

Excerpt from *Shamus the Urban Rez Dog, P.I.*  
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Published by DCB Young Readers  
Publication Date: September 2023  
160 pages  
\$14.95

# 1

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 scabbled 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 shortcut 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 townhouse 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 dogcatcher 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, which is boring for a dog, but he's always ready to throw a ball or Frisbee for me.

Rainey is just as fun — 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 rhodo-

dendron 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.