in silence until we got to the swings. The kids sat down and started to swing listlessly. I could tell their hearts weren’t in it. And they clearly weren’t into a walk. I hunkered down beside Rainey on the grass.

“We tried to tell Mom about the clues that Shamus found when she got home from work,” said Cole.

“What did she say?” asked Max.

Rainey sighed. “She just yelled at us about letting Shamus loose in the complex. She said that Aura and Mitch could have brought the garbage bag home from the mall, and that’s how she thinks Rigby’s store garbage got in it. She wouldn’t listen to us when we tried to explain that they’re real clues.”

“Did you show her the chain that Shamus found?” he asked.

“We didn’t dare — what if we got accused of stealing from them?” said Cole. “It *could* be a chain that they bought from the jewelry store. And if that’s true, then think about it — then we stole it from them!”

We all sat glumly.

Then Rainey said, “Well, I don’t want to just sit here doing nothing! Let’s at least take Shamus for a walk around the complex and see if we can spot anything suspicious at Mitch and Aura’s place!”

As soon as I heard the W word, I scrambled to my feet, ready for action.

“Good call, Rainey,” said Cole. “Let’s go. We can just walk past their place a bit slowly and see if we can see anything.”

I marched off in the lead, eager to go look for another clue. Whatever that was. I still hadn’t completely figured that part out, even though I’m apparently really good at finding them.

20

We didn't see anything on our walk, except for my arch-enemy, Mr. Tibbles. He smirked at me as we passed by his yard. It was agony, but I completely ignored him. I could tell he was miffed when I didn't even glance at him, but I was watching him carefully out of the corner of my eye. *Just wait*, I thought to myself. *I'll get you back. One of these days, Tibbles, it'll happen.*

There was no action at Mitch and Aura's place either. We could see Hepzibah in the window, barking and snarling at us, but no sign of Aura or Mitch. Their SUV wasn't in the driveway, so they were definitely out.

Disappointed, we headed for home. To my disgust, Cole tied up the gate again with the old skipping rope.

When we got inside, Mom was on the phone in the kitchen with Uncle Doug.

"So, you can give her a ride on Friday? That would be really great, Doug. I appreciate it."

She listened for a moment and then said, “Great, see you both then. Bye!” and hung up the phone.

She turned to Rainey and Cole and said brightly, “Guess what, you two? Grandma Rose is going to come on Friday and stay with us for a while!”

“Yay!” said Rainey excitedly.

“That’s awesome!” said Cole. “But — why is she coming?”

“Well, I asked her to come and stay for a few weeks, just to help out. Maybe cook some good meals and be here after school. It’ll — make for a nice change for us all.”

Mom sounded like she was trying to be cheerful, but I could tell there was something wrong.

I groaned and headed to my dog bed.

When Grandma Rose comes, the kids have a great time with her, but there never seems to be time for important stuff like walks for me. Just short ones at the end of the day, like they were duty walks or something. Oh sure, Grandma Rose is a really nice person, don’t get me wrong. She cooks great food, and she always makes sure that there’s lots of leftovers for me mixed in with the old dog crunchies, but somehow, well, it’s like I get forgotten when she’s here. A guy likes to be the centre of attention when he’s the family dog, you know. And when Grandma comes to stay, well, she takes that spot away from me.

Mom continued, “I might — I might have to go away for a while, so it’ll be good to have Grandma here with us.”

Cole and Rainey looked at each other. I could tell that they were worried.

“Where — where would you go, Mom?” said Rainey in a small voice.

Mom smiled reassuringly at Cole and Rainey, but I could tell that she was upset even though she was trying to hide it. Trust me. A dog knows these things.

“Hey, you never know what’s coming!” she said cheerfully. “I just thought it would be nice to have her visit, that’s all!”

I could tell that Cole and Rainey weren’t buying it either, but they pretended that everything was okay. They could all act like things were fine, but I could tell that Mom was really worried, and so were Cole and Rainey. I whimpered softly. I was worried too.

“Time for bed, you two!” Mom said. The kids headed upstairs to brush their teeth and get ready. Me, I hunkered down on my dog bed until everything was quiet.

Then it was time for the ole Stealth Dog to make his move. I carefully stood up and walked softly to the foot of the stairs, listening intently. It was all quiet; even Mom had gone to bed. I tiptoed upstairs as quietly as I could and gently nudged open the door to Cole’s room.

Cole sat on the side of his bed, looking dejected. I padded over and licked his hand, and then I jumped up on the bed and settled in.

The door opened, and Rainey came in. She was almost as quiet as I'd been. I could tell that she had been crying.

"I'm scared, Cole," she sniffled. "What if Mom thinks she's going to jail, and that's why she asked Grandma to come and stay with us?"

"Me too, Rainey," said Cole. "I've been wondering the same thing."

Rainey sat beside Cole on the bed.

I wiggled over and put my head on Rainey's lap to comfort her. She began to rub my ears, but I could tell that she wasn't really concentrating on it. She was completely missing the sweet spot right behind my ears.

"What can we do?" Cole asked.

"We get more proof!" said Rainey. "We know that Aura and Mitch are involved in this thing somehow. We just have to keep looking for clues!"

There it was again. Clues. Just what were these things? Apparently, I had a knack for finding them, but boy, it sure would make things easier if I knew just what they were.

21

We had a few quiet days with no more thefts at Rigby's. And with me in lockdown in the yard, I hadn't found any more smelly paper clues for the kids.

At least I managed to stay out of trouble with Old Man Melnyk. That was mainly because Cole made sure that he tied the gate shut every morning with Rainey's old skipping rope.

The really rough part? Mr. Tibbles figured out that the gate was tied shut, so he knew he was safe. Which meant every day he would casually saunter by the yard, and to my total humiliation, he'd smirk at me, knowing that he was safe.

On Friday morning, everybody slept in, so it was a mad scramble for Mom and the kids to get out the door to work and school.

When that happens, I know enough to stay out of everyone's way, I so hunkered down on my dog bed and just watched all the action.

When I was a younger, I thought that rushed mornings were a great time to play, and as everyone was scrambling around, I'd scamper through the mayhem thinking it was a great game. That made Mom mad, and even the kids would get frustrated with me, so I quickly learned to stay out of the way, safe on my dog bed. Honestly, you'd think that they'd see these things as great opportunities to play, like I do. I'm a real "stop and smell the roses" kind of guy. Just not Old Man Melnyk's roses. I steer clear of his roses, trust me. The one time I did —

Cole and Rainey let me out in the yard as they rushed off to catch the school bus. Cole tied the skipping rope around the gate latch and said, "Remember, buddy, stay in the yard!" Then he gave me a quick pat on the head and ran after Rainey to the bus stop in front of the townhouse complex.

It was a slow, boring day, so I snoozed away the time, waiting for the kids to get home.

Mr. Tibbles got even more brazen in his attempt to get a rise out me. He jumped right up on the fence and then hopped down under the rhododendron bush, right inside our yard. Then he sat and delicately washed his front paw, eying me carefully. I buried my nose under my tail tip and pretended to be fast asleep to hide my humiliation from him.

Disgusted with my lack of response, Mr. Tibbles hopped back up on the fence. Then he took his time as he delicately

picked his way along the fence top, waving his tail like a battle flag, trying one last time to get a rise out of me. Finally, he jumped down from the fence and stalked off.

I'd won that round, but it didn't feel like a victory. Oh sure, I'd saved my dignity by ignoring him, but now he knew that I was trapped in the yard and couldn't chase him.

So much for my big plan! Now that the gate was tied shut, I'd never be able to get my revenge on Mr. Tibbles. I tried to make myself feel better by remembering all the great chases I had given him in the past. It didn't help much, and I began to feel sorry for myself, tied into the small yard all by myself.

I was so happy to see the kids when they got home from school that I nearly sprained my tail I wagged it so hard. I howled and yelped and danced around them to let them know how hard it had been to be stuck in the yard all day. They both gave me lots of snuggles, and then we headed inside for a snack.

Mom had just arrived home from work when Uncle Doug's truck pulled up. I raced to the door, barking with excitement. The kids raced out to greet Grandma Rose and Uncle Doug.

I got there first, of course, grinning and wagging my tail. Grandma gave me a big snuggle and then hugged the kids.

“Hey, everybody!” she cried. “How are you all? Boy, it’s so great to be here.”

Uncle Doug got out of the truck and gave Cole and Rainey a big hug each, and then he began to lift Grandma’s bags out of the back of the truck.

“Give me a hand, kids,” he said. Cole picked up Grandma’s suitcase, and Rainey picked up a grocery bag filled with some really great-smelling stuff.

I picked up the scent of salmon and other delicious food smells. I got a big grin on my face as I followed everyone into the house, and I couldn’t help drooling a little. Even though I was gonna be in the background while Grandma was here, at least I was gonna get some great leftovers! And food always makes up for some missed walks. Grandma makes this really awesome stew —

When Grandma saw Mom, she grabbed her in a big hug and didn’t let her go. They stood, just rocking back and forth. Mom said in a quiet voice, “I’m so glad you’re here. Thank you so much, Mama.”

“Well, of course I’m here, I won’t let you go through this alone, my girl!” Grandma said, sounding like she was getting a cold. “I’ll be here as long as you need me to see this through.”

Cole and Rainey exchanged worried glances. I could tell that even though everyone was happy to see each other, there was definitely something wrong.

Uncle Doug brought another armload of bags in and dropped them on the table. "Well, you brought enough food for an army. Which is great, because I'm starved!"

Grandma Rose quickly wiped her eyes, turned, and tried to sound cheerful. "You were born starving!" she teased.

I padded over to my bed and lay down to think. There was always some excitement when Grandma came for a visit, but this time, I knew that something wasn't quite right. I could tell that everyone was upset, even though they were all trying to hide it. You sure can't hide it from the family dog, let me tell you. A dog knows when the family is upset. And this was one of those times.

"Right, then," said Grandma. "I've got some venison stew for dinner, and some homemade buns to go with it. Let me get it heated up, and we can put Uncle Doug out of his misery. Cole, you get the big pot out of the cupboard so I can heat it up, and then you and Rainey set the table. That'll give me a minute to have a nice, quiet chat with your mom before dinner. Doug, you can put the rest of this food away."

The ring on Grandma's finger glittered as she moved and caught my eye. I immediately thought of Maudie, and then food.

When I first came to Maudie, I was a tiny pup and very sickly, so she had to bottle-feed me. I would lay back snuggled

in her arms as she held the bottle, mesmerized by the glittering ring on her finger. She'd watch me and laugh.

"You sure do like this stone, don't you, boy?" she'd say. "You got a good eye for jewelry. You're the perfect dog for a silversmith!"

So now when I see a glittering ring I think of Maudie and, of course, food. And when Grandma comes, wearing her glittering ring, she brings food, with leftovers for me. So, I know a glittering ring means food.

While the stew was on the stove warming up, Mom and Grandma slipped upstairs to talk.

I could hear Mom crying, while Grandma tried to soothe her. I softly padded upstairs and nosed Mom's bedroom door open.

Mom and Grandma sat beside each other on the bed, both of them looking upset.

Mom said, "I'm their main suspect, Mama, I know they think I did it!"

"Don't you worry, we'll figure this out. Or they'll have me to deal with!" Grandma replied. I gave a soft whimper. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be when Grandma came to visit. Mom wasn't supposed to cry. I couldn't help it — I was getting really worried. And, even though I'm supposed to be a big, tough Urban Rez Dog, I was a little bit scared too. What if Mom got sent to the pound?

22

The next day was Saturday. Uncle Doug made a batch of his famous pancakes, and Grandma pulled out some homemade blueberry syrup. Everybody ate their fill, laughing and chatting at the table, trying to sound cheerful. I sat quietly drooling on my dog bed, patiently waiting for leftovers.

I have to say, Uncle Doug makes really great pancakes. Don't get me wrong, Mom makes pretty good pancakes too. It's just that Uncle Doug's somehow come out really light and fluffy, and the way the syrup just sinks right into them —

The doorbell rang, and I leapt into action. I raced over to the door, barking loudly, just in case no one had heard the bell. Cole was right behind me. His hearing is good too, just not as good as mine.

He opened the door and let out a gasp. Standing there was a skinny young guy in a uniform, looking nervous. Next to him was a short, plump older woman, also in uniform,

looking stern and snapping a piece of gum in her mouth. Her hair reminded me of a grumpy old Airedale pup I once knew, all tight red curls that tried to escape from her cap.

“May I help you?” Cole asked nervously.

The man cleared his throat and said, “Uh — is — is this the home of Gail Martin?”

Cole gulped and said, “Yes, it is,” and then he called out uncertainly, “Mom? You better come here.”

“Who is it, Cole?” said Mom as she came around the corner to the door. She gasped when she saw the people at the door.

“What is it, officers?” she said, trying to sound calm. I could tell she was nervous.

I gulped. This was it. Old Man Melnyk had really done it. He had reported me, and I was about to be busted for running loose. That lousy —

I whined and hung my head in shame.

“Are you Gail Martin?” the woman asked. “The Gail Martin who works at Rigby’s Jewelers?”

“Yes. What is this about?” Mom replied.

“My name is Sergeant Minski. And this is Constable Minski, my, er ... nephew. We’d just like to ask you a few questions, if we may.”

“Of course,” said Mom. She was really nervous now. “Please, come in.”

She showed them into the living room and told Cole to take me into the kitchen.

Cole quickly headed to the kitchen and whispered to everyone, "There's two cops here to talk to Mom!"

Grandma marched down the hallway, stood in the doorway with her arms folded, and said sternly, "What's going on here?"

"Mama, please!" said Mom. "It's okay."

The officers both looked at Grandma. The short, plump woman smiled calmly at Grandma. The tall, lanky younger police officer seemed really nervous.

The red-haired Sergeant Minski said to Grandma, "It's okay, ma'am. We're just here to gather some facts. It's nothing to be concerned about at this point."

"It's okay, Mama, I'll be fine. Just wait in the kitchen with the kids, please."

Grandma glowered at the two officers and said reluctantly, "Well, all right, if you're sure."

Now, I would have been really scared if Grandma had given me a look like that, but that Sergeant Minski didn't bat an eye. She was just as formidable as Grandma when Grandma gets mad, and that's saying something. The younger one still looked nervous, but he had since he'd arrived.

Grandma reluctantly went back to the kitchen. Me, I lurked in the doorway, just to make sure that Mom really

was all right. And to hear if the names Mr. Tibbles or Old Man Melnyk came up.

“Okay, Elwood, you can take the lead on this one,” said the sergeant to the young man.

Constable Minski cleared his throat and asked, “I understand that you work at Rigby’s Jewelers, is that correct?” The notebook he held was shaking as he tried to write. Sergeant Minski snapped her gum and glowered at him.

“Yes, I do,” said Mom. “I’ve worked there for just over five years now.” She sounded calm, but I could tell she was worried.

He cleared his throat nervously and continued, “So, Mr. Rigby has reported a few items missing over the past few weeks — um ... let’s see ... yep, got it here. Six wedding rings, six engagement rings, four gold chains, and two expensive watches. Do you know anything about that, ma’am?”

Mom shook her head. “I know that some stock has gone missing,” she admitted. “But we all thought that maybe Mr. Rigby has been getting forgetful and didn’t put them away properly or something. He has a pretty crazy security system and doesn’t use a safe.”

The female police officer gave her a cool stare.

Then she said, “I understood that he kept that ‘crazy security system’ a secret, and no one else knew about it. Just how did you find out about it?”

Mom really looked nervous now.

“Well, I walked into the back room late one afternoon last year and saw him rummaging around in the closet. He had an old bowling bag pulled out, and a box of polka records, and I could see the loose board in the floor of the closet behind him. So he explained to me how it was his security system. He claimed that it had worked for all the years that he’d been in business, and he figured it was better than a safe. He said that if he had a safe, thieves would break in to it, but polka records and a bowling bag? Who would ever figure that out?”

“Uh-huh,” said Sergeant Minski. She snapped her gum again and added, “I understand that you’re the only other person who knows of this security system?”

Mom sighed. “Yes, that’s right,” she said. “As far as I know, I’m the only other person.”

Constable Minski then said, “So even his son —” He consulted his notebook and then continued in his shaky voice, “Ah, Mortimer, and his niece, Edith Rigby, they don’t even know about this security system. Is that correct?”

“Yes, that’s right. It’s just Mr. Rigby and — and, well, me.”

Constable Minski looked up from his notebook and smiled proudly at his aunt.

Sergeant Minski said, “Well done, Elwood.” Then she asked Mom, “Do you have any thoughts on what could have

happened? I mean, that's a lot of items to just get misplaced, isn't it?"

Mom looked up at them and said levelly, "I had nothing to do with the jewelry going missing, if that's what you're thinking. I'm not a thief!"

At that I padded into the living room, sat down right next to Mom, and leaned against her to give her some moral support. She put her hand on my head and rubbed my left ear gently.

Sergeant Minski held up her hands and said, "Hey, we're not accusing you of anything. We're just trying to gather as much information as we can, that's all. I think we're done here, for now." She stood up.

Constable Minski looked up and said excitedly, "Wait, Auntie Bernice! I've just thought of something else!"

Sergeant Minski glared at him. "I've told you a hundred times already not to call me Auntie Bernice at work!" Then she muttered, "Geez Louise!" under her breath.

Constable Minski stammered, "Sorry, Auntie — er, Sergeant. But I have to ask one more question." He took a deep breath and continued, "Mr. Rigby says that you have arranged for several Indigenous silversmiths to sell their jewelry through his store, which has been very popular, and it's all been selling very well."

“That’s a statement, not a question, Elwood!” said Sergeant Minski impatiently.

“That’s right, I did set that up for Rigby’s. It’s worked out really well for both the store and the Indigenous artists,” replied Mom.

Constable Minski continued, “But none of those pieces have gone missing from the bowling bag, now have they? Any idea why that would be?”

“Good point, Elwood,” said Sergeant Minski. “And that *was* a question.”

“I have no idea at all,” said Mom defiantly. “If you think that I had anything to do with the thefts —”

Constable Minski smiled nervously again and said, “We’re just gathering some information, ma’am, we’re not accusing you of anything.”

“I think we have all we need for now, thanks,” Sergeant Minski said. “Here’s my card, and please get in touch with me if you think of anything that might be of help.”

She handed Mom a small card. Mom shoved it in her pocket. Then she opened the front door and waited as the officers passed by her. As Mom shut the door behind them, we could hear Elwood say eagerly, “I did a pretty good job, didn’t I, Auntie Bernice?”

Sergeant Minski sounded exasperated. “How many times do I have to tell you not to call me that at work, Elwood?”

I gave them a quick bark through the closed door to let them know how I felt about them.

“Good dog, Shamus,” Mom said. “You tell ‘em!” She bent down and gave me a big snuggle. I puffed my chest out with pride.

Uncle Doug and Grandma burst into the hall.

“Are you okay, sis?” asked Uncle Doug.

“I’m fine, really,” said Mom.

I stayed right next to her for support. She kept her hand on my head. “I don’t want to upset the kids,” she whispered.

Rainey and Cole were hovering down the hallway.

“Mom?” asked Rainey, “Is everything okay?”

“Everything is fine, kids, honest,” replied Mom. “The police are just doing their job. They’re trying to help Mr. Rigby figure out what’s happened to the missing jewelry. It’ll be good to finally know what’s going on.” Then she smiled and, trying to sound cheerful, said, “So, who’s for more of Uncle Doug’s pancakes?”

Cole, Rainey, and I rushed ahead to the kitchen, but as we did, we heard Mom say quietly to Uncle Doug and Grandma, “I can’t help feeling scared. I could tell by the way they were questioning me that to them, it all adds up to my being the thief!”

“Oh, Cole!” whispered Rainey. “Mommy isn’t a thief!” With her hand over her mouth, she began to cry silently.

“This can’t be happening!” said Cole. I could tell how scared he was. I gave him a comforting face wash. Clearly, they were going to need all the help they could get solving this case.

“We have to find more clues, Shamus,” Rainey whispered to me, hugging me tight. “We have to clear Mom’s name!”

23

Rainey dried her eyes quickly as everyone came back into the kitchen, pretending that everything was fine. Mom was extra cheerful-sounding, and even insisted that I get some pancakes in my breakfast, which was okay with me.

Cole and Rainey scraped the leftovers into my dog dish and added some crunchies. I sat and drooled impatiently, waiting as Mom filled everyone in on what had happened in the living room.

Cole and Rainey loaded the dishwasher while Grandma and Uncle Doug sat at the kitchen table, listening as Mom described the police visit.

“I know they’re just trying to help figure out what’s going on,” said Mom. “But it sure makes you feel guilty to have the cops show up at your house like that!”

“Well, I hope they figure it out fast,” said Grandma. “I’m getting too old for this much drama!”

I listened with one ear while I wolfed down my breakfast. Light, fluffy pancakes with blueberry syrup, there's no better way for a guy to start the day, let me tell you! Now if they'd had some sausages, or some bacon, that would be even better. There was this one Christmas morning when —

The doorbell rang again, and I took off barking to let everyone know it had rung, in case they'd missed it. I skidded to a stop just ahead of Rainey, eager to see who it was this time.

She held my collar to keep me back and opened the door. It was Max.

"Hey, Max, come on in," Rainey said. "We're just finishing breakfast. Uncle Doug made pancakes!"

Mom came down the hall after us. "Hi, Max. Have you eaten breakfast? There's lots left over."

Max grinned at Mom and said, "Well, it was kind of a small breakfast, so I could fit in a few pancakes, I guess!" I knew just how he felt. It was hard to turn down Uncle Doug's pancakes.

We all headed back to the kitchen, me in the lead to let everyone know we had company. And to break out the pancakes again. Because I could always fit a few more in.

Everyone said hello to Max, and Grandma got up to give him a big hug. Uncle Doug served Max some pancakes. Rainey brought the syrup to the table for him. Me, I was already drooling, hoping for more leftovers.

“How’s your mom, Max?” Grandma asked.

“Oh, she’s pretty good, thanks,” he answered, pouring syrup onto his stack of pancakes. “She got a new job at the new store next to Rigby’s, so she’s pretty happy.”

Grandma smiled and said, “I’m so glad to hear it. I knew it wouldn’t take her long to find a new job.”

Max smiled gratefully at her and then concentrated on eating. I watched carefully to see if he was going to finish the whole plate or leave some for me. Boy, that kid could eat!

Unfortunately for me, even though Max had already eaten breakfast, he still managed to finish off his whole plate. He thanked Mom again and put his dish in the dishwasher.

“Hey, kids, why don’t we take Shamus out in the yard, and we can work on his training?” suggested Uncle Doug. “I hear he’s been getting out and running around loose. We need to work on his ‘stay’ for example,” he added. “With any luck, that will help to teach him to stay in the yard and stop running around.”

“That’s a great idea,” said Mom. “I’ll let you off the hook for cleaning up the kitchen this morning.”

I thought it was a great idea, so I scrambled to the door to wait while Cole, Rainey, and Max got their coats on.

The really great thing about a training session is that it involves treats. A lot of treats. And who am I to turn down treats?

Cole got the bag of dog treats, and we all headed out to the backyard, where for the next fifteen minutes or so, I put them through their paces. Every time I sat, lay down, or lifted my paw to shake, they'd give me a treat.

Then Uncle Doug had me stay in one spot and wait for him to say, "Okay" before I could scamper over to him and get the treat. He made me stay longer each time, and in the end, even though I was quivering with excitement, I let him get his way and waited as long as he wanted me to.

"Good dog, Shamus!" said Uncle Doug, giving my ears a good rub. I grinned at him and burped politely. All those treats after blueberry pancakes can give a guy a little —

"Now, we just have to work on him staying in the yard," said Uncle Doug. "So, I want you to work on his 'stay' command every day. Then, whenever you leave him in the yard, remember to tell him to 'stay,' and with any luck, he'll learn that he can't sneak out and run loose. I'm going to fix the latch on the gate now, so he can't wiggle it open, since that's how he's been getting out."

I groaned. There'd be no living with Mr. Tibbles now, once he knew that I couldn't wiggle the gate open. I'd be humiliated every time that stupid cat came by after this.

"Thanks, Uncle Doug," said Rainey. "That should really help!"

Uncle Doug went off to get some tools to fix the gate, and

Cole put the bag of treats away. I was okay with that, because I was pretty full.

“Let’s go for a walk, and we can catch you up on what’s been going on,” Rainey said to Max.

We all went out the gate and headed for the park.

We walked in silence for a few minutes until we were well away from our place.

“Guess what!” said Cole. “The police were at our place just before you this morning.”

“Ho-lee!” said Max. “What did they want?”

Cole sighed. “They said they were just ‘gathering information’ about the thefts at Rigby’s, and they asked Mom a few questions. But Mom’s really worried, I can tell.”

“Geez, this is getting serious,” said Max. We walked along in silence for a few minutes, lost in thought. Me, I was thinking about how good that blueberry syrup was on Uncle Doug’s pancakes.

“We gotta do something!” Rainey burst out. “We can’t stop now looking for clues now!”

When we got to the playground, the kids sat on swings. I hunkered down beside them, resigned, and waited for them to remember that this *was* supposed to be a walk.

“Max,” said Cole, “I’m really sorry, I know your mom just got hired there, but they really could be the thieves. Your mom really could lose her new job.”

Max sighed. "I know. I've thought of that, but geez! We gotta clear *your* mom's name. Because we know she didn't do it!"

"Should we go back to the store and try for more clues?" asked Rainey. "There's no point in doing a stakeout at Mitch and Aura's house. They never seem to be home. There's just that awful poodle Hepzibah there."

We all sat in silence, thinking. The kids were thinking about what to do next, while I thought about steak. Thick, juicy, tender steak, fresh off the barbeque. I started to drool, just remembering this one time —

"Let's go back to the store for the grand opening," Cole said finally. "Maybe we can spot some clues then."

"Hey, it's today," said Max. "So let's go now!"

We all jumped up and headed home to let Mom know where we were going, and then we set out for the store to search for more clues.

24

By the time we got to the store, it was packed with people. Aura rushed over to say hello and insisted that I come in the store, too, since I was on my leash.

“I just love this sweet boy sooo much,” she gushed, rubbing my ears. “He’s welcome in my store anytime!” I grinned at her and trotted inside with the kids.

Denise was at the cash register, with a long line of customers waiting. She waved at us and told the kids to make sure they got a piece of grand opening cake.

A huge cake was set up on a table next to the sales counter. While the kids each took a piece, I nosed around and wolfed down any dropped pieces of cake I could find. You’d be surprised how many people drop chunks of cake when they’re walking around. I felt that I was doing my part to help out by cleaning up all of the cake bits before —

“Max, I’m so glad you came in!” Denise rushed over once the line died down a bit and gave him a hug and a big kiss

on the cheek. Max squirmed and look embarrassed. “There’s someone here that I want you to meet,” she added excitedly.

She looked around and called, “Oh, M.T.! Come and meet Max!” She turned nervously to Max and whispered proudly, “This is my new boyfriend!”

A familiar-looking man shoved his way through a crowd of people near the cake table and made his way over to us. He wore a flashy suit, really pointy shoes, and a pair of aviator sunglasses. He flashed a smile at Max and said, “Hey there, Max! Glad to meet you! Call me M.T.!” and shook Max’s hand enthusiastically.

Max muttered, “Hello” and rubbed his hand once M.T. let it go.

“Sorry, kid, I forget how strong my grip is!” M.T. laughed and slapped Max on the back. “Isn’t this great? Your mom’s doing a great job here! I’ve been in retail for years, and I can tell when someone’s got the sales touch! And I can tell you, your mom’s a natural. Just come check out how great she is on the till!” With his arm around Max, he led him to where Denise was once again ringing in a sale at the cash register.

“Cole!” whispered Rainey. “Do you see who that is? Calling himself M.T.?”

“Holy cow!” Cole whispered back. “That’s Mortimer Rigby! Boy, does he look different!”

“He sure does!” said Rainey. “He used to be so quiet and shy. And he never dressed like that. He always wore really sensible walking shoes and pretty boring clothes.”

Me, I had known it was Mortimer right away. Oh, sure he looked different, but he had a certain scent that hadn’t changed even though he’d completely changed his looks. Mortimer — or M.T. as he was now called — hadn’t changed his cheap cologne when he’d changed his image. And he still smelled like bagels and Fruitios cereal. You know, every cereal has its own signature scent. And Fruitios has a very distinctive —

“What do you suppose he’s doing here, dressed like that? Like ... like ...” Rainey trailed off.

“Like a cheesy used car salesman?” finished Cole. “Or some really hip barista guy at a coffee shop?”

“Do you think Denise knows that he works for his father next door at Rigby’s? And that he doesn’t actually own the business?”

At that moment, Mr. Rigby came into the store with his niece, Edith, who shuffled in behind him holding a bouquet of flower, and looking miserable.

Edith always reminded me of a mouse. She wore large brown-framed glasses and blinked a lot. Her mousy brown hair was pinned back tightly. Even her clothes were

mouse-colored. She wore a big, shapeless sweater and looked unhappily around her. Clearly, this was the last place she wanted to be.

“Quick! They’re headed over to talk to Aura!” said Cole. “Let’s move to the back of the store so Mr. Rigby doesn’t see Shamus. You know how he feels about him!”

I gulped at that. The three of us quickly made our way through the crowded store, away from Mr. Rigby. We all hid behind a big display rack and peered out as Mr. Rigby handed the flowers to Aura and congratulated her on such a successful store opening. Edith stood awkwardly beside him.

That’s when Mortimer saw them and looked stricken. You’d think that *he* was the unwelcome dog in the store by the panicked look on his face.

Mortimer slipped away from Max and quickly wove his way through all of the shoppers to the back of the store and then ducked into the back room.

“Huh,” said Cole. “Would you look at that! Mortimer sure didn’t want Mr. Rigby to see him!”

“Maybe M.T. doesn’t want his father to see him with his flashy new look,” said Rainey. “But that’s just silly. A grown man, hiding from his father.”

Mortimer glanced back out the door at his father once again. He didn’t see the three of us as we slipped into the back

room behind him and hid behind a tall stack of boxes near the door. Mortimer heartily greeted Mitch, who was working in the closet.

“Hey, Mitch! Great store opening!” He strode over to Mitch and slapped him on the back.

Mitch stepped out of the closet, frowning at Mortimer.

“M.T., what are you doing in here?” Mitch asked. He seemed annoyed.

“Relax, buddy! Relax!” said Mortimer. “It’s all good, no one knows that we know each other.” He snickered. “It’s still our little secret!” he said gleefully. Mitch glowered at him.

“I don’t think you should be back here, M.T. It doesn’t look good,” Mitch said. “I don’t want Aura to know anything about you know what!”

“Like I said, Mitch ole buddy, relax!” Mortimer laughed and slapped Mitch on the back again. Then he leaned in close and whispered conspiratorially, “So, you all set for Wednesday night? Midnight! The big heist!”

Mitch shoved Mortimer’s hand away and said angrily, “Hey! Keep it down, will you? Do you want to give it all away? We got a good setup going, so don’t blow it!”

Cole and Rainey looked at each other in shock. Mitch brushed off the sawdust from his shirt and said, “Now, I have to go out and see if Aura needs a hand. It’s getting busy out there.”

Mitch marched out to the front of the store, and Mortimer trailed after him, saying, “You gotta learn to relax, buddy!” He bobbed and weaved as he craned his neck, looking through the shoppers nervously. He looked relieved to see that his father and cousin had left the store.

“Did you hear all that?” said Cole excitedly. “We gotta tell Max! Mitch and Mortimer are in this together! It all makes sense!”

The kids made their way through the store while I grabbed a few more pieces of dropped cake. It was vanilla, and lightly covered with a delicious buttercream frosting. As much as I love cake, I really don’t care for all that sugar when a cake has a heavy coat of frosting. Oh sure, I’ll go ahead and eat it, don’t get me wrong. I’m not going to turn down a treat, but a guy can be a little discerning about what he’s wolfing down. There was this one time when Mom ordered a cake for Cole’s birthday, and —

Max came up to us, and Cole whispered, “We gotta talk, Max! Wait ’til you hear what we found out!”

Max called out to Denise, “See you later at home, Mom!”

“Bye, kids,” called Denise. “See you at home, Max!” She gave us a quick wave.

Unfortunately for me, Edith and Mr. Rigby were standing just outside the door, chatting to Aura, who now stood handing out balloons to newcomers.

Edith frowned when she saw us.

"Hi, Mr. Rigby, hello, Edith," said Cole. "Isn't this a great new store?"

Mr. Rigby looked over at us, nodded briskly at Rainey and Cole, and glowered at me. "Hello, children," he said.

"It looks to be a very welcome addition to the mall," he added, speaking to Aura. I licked my lips nervously.

Mr. Rigby always makes me think of curry. Which makes me feel guilty. I sat and puffed my chest out to look as noble as I could.

"Any information about the missing jewelry, sir?" asked Rainey.

Edith gasped. Mr. Rigby glared at Rainey and hissed, "Keep your voice down! I don't want this to get out before there's any solid evidence! Your mother shouldn't have told you anything about this!"

"Well, she's really worried about it," said Rainey defensively. "So why shouldn't we know about it? Especially when the police questioned her at the house this morning!"

Mr. Rigby was really mad now. "This has nothing to do with you kids!" he snapped. "And I'll thank you to keep your noses out of this! The police will find the culprit. Whoever he — or she — is, the truth will come out!"

He glared at us all again and then added, "I think we've been here long enough. Edith, it's time we were back at our

own store!” He turned on his heel and strode away. With a relieved sigh, Edith followed him into the jewelry store.

“Great job, Rainey,” muttered Cole. “Now Mr. Rigby will be mad at Mom for telling us about the missing jewelry.”

“Geez, Rainey, I don’t think that was a great idea to ask him about the thefts,” said Max. “He seemed pretty mad.”

Rainey sighed. “I know, but I couldn’t help myself. I hate that he thinks Mom is guilty.”

“Well, let’s just hope he doesn’t get madder at Mom because you asked about it!” Cole said. “Now let’s head for home, so we can fill Max in on what we heard.”

As soon as we got safely around the corner, Rainey burst out, “Okay, so listen to this, Max! We were in the back of the store hiding Shamus from Mr. Rigby when M.T. came back there too. By the way, did you know that he’s actually Mortimer Rigby? And he was hiding from Mr. Rigby and Edith!”

“I guess he doesn’t want Mr. Rigby to see his new image!” added Cole. “Because he never looked that flashy before, or called himself M.T.!”

Max whistled. “Sounds kind of weird to me. Actually, he seems kind of weird to me too.”

“But that’s not all!” Rainey said. “Mitch was really mad that Mortimer had come into the store! He said that he didn’t think they should be seen together, because it could blow this good thing they have going. And get this! They talked

about a big heist planned for next Wednesday night! It's got to be at the jewelry store! And Mortimer's involved too!"

"But what can *we* do about it? No one will believe a couple of Native kids!" said Cole.

"We'll just have to be here on Wednesday night, to make sure we catch them in the act!" said Rainey.

25

When we got home, Grandma Rose was in the kitchen making lunch. Uncle Doug had already left for home.

We all sat in the kitchen, me on my dog bed drooling while everyone else had Grandma's homemade soup.

When everyone was done, Rainey scraped off all the dishes into my dog bowl, and Cole loaded the dishwasher. I stood grinning eagerly and wagged my tail, trying to be patient as she loaded some soup and bits of leftover rolls into my bowl.

"So, how does the new store look?" asked Grandma as she wiped down the table.

"It looks nice," said Cole. "Lots of beads and crystals and stuff like that."

"It sure was busy," said Rainey. "Mr. Rigby and his niece, Edith, brought a bouquet of flowers in for Aura. There was cake and everything!"

"Sounds nice," said Grandma. "Maybe I'll stop in next

week and check it out.” She sounded distracted, not like her normal cheerful self.

Having licked my bowl clean, I hunkered down and got comfy on my dog bed, fully expecting to be ignored now that we were home, since the kids would want to spend all their time with Grandma Rose.

But then Grandma asked the kids what they planned to do for the rest of the afternoon.

Surprised, I lifted my head and cocked it to one side. This was unusual. On a normal visit, Grandma would set up a big puzzle on the dining room table for them to work on while she was here. Pretty boring stuff for the family dog, let me tell you. Or she was big on card games. She always brought a deck of cards and would teach the kids a new game. They would sit at the kitchen table and play for hours. Long, dull hours for yours truly.

The kids seemed a bit surprised too.

“Well, gee, do you want to play cards or anything, Grandma?” asked Rainey.

Grandma smiled, but I could tell her heart wasn’t in it. “You bet,” she said, trying to sound cheerful. “I’ll just get my deck of cards, and I’ll teach you how to play a new card game.” Grandma went upstairs to get the cards from her room. Cole and Rainey exchanged glances.

“She’s worried, isn’t she?” whispered Cole. “About Mom.”

“Yeah,” said Rainey glumly. “Everybody’s trying to act like nothing’s wrong, but I can tell that everyone’s worried and trying to hide it from us.”

“Well, I can’t help worrying too,” said Cole. “What if we can’t prove it wasn’t Mom who stole all the jewelry? And what if the police decide that she really is the thief?”

I got up and went over to where he sat at the kitchen table and gave his hand a reassuring lick. Cole absently rubbed my ears.

“We just have to do it, that’s all!” said Rainey. Just then, Grandma came back in with her deck of cards and said, “Okay, you two, how about some Texas Hold’em? Let’s put Shamus out in the yard for a while.”

And just like that, Grandma booted me outside. I sighed and went to lie down under the lilac bush.

26

I admit it. I was feeling sorry for myself. There I was, banished to the yard, when I should be in the house with my kids. Making sure everybody was okay, on the alert to clean up any food that got dropped. It's my job. And Grandma just didn't get it. I tried to have a nap, but I was feeling so lousy about being kicked outside when the kids were home that I just lay there feeling sorry for myself.

That's when Mr. Tibbles wandered by. That cat even had the nerve to hop up and delicately pick his way along the worn-out fence, flicking his tail tip back and forth, just to tease me.

I couldn't help myself. The gate had been left open, and Tibbles had reached the end of the fence and gave a final smug little smirk over his shoulder at me. Without thinking, I was up on my feet and giving chase. You should have seen the look of panic on his face when he lit out ahead of me! I tell you it felt so awesome to be out on the loose again.

We were just skidding around the corner, and I knew that I was gaining on him — I could tell as he shot a look over his shoulder and looked even more terrified. I grinned and poured on the speed.

It was a classic chase. I gave a couple of joyful barks as I closed in on ole Tibbles.

And that's when I heard Old Man Melnyk yell, "Aha! At it again I see, you stupid mutt!"

I skidded to a halt and looked frantically over my shoulder to see him marching out of his yard shaking his fist at me.

"What's next, tearing up more of my roses?" he said. I could tell he was really mad at me, but there was no way to tell him that it hadn't been me digging in his garden.

I immediately sat down in the lane and hung my head, filled with shame. He grabbed me roughly by the collar and dragged me back home. He rang the doorbell, and when Cole opened the door, he yelled, "I've got him this time red-handed! Running amok again! This dog has got to go!"

"But Mr. Melnyk, please!" pleaded Cole. Rainey grabbed me and dragged me into the townhouse, safely away from the clutches of Old Man Melnyk.

Grandma Rose came to the door just as Mr. Melnyk yelled over his shoulder, "I'm going home to write a letter of complaint about this maniac dog. Mark my words, he'll be gone by next week when the Housing Committee hears about this!"

Rainey burst into tears and hugged me tight.

“Oh, Shamus, how could you?”

I whimpered and hung my head, ashamed of myself. Although I wasn't really sure what I had done wrong. It wasn't like Mr. Tibbles was Melnyk's cat or anything.

“What the heck is this all about?” said Grandma angrily.

Cole sighed and said, “Mr. Melnyk gave us a warning about Shamus running loose in the complex. And now he's found him loose again. I guess the gate was left open. He's going to write a letter of complaint to the Housing Committee to say that he's a dangerous dog.”

“We'll have to get rid of Shamus!” sobbed Rainey!”

“Oh, Lordy,” said Grandma. “What else can go wrong around here?” Then she glared at me and said in a stern voice, “Shamus, you bad dog, you've done it now!”

Rainey sat and cried, hugging me tightly as I lay on my dog bed feeling miserable. And a bit confused. Between you and me, I just don't get what's so terrible about chasing a danged cat. And Tibbles was asking for it, the way he'd been taunting me for days. And how come it's okay for a cat to wander around loose, but not a dog?

“Oh, Shamus!” moaned Rainey. “What'll we do without you?”

Even Cole was crying. And Grandma was furious. First she ranted at me and then she ranted about Old Man Melnyk

being such a crabby old man. I just lay there whimpering. It looked like I'd really done it this time. I was off to the pound again.

And just when I thought that I couldn't possibly make things any worse, well, I did.

27

Grandma Rose banished me once more to the yard, and even though Uncle Doug had fixed the gate, she made Rainey tie it up again with the skipping rope just to make sure I couldn't get out.

Humiliated, I hid under the lilac bush, feeling even more sorry for myself and thinking about how unfair everything was. *A guy can't catch a break*, I thought miserably. *Between Tibbles and Melnyk, I'm doomed*. I sighed and snuffled my nose morosely in the dirt.

Just then, I heard the furtive sounds of a dog sneaking along the laneway.

I peered out to see who it was. If it was Spunky, I figured I'd better let him know that he should steer clear of Melnyk's place. Through the fence I saw a flash of white. It was Hepzibah! I ducked my head down, so she couldn't see me.

She looked furtively around and then gave a leap and easily

cleared Melnyk's fence, landing lightly in his yard. A moment later, I heard her digging and scraping in the garden.

So Hepzibah was the culprit! I scrambled up and frantically rattled at the gate. With the skipping rope and Uncle Doug's repair job, there was no way that I could open it. I trotted back a few feet and ran at the gate. With a grunt I took a huge leap, cleared the gate, and ran to Melnyk's yard. I began barking and jumped at his fence, trying to alert him to Hepzibah's handiwork.

Melnyk's front door opened, and he stepped out.

"You again!" he yelled. "I don't believe it! Already loose again and trying to get at my garden!"

All I could do was run back and forth barking to try and let him know that Hepzibah was in his garden digging away in the corner. Destroying another one of his precious rose-bushes.

I heard Grandma, Cole, and Rainey calling me, but I ignored them. I'd had enough. I launched myself over Melnyk's fence and barrelled straight at him. Old Man Melnyk yelled and tried to scramble out of my way. Grandma and the kids pleaded with me to stop, but I didn't listen. A guy can only take so much. I'd been framed, accused of being a dangerous dog, and now Old Man Melnyk was going to have me sent away to the pound. Away from my family. Forever.

He had a look of terror on his face as I closed in on him.

I tore right past him and barreled into Hepzibah, barking at her to get her to stop destroying Melnyk's garden. She stood there in shock with a rosebush in her mouth and dirt all over her muzzle and front paws.

"*You!*" Melnyk yelled at Hepzibah. "*You're* the dog who's been tearing up my garden!"

Yep, there she was, caught right in the act. Here was the rotten dog who'd been digging up Melnyk's roses and getting me blamed for it. I was elated. Hepzibah was busted!

Hepzibah dropped the rosebush and jumped on top of me, snapping and snarling. I yelped and turned to run, and that's when she tried to sink her teeth into my butt. I howled in fear.

"Here, you dogs, stop that!" yelled Melnyk. Hepzibah turned to face him and, snarling, headed towards him. Old Man Melnyk started to back away.

"N-nice doggie," he said. "Good doggie!" Now he sounded really scared.

Before Hepzibah could jump at him, I tackled her from behind, shoving her away from Melnyk as best I could. He was a cranky old guy, but no one deserves to get bit by that nasty poodle, not even Old Man Melnyk.

I knocked Hepzibah over, and we landed in a heap. As I scrambled to get up, Hepzibah snapped at me again. I yelped and scampered out of the way of her teeth. Dancing out of

bite range, I kept herding her away from Mr. Melnyk until I could see that he was safely out of his yard and had slammed the gate shut. I scrambled away from Hepzibah and stood panting, eyeing her carefully.

Now I was alone, trapped in Melnyk's yard with that nasty poodle. Hepzibah lowered her head and growled again, slowly advancing towards me. I hastily backed towards the gate, looking over my shoulder to see if I could safely get out of the yard.

"Hepzibah! You bad girl!" I heard Aura scream as she rushed up and opened the gate. I shot past her and sat down hard next to the kids and Grandma and tried to look nonchalant.

Aura got the leash on Hepzibah and grimly held on as Hepzibah barked and jumped at me. Me, I sat with my chest puffed out, trying to look like the world's best-behaved dog.

Aura dragged Hepzibah off home, calling over her shoulder, "I'm so sorry, Mr. Melnyk, we'll pay for any damage to your garden!"

Grandma grabbed me by the collar and said sternly, "Shamus, you get in the house *now*!" Then she marched me back into the townhouse. The kids followed behind her, not saying anything. I could tell that they were really upset with me too.

“You bad dog!” Grandma glowered at me. I looked up at her and gulped. I could tell she was mad at me.

“You lie down on your dog bed, and don’t you dare move from there!” Grandma angrily shook her finger at me.

I knew I’d really done it this time. Rainey and Cole looked miserably at me.

“Oh, Shamus, how could you!” said Rainey reproachfully.

“Breaking out twice in one day!” said Cole. I lowered my eyes, ashamed. When you put it that way, it did look pretty bad. And I admit it, two breakouts in one day was a bit over the top, even for me. But to be fair, the second time, well, I was only trying to be helpful. Busting out and barking at Melnyk’s fence was the only way I could let him know that Hepzibah was the real culprit, not me.

But this time, instead of making things better I’d made things worse. Way worse, apparently. It just wasn’t fair. Even though I’d proved that it was Hepzibah digging up Melnyk’s garden, now I was in even bigger trouble.

I sighed, hunkered down, and tried to snooze, but I slept fitfully. I began to dream that I was chasing Mr. Tibbles, but then it all changed to Old Man Melnyk dragging me off to the pound. As he triumphantly slammed the door shut, I yelped and jerked awake, my heart pounding. I lay on my bed, whimpering and feeling sorry for myself.

28

I heard Mom's car drive up. I jumped up and ran to be the first one to the door so that I could try to look as noble as possible before she heard the news about my latest little escapades. The kids and Grandma followed behind me.

That's when we saw the police car pull up and park in front of the house.

Cole gasped, and Rainey said, "Oh no!" in a frightened voice as Sergeant Minski and Constable Minski got out and walked up to Mom's car.

"What the heck's going on now?" muttered Grandma Rose.

Mom got out of the car, looking really nervous. She looked at the house and tried to smile reassuringly at us as we looked out the window.

Grandma opened the front door and marched out to stand beside Mom. I trotted out to sit down beside her as well to stand guard.

Sergeant Minski sauntered up, her thumbs in her belt loops, and said, “Afternoon, folks.”

Constable Minski cleared his throat nervously, clutching his notebook.

“Is there something I can do for you?” Mom asked. I could tell she was trying her best to sound calm. Grandma Rose stood with her arms crossed and glowered at the two police officers from the front door.

“As a matter of fact, there is,” said Sergeant Minski. “Show her the paper, Elwood.”

“I’m on it, Auntie — er, Sergeant,” said Constable Minski. He pulled out a folded piece of paper from the front seat of the police car and handed it to Mom.

“This is a warrant to search your car, ma’am,” said Sergeant Minski. “We’ve had an anonymous tip called in to the station.”

“Shut it, Elwood!” Sergeant Minski sounded annoyed. “You don’t need to tell her that part!”

“Go ahead, search away,” said Mom. “There won’t be anything incriminating in there, unless you have a law against old granola bar wrappers and the odd orange peel left by the kids. That, and a *whole* lot of dog hair.” I hung my head at that. A guy can’t help it if he sheds all the time and —

Constable Minski opened the passenger door of Mom’s car and then opened the glove compartment. He rifled

through and pulled out a dark cloth bag pulled closed with a drawstring.

Mom looked confused. "What's that?" she asked, looking up at the kids. "Cole? Rainey? Is that bag yours?"

Constable Minski looked in the bag and said, "Aha!" in a triumphant voice. "Look at this, Auntie Bernice! We got her!"

Sergeant Minski leaned over and glanced in the bag, then whistled softly. "Well, well, well. Not too clever to keep everything in the car, now was it?" Then, with a glare at Constable Minski, she hissed, "And don't call me that!"

Mom began to protest. "But ... I don't understand! I've never seen that bag before. Honestly! You have to believe me!"

Sergeant Minski held it out so that Mom could see the contents of the bag. "I'm sure you recognize all these rings and watches, though, can't you? Looks like the missing stock from the jewelry store!"

"You'll have to come with us to the station, ma'am, for questioning." Sergeant Minski sounded smug. "You've been found in possession of stolen goods."

"No!" yelled Rainey. "You can't do this!"

"My mom's not a thief!" said Cole angrily. "You can't believe she'd do this!"

"Quiet now, kids. We'll get this sorted out," said Grandma Rose grimly. She held on to Cole and Rainey.

That's when I lost it. I rushed at the squad car, barking wildly as the police led Mom towards it. I didn't know for sure what was happening, but my kids were really upset. So was Mom. And she sure didn't look very happy about going with the two police officers.

"Get back! Bad dog!" screamed Constable Minski as I charged at him. He shrieked, ran around the far side of the police car, yanked the passenger door open, and leapt in, slamming the door after him.

"Elwood, you idiot!" yelled Sergeant Minski.

That's when Old Man Melnyk marched up to Sergeant Minski and yelled, "This dog is a menace to this community! He needs to be taken to the pound!"

Rainey and Cole were sobbing and Grandma was furious, yelling, "You stay out of this, mister!" at Melnyk.

Sergeant Minski yelled, "Somebody get this danged dog under control! Elwood, get out of the car and give me a hand here!"

Mom called, "Cole, come and get Shamus, *now*! It'll be okay, kids. We'll get this sorted out. I promise!"

Old Man Melnyk yelled, "I demand you take this dog away! He's a menace, I tell you!"

Cole ran out to the car, grabbed me by the collar, and tried to drag me away from the police car. But I dug in, barking wildly, and resisted his tugs on my collar. I kept barking

at the police and Old Man Melnyk. I was furious that the police were taking Mom off to the pound, and even more angry at Old Man Melnyk for showing up to complain about me.

Old Man Melnyk kept yelling, "You see? You see what a menace this dog is? You should arrest *him* too!"

Elwood stayed put in the front seat until Cole had dragged me away from the police car. Rainey clipped my leash on me and held on tight so that I couldn't get away again.

It was only then that Elwood got out and tried to look tough. "Sorry, Auntie Bernice," he muttered. "You know I'm afraid of dogs."

Even I could tell that things were falling apart. The kids were sobbing, Mom was crying, Grandma was yelling at Old Man Melnyk, Old Man Melnyk was yelling, "Arrest that dog! He's a menace!" and I was madly barking, trying to tell the police that Mom was innocent. All of the neighbors had come out of their townhouses and were staring at us.

"EVERYBODY QUIET!" bellowed Sergeant Minski. Everyone fell silent. Even I stopped barking and immediately sat down.

"Now then, sir." She glared at Old Man Melnyk. "I suggest that you go home, and you can file a report of a dangerous dog through the proper channels."

Then she turned to the rest of us. "Look, folks, I'm sorry.

I know that this seems scary, kids, but it's just procedure at this point. You'll just have to be patient and trust the system. We're just taking your mom in for questioning. But get that dog under control! He *is* a menace!"

She turned to Mom. "Please get in the car, ma'am. Now!"

Mom looked at us, gave a weak smile, said, "It'll be okay, kids, don't worry," and got into the back of the police car.

Sergeant Minski glowered at everyone standing around watching, and bellowed, "There's nothing to see, here, folks. You can all go back inside now. And I mean *now*!"

The neighbors reluctantly shuffled back inside their town-houses, but I could see them all peering out their windows.

Then she turned to Elwood and hissed, "You idiot, Elwood, how about a little reliable backup next time?"

"He's a big dog, Auntie Bernice, I'm sorry!" whined Elwood. "Did you see the size of his teeth?"

"You're just lucky I don't write you up for incompetence!" she muttered. "And stop calling me Auntie Bernice!"

They both got into the squad car and drove away, with Mom looking back helplessly out the window at us all.

"That's it, everyone inside," said Grandma. "And don't you worry. I'm gonna phone my niece Andrea, the lawyer. She'll straighten this all out."

She marched us all inside, the kids still crying. I was growling under my breath.

I headed straight for my dog bed in the kitchen. The kids clustered around Grandma as she dialed her phone.

“Hello, Andrea? This is your Auntie Rose. I have a problem. Well, Gail does.”

She listened a moment and then said, “There’ve been some thefts from the jewelry store where Gail works, and it looks like an inside job. Two cops just showed up with a warrant to search her car, and they found a bag in the glove compartment with some of the missing pieces in it. Apparently, they had an anonymous tip, so they’ve taken Gail in for questioning.”

She listened for a few moments more and then said, “That would be wonderful. Thank you so much!”

She hung up the phone and turned to the kids. “It’ll be okay, kids, you’ll see. My niece — she’s your cousin Andrea — is a lawyer. She’s going to drop everything and head down to the police station to be there when they question your mom.”

I gave a whimper of relief. Rainey hugged Grandma tightly and said, “Oh, Grandma, thank you so much!” She began to cry once more.

Cole said, “Thank goodness!” and hugged Grandma and Rainey.

“Well, I don’t know who’s behind those thefts. All I know is that your mother is *not* a thief!” declared Grandma. She hugged the kids tightly as they all cried.

I don't know what being arrested meant, but it had to be bad. Even worse than me being sent away to the dog pound. And now, Mom had actually been taken away to the pound. I sat down, put my head back, and howled in despair.

29

It was late in the afternoon when I heard a car pulling up in front of the house. I raced to the living room window to see who it was. Mom was stepping out of a flashy red car driven by a woman of about the same age as Mom. I barked excitedly. The kids rushed out of the house and threw themselves into Mom's arms. I leapt around them all, yapping away happily. I didn't know who this woman was, but she had busted Mom out of the pound, so to me, she was a hero. Grandma Rose came down the sidewalk after us and gave first Mom a big hug, and then the woman who was standing next to her, smiling.

"Thank you so much, Andrea!" she said.

"Are you kidding?" Andrea said, grinning. "I live for this stuff. They really had nothing to base any charges on, and they knew it."

"It's okay, kids," Mom said to Rainey and Cole. "Everything's going to be okay."

“Let’s all go inside, and you can tell us all about it,” suggested Grandma.

I trotted importantly ahead of everyone and led the way into the house. We all sat down in the living room, me next to Mom, looking up adoringly at her, my tongue hanging out happily.

“So, kids, this is my cousin Andrea. I don’t think you’d remember her — she’s a lawyer. And thank goodness she was available,” Mom said.

Andrea grinned at the kids and said, “I remember meeting you at the powwow when you were babies, but I doubt you remember me! You were pretty little.”

I love going to the powwow on our home reserve. Everybody gets together for the whole weekend to have a good time. There’s lots of competition dancing, drum groups singing and playing, vendors selling stuff, oh, and the food! I can spend my entire day just cruising for —

“Thanks for helping Mom,” said Rainey.

“We sure appreciate it,” said Cole.

“So, what happened?” interrupted Grandma. “We’ve been so worried all afternoon!”

“Well, the police really don’t have much to go on, other than the bag of a few missing pieces of jewelry in Gail’s car. There were fingerprints on the bag, but none that matched Gail’s. Since the passenger door lock is broken and no longer

locks on her car, she was able to prove that she had left her car unlocked at work in the parking lot behind the store. So that means that anyone could have slipped the bag in without her knowledge. The police got an anonymous tip about the bag, which they agreed was pretty suspicious. I mean, seriously, how does someone know there's a bag of stolen jewelry in a car unless they put it there?"

"So they've let me go, and I haven't been charged at this point," said Mom. She sounded relieved, but there was still a note of worry in her voice. I moved in close and lay my head on her knee to reassure her. "I'm still a 'person of interest,' as they put it, but Andrea was able to convince them that they didn't have enough evidence to charge me."

"Don't worry, Gail, I'll make sure that you're cleared of all suspicion — they would need a heck of a lot more evidence to pin on you than what they have at this point."

"In the meantime," Grandma said, "let's celebrate with a really nice dinner!" She bustled off to the kitchen to begin cooking, and I leapt up to go help with floor cleanup.

30

Later that night, when everyone was in bed, I snuck upstairs, nosed Cole's bedroom door open, and padded quietly in. Rainey was already there, sitting next to Cole on the bed. Rainey was still crying softly, and Cole kept wiping his eyes angrily. I could tell he was trying to be brave. I climbed up on the bed next to them and lay down as close as I could to them.

"I'm too worried to sleep," said Rainey sadly.

"Me too," admitted Cole. "It's so hard, not really knowing if Mom's in the clear or not. And if Old Man Melnyk really will report Shamus." He sighed. I nosed in so that his hand was on my head, so he could pat me. I sighed glumly, thinking of Mr. Tibbles and imagining his triumphant look when he heard that I was going to be arrested and taken off to the pound.

"This is the week that M.T. and Mitch have the big heist planned," said Cole slowly. "If they steal more stuff from the store, wouldn't that prove that Mom didn't do it?"

“Unless they have some plan to pin it on her again,” said Rainey. “If we could just catch them in the act, then we could clear Mom completely!”

“And how do you suggest we do that?” Cole asked. “Geez, Rainey, we’re just kids!”

“Maybe,” said Rainey thoughtfully, “we could be there to catch them in the act!”

“Seriously, how do you figure we can do that?” asked Cole. I yawned. It had been an exhausting day.

Rainey was thinking hard, I could tell. I put my head on her lap to help her.

“Okay, so it looks as though they can access the jewelry store through the closet of Aura’s shop, right? So, what if we were there waiting for them and caught them in the act. I mean, not really catch them, but we could take photos of them in the act with our cellphones so we have proof to show the police!”

“And how do we get into the store without them noticing us? Just saunter in and say, ‘Oh, don’t mind us, we’re just doing a little late-night shopping’ — like that’s gonna work!” said Cole sarcastically.

“Well, they won’t use the front door since it faces the street, and they’d be seen by anybody driving by,” said Rainey. “They’ll use the back door to the store, since it’s in the back alley and no one will see them. What if we were to

hide somewhere in the back alley and wait for them to go in the back door? We could take some pictures of them in action. Or at least pictures of them sneaking into the store late at night. And while they're in there, we call the police, right? They'd never know we were there if we're really quiet and we hide well, so we'll be safe."

Cole nodded slowly. "That could work," he said. "Let's take it up with Max tomorrow and see if he wants to come with us on the stakeout."

That sounded great to me. Especially the part about the steak. Rainey went back to her room, and I hunkered down on Cole's bed to get some shut-eye, dreaming of steak.

31

We spent a quiet day on Sunday with everyone just lazing around the house. The kids wanted to stay close to Mom, and I wanted to be as close as I could to them. So I snoozed the day away as they spent the day reading books and working on a puzzle together with Grandma and Mom. It was a perfect day. The only thing missing was a good old cat chase, but overall, it was a great way to spend a day.

On Monday morning, I tried to keep a low profile as the kids and Mom got ready to leave.

Rainey took me out for a quick walk, and then we went into the backyard to go through our training routine. After lots of commands and lots of treats, we were done. She rushed in for breakfast, and I returned to my dog bed, thinking about how good she was getting at this training stuff. As fast as I could respond to her commands, she was just as fast with her treat response time. I couldn't help feeling really pleased with how she was doing. Not to mention how many times she told me

I was a good dog, which, after the weekend's fiasco, made me feel a little bit better.

Once Rainey and Cole rushed off to get the school bus, and Mom drove off to work, it was just Grandma and me.

"Well, Shamus, I think you can have an inside day today, to keep yourself out of trouble," she said as she poured herself another cup of coffee.

Probably for the best, I thought to myself. *Tibbles will just have to look for some other poor dog to harass today.* I yawned, stretched my legs out, and then curled up in a comfy position for my morning snooze.

Grandma got up a few minutes later and began bustling around, tidying the kitchen. I opened one eye, but since there were no leftovers this morning, I went right back to sleep.

I woke up an hour or so later to see Grandma putting on her coat. She picked up a cookie tin and opened the door, saying, "Okay, Shamus. You stay here, boy. And wish me luck. I'm going to try to do some buttering up with my famous cinnamon crumble coffee cake!"

With that, she left, shutting the door firmly behind her. I shrugged and went back to sleep.

A few hours later, Grandma came home, smiling and looking pleased. She hung up her coat and leaned down to give me a good pat, rumpling my ears just the way I love it. I gave her hand a lick.

“Shamus, keep your paws crossed. I may just have gotten you out of the doghouse!” she told me. Now I was confused. I looked around to be sure. Yep, I was still in the kitchen, not a doghouse. Not only that, I knew for sure that we didn’t even have a doghouse in the yard. I shrugged, yawned, and went back to snoozing. I didn’t wake up until the kids came home from school.

32

I was thrilled to see Rainey and Cole come home after school since it had been such a slow, boring day. As the kids came the kitchen door, I jumped to my feet and scrambled over to greet them, wagging my tail happily.

“Hey, Shamus, good boy!” said Rainey. “Hi, Grandma!” she called.

“Hi, Shamus!” said Cole, giving me a good snuggle. He gets right down and hugs me, all the while rubbing my tummy, and I gotta say —

That’s when Grandma came into the kitchen saying, “Hello, you two! Guess what! I might just have a bit of good news for you!” I looked at her hopefully. *We sure could use some good news around here*, I thought.

But she didn’t get a chance to tell us what the good news was. At that moment, Mom came in, looking tired and very discouraged. I scuttled back to my dog bed and tried to keep a low profile in case it was something I’d done. Although, I

couldn't think of what it could be this time, since all I'd done all day was hang out in the kitchen and sleep.

"Hi, everyone," she said. She dropped her purse on the table and gave each of the kids a big hug.

"You're home early, Gail," Grandma said. "What's wrong?"

"Oh, I got a bad headache, so I left work early," Mom said. She sounded so discouraged that I went and stood beside her and gently put my head under her hand so she could pat me and feel better.

"Really, it's gotten so rough at work. No one talks to me unless they absolutely have to, and I feel like I'm being watched constantly! And ever since that bag of stolen jewelry was found in my car, it's gotten way worse. I can't help wondering who could have done that to me. It's hard to believe that any of them are stealing, but it has to be an inside job." She sighed. "It's been such a great place to work until now, but the way things are going ..." Mom trailed off.

Grandma gave Mom a big hug. "It'll all work out, Gail. You'll see," she said, trying to comfort her.

Mom sounded like she was trying not to cry. "Yeah, well, that's only part of it," she said. "Mr. Rigby told me today that he's not going to continue to sell the Native jewelry made by Maudie and the other silversmiths from the reserve," Mom said sadly. "Even though none of *their* jewelry has gone missing, and it sells really well."

“How can he do that?” protested Rainey. “That’s so unfair!”

“He claims that with all the thefts, he’s losing money, and he has cut back, so he going to start there,” Mom said.

“That’s just being spiteful!” said Grandma.

“I’m convinced he really does think that it’s me stealing from him,” said Mom. She sounded miserable.

Rainey and Cole exchanged glances. I didn’t understand quite what it all meant, but I could tell that everybody was really upset. I whimpered softly. All I knew was that it involved the missing jewelry again. The kids and I really needed to figure out who was stealing the jewelry so we could clear Mom’s name once and for all.

Mom tried to smile at the kids. “Anyway,” she said. “Let’s not worry about all that now. I’m sure the police are going to figure out who the real thief is soon. Now, why don’t you two take Shamus for a walk, and Grandma and I will figure out dinner.”

The kids quietly got their coats on, and Rainey clipped my leash on me. As we headed out, Cole pulled out his cellphone and called Max.

“Can you meet us at the playground?” he said. “We’ve got to make our plans for Wednesday night.”

He hung up and put his phone in his pocket. Then, walking briskly, we set off to meet up with Max. This jewelry thing was getting even more serious. And now even Maudie needed my help.

33

The next morning, Cole and I went for a quick walk before breakfast, and then we did a quick training session in the yard. Cole was also getting really good with his treat response time. As soon as I did a trick, he had the treat right there ready for me.

When we finished our session, I couldn't help feeling proud of how well the kids were both doing with their training.

We went back inside so Cole could finish getting ready for school. I was pretty worn out from all my hard work training Cole, so I was ready for a snooze.

The kids and Mom headed off, and Grandma settled in to read the paper with a cup of coffee.

I lay on my dog bed thinking things over. While it was nice and peaceful hanging out in the kitchen with Grandma, I confess that I was a little disappointed with having to stay inside all day.

I tried not to think about what I was missing outside — seeing Mr. Tibbles sauntering around ripe for a good chase or checking on the family of squirrels that had moved into the big oak tree on the corner. They could always use a good barking at. Spunky might go for a walk with his owner and could fill me in on some of the doings from the other end of the complex. Or I could be off rummaging around in the garbage and stumble on another clue. You know, important dog stuff. But here I was stuck inside and missing all the action.

I sighed and settled in for another long, dull day before the kids got home.

A few hours later, I awoke suddenly. I lifted my head and listened, now alert. It was Uncle Doug's truck pulling into the driveway. I jumped to my feet and raced to the front door, barking to let Grandma know that we had company.

"All right, Shamus," she said. "Quiet, boy."

I sat down by the front door with wagging my tail happily. Then my ears picked up a very familiar voice with him. Maudie!

I leapt to my feet, yelping in excitement and quivering with joy. Maudie was here! As they approached the house, I lost all my self-control and began leaping at the door, howling with joy. The door opened, and there she was, smiling down at me — Maudie!

Leaning on her cane, she bent down and hugged me.

“Oh, Amos! I’ve missed you too!” she said, laughing as I washed her face over and over again.

“Wow! Something tells me you’re happy to see Maudie!” said Uncle Doug as he came into the house.

I was so excited to see them that I started to race around the house like a maniac, skidding around corners as I went. Then I came back and threw myself at Maudie again. She snuggled me tight, and I wiggled with joy. I had missed her so much! I did a few more laps of the house to show them just how excited I was.

By the time I had calmed down, Uncle Doug and Maudie had their coats off and were sitting at the kitchen table with Grandma, all of them laughing at me.

Panting and tired, I hunkered down next to Maudie and grinned lovingly up at her. She sat smiling down at me and stroking my head. It was just like old times.

Grandma filled cups of tea for them and brought a plate of cookies to the table. I looked up hopefully, but she didn’t take my hint.

Maudie helped herself to a cookie and casually broke off a piece, slipping her hand under the table to me without Uncle Doug or Grandma seeing. I gulped it down and gave her hand a quick lick of thanks. Yep, just like old times.

“Gail called to let me know what’s been going on at the

jewelry store,” Maudie said to Grandma. “Doug was kind enough to bring me into town so’s I can talk to the store owner, that Mr. Rigby. I’m here on behalf of all the silver-smiths who rely on the sales at his store for their income to let him know how important his store’s been for us all. It’s been really good to have a steady place to sell our jewelry, and it’d be a real shame to lose it over a misunderstanding.”

Grandma sighed and took a sip of her tea. “I sure hope he’ll listen to you,” she said. “And I sure hope they catch the real thief soon. It’s been so hard on Gail.”

Maudie shook her head sadly. “I can’t believe that they’d think it was Gail,” she said. “Anyone who knows her knows how honest she is.” I gave her hand another quick lick to show her that I agreed.

“It sure will be hard on all of us if we lose the store,” she added. “It’s been such a good place to sell our work that we haven’t had to sell anywhere else. It’ll be a real setback for all of us,” Maudie said. “It’s hard enough being an artist without having to search out new places to sell your work.”

I looked up at Maudie and gave a soft whimper. I could tell how worried she was.

Maudie finished her tea and then said, “Well, we best get over to Rigby’s so’s I can talk to Mr. Rigby and plead our case.” She leaned down to give me another hug.

"You be a good boy now, Amos," she said as she stroked my head. "No more of this running loose, you silly dog." I grinned at her, a little embarrassed that she'd heard about my recent exploits. I wagged my tail and gave her hand another lick to let her know that I'd try my best.

"You folks want to come back here for dinner?" Grandma asked as we all walked to the door.

"Thanks, but we'll be heading straight back to the reserve once Maudie's done at the store," Uncle Doug said.

"I've got to let all the other artists know the outcome," said Maudie. "They're all waiting to hear how it goes with Mr. Rigby, so wish me luck!"

Maudie bent down to give me one last hug before she followed Uncle Doug out the door.

"You be a good boy, Amos!" she said to me. I grinned up at her again. Even though I was used to being called Shamus now, I loved hearing her call me that. Made me feel like a little pup again.

As Grandma shut the door and I heard the truck drive away, I went and lay down on my dog bed, thinking over what Maudie had said. As happy as she was to see me, I could tell that she was really worried. I knew that this jewelry theft thing had been really hard on Mom and the kids, but now Maudie was going to be hurt by it too.

Whatever it takes, I thought to myself. The kids and I have got to catch the real thief. And soon!

Feeling worried, I fell asleep, waiting for the kids to come home so we could get to work.

34

I yawned and stretched as I heard the gate open and the kids come up the steps to the kitchen door. I scrambled to my feet, ready to greet them as they came in.

“Hi, Shamus!” they both said and bent down to give me snuggles. I gave them each a face wash to let them know how much I’d missed them.

“Hi, Grandma, we’re home!” called Rainey.

Grandma came in from the living room and greeted the kids.

“Why don’t you two have a snack and then take this poor old bored dog for a walk?” she suggested. I grinned up at her. I was up for that idea. “I made some carrot muffins today,” she added.

I sat next to the table as the kids ate their muffins. First Rainey slipped me a piece and then Cole did. I have to say, Grandma makes great muffins. She has this one recipe where —

That's when Mom came home looking even more tired and discouraged.

"Hi, Mom," said Rainey. I could tell she was worried about Mom.

"Hi, Mom, how was work?" asked Cole.

Mom sighed. "I wish I could tell you it was good, but it wasn't that great." She sat down at the kitchen table. Grandma poured Mom a cup of tea and sat down next to her.

"How did Maudie's meeting with Mr. Rigby go?" she asked.

"Not great," said Mom glumly. "Mr. Rigby listened to what Maudie had to say, but it didn't make any difference. He refused to change his mind. He said that he won't be accepting any more jewelry from any of them until the thefts are solved." Mom bit her lip to keep from crying. "I feel like I've let them all down."

Grandma reached out and patted Mom's hand. "This will get sorted out soon, Gail. It has to." But I could tell that Grandma was really worried too. I gave Mom's hand a lick and whimpered softly. Mom and I could both go to the pound, and now Maudie wouldn't be able to sell her jewelry.

Rainey and Cole looked at each other. I could tell they were upset too.

"We're gonna take Shamus for a walk," said Rainey after a few minutes. "Come on, Shamus." I scrambled to my feet and waited while she put my leash on.

We headed out, and as we left our yard and got safely past Old Man Melnyk's place, Cole pulled out his cellphone and called Max.

When Max answered, Cole said, "You need to join us at the park. We've gotta finish planning our stakeout. Things are getting worse!"

I trotted resolutely along as we made our way to the park. Now it was even more important that we solve the mystery of the missing jewelry. It had already been really serious for Mom and the kids, and now it was affecting Maudie.

35

It was late Wednesday night, and the kids and I had snuck out of the house and made our way to the jewelry store. The four of us crept through the alley behind the strip mall, quietly making our way around the recycling bins until we were in sight of the back doors to Rigby's and Aura's stores. It was dark, but that was okay with me. I had an easier time of it, as my vision is pretty darned good in the dark. As a matter of fact, dogs have superior night vision, compared to humans. Not only that —

“Hide, guys!” hissed Rainey. “I hear a car coming!” She grabbed my collar and dragged me out of sight behind a dumpster. Max and Cole scrambled after us, and we peered out as a car slowly turned in to the parking spot behind Crystals, Beads, and More.

“Look, guys! It's Mitch and M.T.!” whispered Max. We watched quietly as the two men got out of the car. They were dressed all in black. Mitch had a flashlight with a low beam,

which he held up to the lock, inserting the key and quickly turning it.

We heard Mortimer say, "Turn the alarm off, quick!"

Mitch sounded irritable as he answered, "All right, I'm on it!" There were a few muted beeps of the alarm, and the two men slipped inside the store. Then there was silence.

"What should we do now?" whispered Cole. "Geez, when they went inside, I was too nervous to take any pictures. I didn't want the flash to go off and give us away!"

"Let's wait and give them some time to break through the closet into the jewelry store, and then when they've got the loot, we can catch them red-handed!" said Rainey.

Max and Cole thought that was a great idea, but me, I was bewildered. How would their hands get red? And if they did turn red, what did it matter? How would that prove anything?

I sighed, now very confused, sat down, and settled in to wait. That part I got. I was good at waiting. As long as it didn't take too long.

After about fifteen minutes, Rainey started to get restless. "Maybe we should call the police now," she suggested. "Or sneak in after them to see if they've broken through the closet wall yet."

"I don't know," said Cole nervously. "I think we should just wait here."

“Yeah, me too,” said Max. “I don’t want to get caught inside with them. We’re talking desperate criminals here. You never know what they’re gonna do!” He sounded really nervous.

But Rainey was determined. “I am *not* going to sit back and watch Mom get framed and go to jail for a theft she didn’t do!” she said. “You two can wait here then, but *I’m* going in!”

“Rainey, please, just wait here with us!” pleaded Cole.

“Don’t worry. I’ll make sure I’m really quiet, and I’ll turned the flash off on my cellphone so they don’t see me taking pictures of them in action!” Rainey hissed. “We have to get proof!”

She marched determinedly towards the store. She glanced back, then turned the handle and slowly opened the door. It was silent. She slipped in, and the door shut behind her.

We all waited in the dark alley.

“I don’t like this,” said Cole. “She’s so danged stubborn. What do we do now?”

“I dunno,” said Max. “She’s braver than me, I can tell you that much!”

I whined, and strained on my leash, trying to get to the store. I didn’t like Rainey going into the dark store alone, and I wanted to go after her and make sure she was okay. “Stop it, Shamus!” whispered Cole.

But I kept pulling. Finally, Cole said, "Oh, all right, we better go in after her!"

Max gulped and said, "Okay, if you insist." He didn't sound too happy about it.

We headed to the store and stopped just outside the doorway. Cole leaned over me and held my face in both of his hands. He said, "Shamus you have to be really, really quiet, okay, buddy?" I grinned up at him in the dark, letting him know that I would do my best. But you never knew what was coming, right? A guy can't guarantee that some scary thing won't come leaping out of the dark that he might need to bark at, for instance. And all I knew was that I really needed to get in there and make sure that Rainey was safe.

I gave his hand a quick, reassuring lick, and he opened the door quietly. We slipped inside the back room of the store and stood, listening. We could hear thumping and banging coming from the closet, and a tiny flashlight beam was flickering. There was no sound from Rainey.

"I did it! I'm through the wall!" came the muffled voice of Mitch. "Here, take this last board."

"Ouch!" said Mortimer. "That one had a nail in it. Careful there, buddy!"

"Shut up, M.T.!" said Mitch. "Never mind that! Now, show me where this bag is on the other side of the wall!"

We could hear rummaging sounds, and then Mortimer's

muffled voice triumphantly said, "I got it!"

Then we all froze as we heard the sound of Rainey's cell-phone snap a photo in the darkness.

"What was that?" Mitch whispered hoarsely.

"I didn't hear anything," said Mortimer. "Now take this bag from me, it's really heavy!"

"Quiet!" said Mitch. "It sounded like ... someone taking a picture with a cellphone!"

We stood as quietly as we could behind a stack of boxes in the corner. Hopefully, in the darkness, we wouldn't be noticed. Even I was holding my breath. I strained to see if I could spot where Rainey was hiding. I have to say, she was really good at it.

"You're just getting paranoid!" came Mortimer's muffled voice. "We've got what we came for, now let's get the wall back on and get out of here!"

With a few thumps and grunts, he stepped out of the closet. Mitch handed him a heavy-looking bag in the darkness.

"Hold this, and I'll get the wall back together so no one knows we were here," he muttered. "The sooner we're out of here, the better!"

Mortimer looked around nervously, peering into the darkness. "This place is really creepy in the dark. I feel like I'm being watched," he said.

"That's just your guilty conscience," said Mitch.

With a few blows of a hammer, and more thumps and bangs, Mitch was done. He came out of the closet with a tool bag in his hand and said, "Okay, let's get the heck out of here!"

We all froze as they rushed right past our hiding spot, heading for the door. Mortimer went out first, and Mitch stopped by the alarm panel. We could hear beeps, and then a little green light shone brightly. Mitch quickly shut the door, and we could hear the lock turning. We heard the car start up and drive away.

"Well, that was easy," came Rainey's voice in the darkness. "I think I've got some good shots, even without the flash!"

"Stay still! Nobody move!" said Max frantically. "The alarm's set, and it's a motion sensor. One move and it'll go off!"

From what I could tell, that meant we were trapped. Locked inside the store, an alarm set, and no steak in sight. Things did not look good.

36

“Quick, Max! Do you know the code?” demanded Rainey. “Yeah, I think so, Mom told me. It’s one-two-three-four. She was laughing at how simple it is,” Max said doubtfully. “But it’s a sensor alarm. One movement and it goes off!”

“Move fast! I’m pretty sure you have a couple of minutes before it comes on so you can leave the store once it’s set. That’s how they work!” urged Rainey. “Go now, Max! It’s our only hope!”

“Oh, man!” wailed Max as he dashed to the alarm panel and began beeping buttons. “I sure hope I have this right, you guys,” he said.

A little light flashed red on the panel, and he gave a big sigh of relief.

“Okay, I got it turned off,” he said. “We’re okay.”

Rainey came out of the darkness, grinning. “I got a couple of great pictures. I can’t believe I forgot to turn the sound off! That was close!”

“That was really stupid, Rainey!” said Cole. He sounded angry. “Now we’re locked in here, thanks to you!”

“Thanks to *me* we got some pictures of Mitch and M.T. robbing the jewelry store!” yelled Rainey. “It’s not my fault you guys came in too!”

“What does that even matter?” Cole yelled back. “Even if we had waited outside, you’d still be locked in! So, what do we do now? What’s your big plan now, huh, Rainey? Say, why don’t we call up Aura and say, ‘Oh, hi, we’re just, um, locked in your store?’ How’s that going to help prove Mom innocent?”

I whimpered. I hate it when the kids fight. It’s not very often, since they get along so well usually, and —

“*Shhhhh!*” hissed Max. “I hear a car! Maybe they’re coming back for something else!”

We all rushed to the window and peered out. Another car was pulling into the alley and parking. It was a beige sedan, not Mitch’s SUV. The driver’s door opened, and a woman got out. She too was all dressed in black. She looked around, and we could see her clearly in the pale light.

“Look! It’s Edith!” whispered Rainey. “She must have known about the big heist too! But she doesn’t know that she’s too late — Mitch and M.T. already got away!”

We all watched out the window as she walked quickly to the jewelry store and unlocked the back door. I could hear

faint beeping noises. Clearly, Rigby's had one of those alarm things too.

We waited quietly in the darkness. "What should we do now?" asked Max.

"Let me think a minute," whispered Rainey.

We began to hear muffled thumping in the closet, this time from the Rigby side of the wall. We all crept close to try and figure out what was happening.

"Let's thump on the wall and yell for help!" said Cole. "We can take it apart like Mitch did and get out through the jewelry store!"

"Good idea!" said Rainey. "We can tell her that she's too late and get her to call the police. Maybe they can still catch them!"

Cole rummaged in Mitch's tool bag and pulled out his hammer. He made his way to the closet and started banging on the wall. Rainey joined him and yelled, "Help! Edith, help us! We're trapped!"

"I don't know about this, guys," said Max. I could tell how scared he was, so I gave his hand a quick lick. "We could get in big trouble if we get caught in here."

"Well, how do you expect to get out unless somebody helps us?" demanded Rainey.

Cole pulled the shelves out and then began to pry the wall boards off the back of the closet.

I stood behind him, wagging my tail eagerly. Maybe *this* was where the steak was!

When the boards finally came away, we could see Edith standing in front of the closet with a shocked look on her face.

“What are you kids doing in there?” she demanded.

“Quick! Mitch and M.T. already robbed the jewelry store! They just left, and they got away with everything! They had a big bag full of stuff! We have to call the police, and maybe it’s not too late to catch them!” said Rainey urgently.

“We followed them tonight to catch them in the act. We snuck in after them and took some pictures of them, but we got locked in the store when they left!” said Cole.

She relaxed and smiled at us, saying, “Wow, you kids are really brave! I’ll call the police and report this right away!” I sat down and eagerly thumped my tail. Maybe after that, she’d get me that steak. I was getting hungry, and I could use a good steak right about now.

She pulled her cellphone out of her pocket and punched in some numbers. She listened, waiting, and then said into the phone, “This is Edith Rigby, I’m at Rigby’s Jewelers and there’s been another theft!”

“Wait,” said Cole. “You need to tell them that that it was Mitch and Mortimer!”

“Don’t move or get any big ideas!” Edith glowered at us.

“The police are on their way now! We’ll get this straightened out.”

“But they’re getting away!” protested Rainey. “I’m going to call the police back and tell them to look for Mitch’s car!” She started to dial on her cellphone, but Edith reached out and snatched it from her hands.

“Hey!” yelled Rainey. “Give me back my phone!” I started barking at Edith. I was getting annoyed with her.

“You can’t do that!” yelled Cole as he grabbed me by the collar and held me back. “Take it easy, Shamus,” he said. “It’s okay, boy!”

But I was mad. First, there was no steak, and then this woman just snatched Rainey’s cellphone from her hand. Even I know that’s rude.

In the distance I could hear a siren.

“Good,” said Rainey. “Here come the police. Then you’ll get the truth!”

“You have to believe us!” said Cole.

“Oh, man, we’re in big trouble,” moaned Max. “Why did I let myself get talked into this?”

Edith smiled grimly at us. “Don’t worry, kids, we’ll get to the bottom of this. Sounds like the police are here now.”

Stumbling over a box of records on the closet floor, we all climbed through to the jewelry store and waited in the darkness until Edith flicked on the jewelry store lights. We all

stood blinking, getting used to the bright lights as she strode over to the back door of the store and wrenched it open.

“Help! Police! The thieves are in here!” she yelled. “I caught them right in the act!”

The kids gasped. I sat down with a thump and whimpered. I wasn’t quite sure what we had done wrong, but it sounded like we were all really bad dogs. And I was already in enough trouble with Old Man Melnyk.

37

Through the back window, I could see the flashing red and blue lights of the police car. Sergeant Minski and Constable Minski strode into the store, guns drawn. Two more cars quickly pulled into the laneway.

“Nobody move!” yelled Sergeant Minski. “Put your hands up!”

Max and I both whimpered. The kids nervously raised their hands in the air. I sat down and tried to look as well behaved as I could. Edith stood, pointing at us. “These are the thieves!” she said triumphantly.

“I got them covered, Auntie Bernice!” yelled Constable Minski.

“Dang it, Elwood, stop calling me that!” snarled Sergeant Minski. “Or I’ll have you directing traffic for a year!”

“Sorry Auntie — er, Sergeant,” said Constable Minski.

“Arrest these kids!” said Edith. “I caught them in the act, sneaking through the closet wall to rob the jewelry store.

Obviously, their mother is the gang leader. It's a whole gang of thieves!"

Just then, Mr. Rigby rushed into the store. Right behind him was Mom.

"What in tarnation is going on here!" roared Mr. Rigby. Constable Minski and the kids all cringed.

"Stand back, sir!" ordered Sergeant Minski. "We've caught the jewelry store thieves in the act!"

"Kids!" said Mom. "What's going on?" I whimpered at the anguish in her voice.

Another car screeched into the parking lot, and Mortimer and Mitch jumped out. Then one more car pulled in, and Aura got out. The three of them ran into the store. They stopped dead in their tracks when they saw us.

"Dad! Edith!" stammered Mortimer. "What — what's going on here?"

"Mortimer, what the hell have you done to your hair?" yelled Mr. Rigby. "And what the heck are you wearing?"

"Please, Dad, this isn't really the time —"

"Arrest them!" screamed Edith pointing wildly at us.

"Oh, man, Mom's gonna kill me," moaned Max.

"We didn't do it!" wailed Rainey.

"We're innocent! It was Mortimer and Mitch!" yelled Cole.

I started to bark furiously, defending my kids.

"Quiet!" bellowed Sergeant Minski.

We all stopped and stared at her.

"All right," she said. "One at a time! Starting with you!"

She pointed at Edith.

Edith smiled triumphantly and said, "Well, officer, I was just stopping by to check on the store and make sure everything was okay when I discovered these three kids and their dog breaking into our store through the closet from the store next door. They had some nonsense cover story!"

Everyone turned and glared accusingly at us. Except Mom. She looked very, very upset.

"Oh, kids, what's going on?" she whispered. "What have you done?"

"All right, kids," said Sergeant Minski, looking at us. "Let's hear your side of the story."

I gulped and whimpered softly. Max moaned.

"Okay," said Rainey. "We overheard Mitch and Mortimer the other day talking about a big heist they were going to pull, so we followed them tonight to try to catch them in the act stealing from the jewelry store by busting through the closet wall."

"What rubbish is this?!" roared Mr. Rigby. "My own son? Stealing from me?"

"No, Dad, you don't understand!" protested Mortimer.

"It was these kids, I tell you!" yelled Edith.

"M.T., you idiot," yelled Mitch. "This is all your fault! I told you we wouldn't get away with it!"

"Who the blazes is M.T.?" yelled Mr. Rigby. "And how did these danged kids get in here anyway? And just who in tarnation tried to steal from my store?"

"Cole! Rainey! What's going on?" said Mom, fighting back tears. And that made me start barking all over again.

"*Quiet!*" yelled Sergeant Minski again. She glowered at all of us. Constable Minski tittered nervously. She glared at him too.

"If I don't get some order here, we're gonna arrest you all for disorderly conduct and take you down to the police station to sort this out once and for all!"

Then she took a deep breath and said, "Now, nobody, and I mean *nobody*, talks unless I say so. Got it?"

Everyone nodded obediently, even Constable Minski. I thumped my tail in agreement. I knew a bark would be inappropriate at a time like this.

Sergeant Minski turned to me and the kids.

"Now, tell me why you thought that these two," she gestured at Mitch and Mortimer, "were going to rob the jewelry store?"

Cole and Rainey looked at each other. This time, Cole spoke. "Well, we were at the store's grand opening on Saturday. We were in the back room and overheard Mitch and Mortimer talking about how they were gonna pull off a big

heist tonight. And before *that*, we found a gold chain from Rigby's store in the closet, which was proof that they were the thieves. It was in a bag that got stuck on Shamus's head, and it got tangled on his collar. So we figured if we followed them tonight, we could catch them in the act and clear Mom's name."

Mortimer gave a high-pitched squeak but said nothing when Sergeant Minski glared warningly at him.

"So that's where it went!" said Mitch. He glared at us. "I bought that gold chain a few weeks ago! I have the receipt to prove it, too. It was a surprise gift for Aura to celebrate the opening of her store, and I haven't been able to find it!"

"Oh," said Rainey faintly. "Sorry, Mitch. We thought it was a clue."

"You bought me a gold chain? How sweet!" said Aura. She looked adoringly at Mitch. Mitch blushed and looked bashful.

"Please, people! So, how did you get into the store?" Sergeant Minski asked Cole.

He took a deep breath and said, "Well, we were waiting in the parking lot and saw Mitch's car drive up and watched them go into the crystal store. Rainey wanted to get a picture of them in the act, so she snuck into the store after them to take a picture with her cellphone."

Mitch moaned softly but said nothing. Aura looked at him, her eyes filled with dread. "Oh, Mitch," she whispered. "What have you done!"

“So, Max and Shamus and I snuck in after her, because we were worried about her. We heard Mitch and M.T. — Mortimer —”

“M.T. indeed,” snorted Mr. Rigby. “What nonsense!” Sergeant Minski glared at him and held up a warning hand. Mr. Rigby fell silent.

“We could hear them take down the closet wall between the two stores, and then we saw them take a bag out of the jewelry store. Then they put the closet wall back on and left. Only we got stuck inside the store when they locked up and set the alarm again.”

“Oh, geez,” muttered Mitch. Aura looked sick.

“Max knew the security code because his mom had laughed about how simple it was, so he was able to turn it off,” added Rainey. “But we were still trapped inside.”

“I guess I’d better change it from one-two-three-four, then,” said Aura.

Sergeant Minski turned to Mitch and Mortimer. “Well, what have you two got to say for yourselves?” she asked them.

“You don’t understand,” pleaded Mortimer. “Okay, yes, technically we broke into the jewelry store, but it wasn’t to steal anything valuable like jewelry.”

“My own son, a thief!” muttered Mr. Rigby. “After all I’ve done for you!”

"No, wait!" wailed Mortimer. "We just came to get your lucky bowling ball!"

"*What?!*" roared Mr. Rigby.

"That's right. I wanted to use your lucky bowling ball." Mortimer sounded defensive now. "Mitch and I have joined a bowling league, and, well, our team made the finals. I thought it would give me an edge to play with your lucky bowling ball." He faltered. "I figured if I asked you for it, you'd just say no. Besides, then I'd have to tell you that I was bowling. And I didn't want you to know until we won the final." He hung his head in shame.

Mitch glared at him. "I can't believe I let you talk me into this cockamamie scheme," he muttered. "Caught stealing a stupid bowling ball!"

"You're in a bowling league?" asked Aura. She sounded as baffled as I felt.

"I didn't want to tell you, Aura. I was worried you wouldn't think it was very cool."

"Oh, Mitch, I'm so confused," said Aura. "This is all too much for my chakra alignment. Why wouldn't I think bowling is cool?"

Sergeant Minski said incredulously, "Okay, so you claim that you didn't rob the store, but you broke in just to take a bowling ball?"

Mortimer nodded miserably.

“My boy made the bowling finals. Go figure.” Mr. Rigby sounded incredulous. “You were never any good at bowling as a kid. Whenever I tried to teach you everything I knew, you said you hated bowling.”

Mortimer looked up at him and said, “Sorry, Dad. I just — I just have never been able to live up to you. You were a champion bowler for ten years running, and it’s hard for me to try to match that. Whenever you tried to take me bowling, I just — well, I guess I just froze. I was always so nervous that I wouldn’t meet your expectations and that I’d just let you down again.”

He faltered and then continued. “And, let’s face it, in the store it’s always, ‘Dang it, Mortimer, you broke this watch winder again’ or ‘That’s no way to size a ring, you fool!’ So, I thought if I was able to win a league trophy like you did all those times, you’d finally be proud of me. And I’d show you that I really could do something right.”

“I had no idea you felt that way,” Mr. Rigby said.

“Hey! Time for the family bonding session later,” said Sergeant Minski sharply. “What happened next, kids?”

Rainey took a deep breath and continued. “Well, we were trying to figure out what to do next when we heard Edith pull up and go in the back door of Rigby’s. So we started banging on the closet door to tell her that Mitch and Mortimer

had already gotten away. We used Mitch's drill to unscrew the wall and take it down, and then we came through to the jewelry store. He's got it set up so that you can take the wall down really easily, and no one would know. It's really smart, if you think about it."

"Oh, geez," muttered Mitch. "We just wanted an easy way to get the bowling ball."

Aura smiled proudly at him. "You really are very clever, Mitch," she said lovingly.

Cole glared at Edith. "But then Edith grabbed Rainey's cellphone with the photos of Mitch and M.T., and she called the police and accused us of being the thieves. But we weren't robbing the store!"

Constable Minski was scribbling as fast as he could in his notebook. "Weren't ... robbing ... store," he muttered as he finished writing and looked up expectantly. "Got it all so far, Auntie — er, Sergeant Minski," he added.

Sergeant Minski glowered around at all of us. "Well, this doesn't leave us with a clear jewelry theft, now does it?"

Edith looked outraged. "You're not going to believe these little delinquents, are you? Clearly, they're lying! They just used the opportunity of Mitch and Mortimer breaking in for the bowling ball to get into the jewelry store! And obviously their mother put them up to it!" she yelled.

Mom gasped. "Hey!" she said. "That's not true!"

"We're not the thieves!" yelled Rainey. "You have to believe us!"

"These kids are no good!" said Edith. "Just like their mother!"

"Don't you say that about my kids!" said Mom. "You have no right!" She sounded really angry, so I barked at Edith.

"I can't believe I let you talk me into breaking in to steal a stupid bowling ball," yelled Mitch at Mortimer.

"What have you done, Mitch!" wailed Aura. "I'm so confused!"

"And why in tarnation is everybody now calling you M.T.?" yelled Mr. Rigby. "I demand to know just what's going on around here!"

"Everybody calm down and be quiet!" yelled Sergeant Minski warningly. "Or I'll call for backup and we'll take you all in for questioning!"

With all of the chaos and yelling going on, Edith started to move slowly, and something bright and flashy in her hand caught my eye. She was slipping something into her purse, furtively looking around. Oh, I know that guilty look. Just like my buddy Spunky gets when he's stealing off of the table. He goes really slow and casual, looking around to make sure no one is watching. Many a time I've watched him through the window, going in for a piece of toast or bacon when his owner, Mrs. Cheever, goes to pour herself another cup of coffee.

I slipped through the crowd of people until I stood next to her. I saw her hand come out of her bulging pocket, filled with more glittering objects. She shoved them all quickly into her purse. Lots of glittering rings and more hamster leashes. And I knew what that meant. Glittering rings meant food. That's where the steak was — in her purse! And she was keeping it from me!

You know, a guy can only take so much. I was tired, in big trouble, and now really hungry. And Edith was hiding my steak from me.

I growled and jumped up on her, grabbing her purse. Edith screamed.

“Stand back! Wild dog!” yelled Sergeant Minski.

The strap broke, and Edith's purse fell to the floor. Desperate to find my steak, I grabbed it, shaking my head wildly as I yanked at the purse with my paws. It tore apart, and all of the contents spilled out onto the floor. There was no steak. Just lots of glittering jewelry. But for the first time, there was no food.

Suddenly, I noticed that there was a shocked silence, so I looked up and then gulped. Sergeant Minski had her gun leveled at me. I gulped and immediately sat down in my “good doggie” pose and smiled weakly at her. Everyone else was staring at the floor in shock. I looked back at the mess that I had made of Edith's purse. Dang it! There was no steak

in there, after all that. And I knew that I was in even bigger trouble now.

“Edith? You?” said Mortimer in horror.

“My own niece!” said Mr. Rigby. “You’re the one stealing from me?”

“You’re the thief?” said Mom in a shocked voice. “I don’t believe it!”

“You think he’s been hard on you, Mortimer?” yelled Edith defiantly. “Try being just his niece. I’ll never be as good as Gail with customers, and *she’s* an outsider! And an Indian at that!”

“Hey!” said Sergeant Minski sharply. “There’ll be none of that racist talk on my watch!” She glared at Edith, who cringed under the sergeant’s angry look. Edith now looked trapped and defeated, just like Spunky when he’s been caught with a mouthful of stolen bacon.

“You tell her, Auntie Bernice!” declared Constable Minski. “That kind of thing oughta be illegal!”

Sergeant Minski holstered her gun and looked at the kids. “I’m sorry you had to hear that nasty comment, kids. It was pretty mean, I know.” Then she turned to Mom. “And you too, ma’am. There’s absolutely no place for racism. I cannot abide that type of nastiness and ignorance.”

Then she looked at me and grinned. “Well, aren’t you a

clever doggie,” she said, giving me a quick pat on the head. “Looks like you caught the real thief for us!”

I grinned weakly at her, relieved that I wasn’t in trouble.

Then she turned to Constable Minski and said, “All right, Elwood, cuff her and let’s get her down to the station to book her.”

“You got it, Auntie — Sergeant!” said Constable Minski. He pulled out his handcuffs and began to fasten them on Edith’s wrists.

“Edith, I can’t believe you betrayed me like this!” said Mr. Rigby. “How could you steal from your own family?”

“You always liked Gail better than me!” screamed Edith. “My plan was working perfectly too, until these kids and their stupid dog came along!”

“Quiet!” said Sergeant Minski. “Get her in the squad car, Elwood, and we’ll take her down to the station and get her booked.”

As Constable Minski led Edith out, Sergeant Minski looked at the rest of us. “Well, folks, you’ll all need to come down to the station so we can get your statements. Mainly because nobody is going to believe us without them!”

She turned to Mr. Rigby. “You can decide if you’re going to press charges against your son and his bowling partner for breaking and entering and stealing your bowling ball, sir.”

“Oh, please, Dad,” pleaded Mortimer. He looked appealingly at Mr. Rigby.

“I think one thief in the family is enough for the Rigbys,” Mr. Rigby said gruffly. “Besides, you’ve got a tournament to win, son!” He slapped Mortimer on his back. “And you know, I rather like ‘M.T.’ I think that could catch on!”

“Oh, gee, thanks, Dad!”

“Oh, thank god!” moaned Mitch, sounding relieved. He hugged Aura, who still looked confused.

“I still don’t understand, Mitch.”

“I’ll explain it all later, sweetheart,” he said.

With that, we all headed out and down to the police station so that everyone could make a statement, whatever that was.

When we got down to the station, the kids and I were treated like real heroes, since we’d caught the thief. Max’s mom rushed in, crying, and hugged Max over and over again. He looked really embarrassed at that.

All the police officers came by to hear the story of how we’d solved the jewelry thefts and then gave me lots of ear scratches and belly rubs. I even got a couple of stale donuts! But, with all of that, I confess that I was still a little disappointed.

After all that excitement and action, there had been no steak. And when you’ve got your heart set on steak, well, it’s a bitter disappointment.

38

It was really late when we finally got home. Mom had to go through the whole story with Grandma Rose, who was sitting up waiting for us. She'd made a pot of tea and some sandwiches, which was great, because I was starved.

"How did you know where to find us, Mom?" asked Rainey.

"Simple. I have a tracking app for your cellphones. I know where you guys are at all times," said Mom.

"Well, good thing!" said Cole. "You got there just in time tonight!"

"Yeah, well, we're going to have a very long conversation in the morning about you two doing something that crazy!" Mom answered.

"But, Mom —" protested Rainey.

"Well, they did solve the mystery of just who was stealing from the jewelry store, Gail," said Grandma. "And they *did* have Shamus to keep them safe."

I grinned up at Grandma Rose. Did I mention how smart she is? Sometimes she —

“Seriously, kids,” Mom said. “That was really crazy. I can’t believe that you snuck off on your own like that. You could have been in real danger!”

“Oh, Mom, it wasn’t that bad,” protested Rainey. “Honestly —”

Mom gave her a look that silenced her.

“Well, we’d better get to bed,” said Grandma. “We can talk about it again in the morning. I’m just glad you’re safe and that this got solved once and for all!” She smiled at Rainey and Cole. “I for one am very proud of you kids,” she added. “And you too, Shamus!” She leaned over and gave my ears a satisfying ear rub.

At that point, they all headed off to bed. I settled down on my dog bed until everything was quiet and then snuck up the stairs to Cole’s room and climbed onto his bed with a contented sigh.

39

The next morning, I was out in my usual spot under the lilac bush, snoozing. We'd all slept in, as it had been a late and very exciting night. Even Mom had the day off. Mr. Rigby had phoned early to let her know that he wasn't going to open the store that day. Mom had let the kids stay home from school since they'd had such a late night.

I yawned and stretched contentedly, basking in my sunny spot. A snooze was just what I needed. I was still worn out from all of the excitement last night.

I couldn't help feeling pretty darned proud of myself for catching the real thief in the act and solving the mystery of the missing jewelry with the kids. Now Mom was completely in the clear! There was no danger of her being sent to the pound.

And that's when Mr. Tibbles showed up. He leapt up on the fence and glanced around, clearly looking for me. Then he hopped right into our yard. I opened one eye and watched

as Tibbles sat down and delicately started to wash his paw. He looked over at me and smirked.

I knew that the worst thing I could do was to chase Tibbles again. I knew that it could be the last thing I ever did here at the townhouse complex, since Old Man Melnyk had it in for me. But you know, a dog can only take so much from a cat.

I scrambled to my feet and lit out after Mr. Tibbles. As soon as I got to the gate, I put my front paws up on it and barked at Tibbles as he tore down the laneway. I kept it up until he skidded out of sight.

I could see Old Man Melnyk looking over his fence at me, a trowel in his hand. I gave a loud, satisfied snuffle and got down from the gate. I smirked and trotted back to my spot under the lilac bush.

You know, it was pretty rewarding to see the startled look on Tibbles's face when I barked at him.

It was as good as chasing him, I thought it myself as I settled in for another snooze. *A guy could get used to that.*

That's when Rainey called me in for breakfast. I headed inside for my morning crunchies. Sniffing the air, I picked up my pace. Grandma had cooked bacon. I sniffed again. Maple smoked, my favorite.

With any luck, there'll be some for me too, I thought to myself. *It'd make for a nice hero's breakfast with my crunchies.*

40

I was about as full as a guy can get. I lay on my bed, licking my chops to make sure that I got all the traces of bacon grease and sighing contentedly. *It doesn't get much better than this*, I thought to myself.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. I leapt to my feet and led the way, barking to let everyone know there was someone there.

I sat waiting importantly as Rainey opened the door. We both gasped in dismay when we saw who it was.

It was Old Man Melnyk! I gulped and tried to slink away, but Grandma came up behind me and blocked my exit.

"Hello, Albert, come on in!" said Grandma cheerfully. I looked at her in horror. *What is she doing?* I thought. *Inviting my archenemy into our house?*

"Well, don't mind if I do, Rose," said Mr. Melnyk. Mystified, I followed them into the living room and watched warily as he sat down.

Mom came in and said, "Hello, Mr. Melnyk, how are you?" The kids followed behind her, looking nervous and standing quietly, waiting to see what Old Man Melnyk was going to say.

To my surprise, he smiled at the kids. "I just came to let you know that after your grandma came over the other day, I've been doing some thinking about your dog here." Then, to my shock, he looked at *me* and smiled.

We all looked in Grandma in surprise, and then back at Mr. Melnyk.

"Things have been so busy in the past few days that I haven't had a chance to tell you," Grandma explained. "I had a chat with Albert all about Shamus the other day."

"Rose came over and introduced herself, and we had a very nice visit," continued Mr. Melnyk. "She was thoughtful enough to bring over a coffee cake."

So that's what she was up to that day! I thought to myself indignantly. *Visiting with the enemy!*

"Anyway," Mr. Melnyk continued, "she explained how your uncle has been helping you to train Shamus lately, and she says that it's been going really well. She's told me she's already seen a big difference in him."

Even Mom was surprised by this. Grandma Rose just grinned at us.

"I hear it was a pretty exciting night you all had," Mr. Melnyk said. "Max told me all about it when he stopped by my place earlier."

"Max did?" Cole sounded shocked. I know I was. After all, Max is a really shy and nervous guy. I'd never have thought he'd be brave enough to go and talk to Mr. Melnyk.

"Well, yes, he did." Mr. Melnyk smiled again. "He came over to tell me what a good dog Shamus is, and that he's an important part of your family, and he asked me to reconsider writing that letter."

"Wow," said Rainey. "That was so nice of him."

"He told me all about how you kids and Shamus solved the mystery, and that Shamus caught the thief."

Cole and Rainey grinned at Mr. Melnyk. I tried to look humble, but I was grinning too.

"We just wanted to prove that it wasn't Mom!" said Rainey.

I was still amazed to hear that Max had braved the Wrath of Melnyk to stand up for me. What a guy!

We all grinned modestly at him. We'd just been trying to clear Mom's name, that's all. And find some steak. Which, come to think of it, I never did ...

"He asked me to give Shamus another chance, and I figured that since this dog has so many people rooting for him, well, he can't be all that bad! In fact, since he helped solve the

crime and catch the thief, that makes him a pretty special dog to have around.”

Well, good old Max! I thought to myself. Shy, nervous old Max, going to talk to Mr. Melnyk and sticking up for me. Boy, what a pal!

He paused to smile at the kids again. You know, I have to say, Mr. Melnyk looked like a really nice guy when he smiled.

“And just this morning I saw Mr. Tibbles walk by and try to tempt Shamus into chasing him. This time, Shamus stayed in the yard and just barked at him! Now *that* showed some real self-control! So, I saw for myself that all your training’s already paying off.”

“Atta boy, Shamus!” said Cole, patting me. I grinned up at him. Tibbles had been pretty hard to resist, I had to admit. But if you’re gonna be a good dog, well, these are the sacrifices you have to make.

“And,” continued Melnyk, “now that I know it wasn’t Shamus digging up my garden, well, that changes things. And since he’s getting more training, I’m prepared to give him another chance. So, I’m tearing up my letter of complaint to the Housing Committee.” He grinned at the kids as they cheered.

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Melnyk!” said Mom. Rainey gave me a huge hug. “You can stay, Shamus!” she whispered. “You can stay forever!”

“We’ll work really hard with him, I promise,” said Cole. I grinned at him. I was always up for some training, since that meant lots of treats for yours truly.

“Well, I’d best be going.” Mr. Melnyk stood up. Looking down at me, he said, “Now you be a good dog, Shamus, and we’ll get along fine.” To my surprise, he actually gave my head a quick pat as he left.

Both Rainey and Cole hugged me and then hugged Grandma.

“It’s been so crazy around here that I didn’t have a chance to tell you that I went over to plead Shamus’s case to Mr. Melnyk,” said Grandma. “He’s actually a very nice person. Likes to play cards, so we’re going to get a game or two going one afternoon.”

Mom knelt down and gave me a big hug. “Atta boy, Shamus!” she said to me. I grinned up at her and gave her a face wash.

Looks like we’re both in the clear! I thought happily. *And neither of us had to go to the pound!*

41

The kids and I were lounging in the living room when Mom got home later that afternoon. As soon as I heard the door open, I hopped off the couch and lay down at Rainey's feet, trying to look as though I'd been there the whole time since Mom doesn't like me on the furniture.

I put on my innocent dog expression, hoping she'd fall for it. I needn't have worried.

Mom was really excited, and I don't think I'd ever seen her so happy.

"Guess what, everyone!" she called as she came in. Grandma came in from the kitchen where she'd been cooking. Whatever it was, smelled great, I gotta say. I sniffed the air appreciatively. *Beef?* I wondered and sniffed again. *No, venison. Definitely venison.*

She calls it stew. I call it heaven in a bowl. The way she makes a nice thick gravy and always adds some to my —

“I have some really great news!” said Mom, sitting down. “I just came from a meeting with Mr. Rigby, and he apologized to me for thinking that I could be the thief, and he offered me a job as store manager, with a raise!”

“Oh, Gail, that’s wonderful news!” said Grandma. “I’m so proud of you!” She gave Mom a big hug.

Mom grinned happily. “That’s not all,” she continued. “He’s not going to cancel any orders from Maudie or the other silversmiths. He asked me to apologize to them too!”

I gave a couple of delighted barks as the kids cheered and hugged Mom.

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On Saturday, Mom and Grandma held a party to celebrate. To my delight, Uncle Doug brought Maudie, so we got to have another reunion.

Even Mr. Melnyk was invited. As strange as it may seem, I'm kind of starting to like the guy. Turns out he's not a big fan of Mr. Tibbles either.

Max and his mom came, and Aura and Mitch. Fortunately, they decided to leave Hepzibah at home.

We all sat out in the yard with all of the food laid out on the picnic table. I love that — everybody serves themselves, dropping little bits of things on the grass for me to clean up.

I did my best to look like the world's best trained dog, sitting up with my chest all puffed out. It's one of my secrets at a barbeque, and I gotta say, it works like a charm. People see me looking like a good boy and just naturally give me —

“Shamus is getting so well trained,” said Aura, giving me

an ear rub. "We sure could use some advice with training Hepzibah."

"I'd be happy to give you a hand whenever I'm here," said Uncle Doug. "But even better, a friend of mine is opening up a pet store in the mall, and he's a great dog trainer. He works with all kinds of dogs and helps the owners with training."

"That would be perfect!" said Mitch. "We could use all the help we can get with Hepzibah!"

I snorted. *Well, there's an understatement*, I thought to myself. I was feeling pretty smug about how well I was doing these days, resisting the urge to chase Tibbles and just staying in the yard. Well, for the most part.

Sometimes, late at night, when the scent of the garbage was too much to ignore, I *might* just happen to slip out and head on over to the bins and give things a good once-over.

Later, when we'd all finished eating, I was snoozing blissfully in the sun when Rainey, Cole, and Max came over and dropped down next to me.

Max moaned. "I don't think that I've ever eaten so much," he said.

"Me too," said Cole. "I am stuffed!" I felt the same way. I sighed contentedly.

"It was a great party," said Rainey.

"It sure was," said Cole. "Hey, Max, what do you think of M.T., now that you've gotten to know him?"

“You know, he’s not so bad,” said Max. “He’s really nice to my mom, and that’s the important thing.”

“He sure seems a lot happier since he and Mitch won that bowling tournament!” said Rainey. “And Mr. Rigby sure is proud of him now that he’s a champion bowler!”

I moved my head closer to Rainey so she could scratch my ears.

“I guess things are going to be pretty boring around here now that we’ve solved the mystery,” commented Cole.

“Who knows — maybe another mystery will come along, and we can solve that one too!” said Rainey. “After all, with Shamus’s help, we’re pretty good at it!”

The kids laughed, and I put my head down again to snooze, reflecting on how well things had turned out. The real thief had been caught, and both Mom and I were safe from going to the pound.

We do make a good mystery solving team, I thought to myself. And if it wasn’t for Mr. Tibbles, life would be perfect around here.

Acknowledgements

I am so grateful to have the continued support of Barry Jowett, Head Cat Herder at Dancing Cat Books. To all the incredible staff at Cormorant/Dancing Cat Books, many thanks for all your assistance and humour on this journey. It's always appreciated!

Once again, the incomparable Julie McLaughlin did my book cover, and I'm thrilled with how she completely captured the heart and soul of Shamus.

A very special thank you to Alwyn Crocker: when I gave you my manuscript and a red pen for your backcountry camping trip, you read it, gave me insightful feedback, and resisted all temptation to use it as a fire-starter.

Thank you, Glenda Kohse, world's most patient friend, and reader of multiple drafts.

A special thank you to Tristan and Michelle, my own personal Team Minski, who corrected my policing details and gave me great advice.

I remain grateful as ever to my sister Karen Lee White, who gave me hours of her time with insight and knowledge of jewelry making, read through all my drafts with patience, and cared as much as I that I get those details right. You helped me bring Maudie to life.

Thank you always to my husband Dan, and my whole family, here in BC and in Ontario, who continue to support and champion me on this writing expedition.

A strange and painful twist of fate made this story better, and I to credit the person who helped with it. In the middle of writing of this book, Hudson, our beloved German Shepherd, passed away very suddenly. Not only that, but my son's family also had recently lost their German Shepherd, Dyesal. These dogs were best buddies, and treasured members of our family. It was a very sad time for all of us, and I had to take a break from writing about a fun-loving dog. We decided we weren't meant to be dogless, so my husband Dan and I contacted Heather Wilson of Broomeacres German Shepherds and went to visit some puppies. While we were there, Heather casually mentioned a funny story about a sickly puppy that she'd had to bottle feed, who was always mesmerized by her diamond ring as she held him. A few years later, she got an email from his new owner to let her know that the dog had zeroed in on a very valuable diamond ring in the grass while out on a walk. Heather credited his clever skill to all

his bottle-fed hours in her arms staring at her ring. I managed to work this into Shamus's story, and I love how it tied everything together. Thank you, Heather, for that story and our wonderful new puppy Sitka, who has healed a huge hole in our hearts.

And finally, to all the family dogs we've owned and loved through the years, thank you for enriching our lives and bringing us such joy — Skipper, Guinness, the real Shamus, Dyesal and Hudson — you all live on in *this* Shamus.



Leslie Gentile is a singer/songwriter of Indigenous and settler heritage. She performs with her children in The Leslie Gentile Band, and with one of her sisters in The Half White Band. Gentile currently lives on Vancouver island with her husband. Her debut novel for young readers, *Elvis, Me, and the Lemonade Stand Summer*, won the Jean Little First Novel Award and the City of Victoria Children's Book Prize, and was nominated for numerous other awards.

We acknowledge the sacred land on which Cormorant Books operates. It has been a site of human activity for 15,000 years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and Confederacy of the Ojibway and allied nations to peaceably share and steward the resources around the Great Lakes. Today, the meeting place of Toronto is still home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory.

We are also mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.

