

# The Case of the Lost Lhasa

*by Doug Harrell*

**L**ucy, where are you?" Colin, tall, dark, and frantic, was searching his beach rental for any sign of his little dog. He had just woken and had been startled not to find her at his feet. He dashed outside calling her name, only to realize he was dressed in the plaid boxers and ripped T-shirt he had slept in. Sheepishly slinking back inside, he tossed on shorts and sneakers, grabbed his keys, and ran out of the house.



At pet-friendly Bow-Meow Books in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, it was a lazy August morning. The four-legged staff, all rescues, were amusing themselves by testing their powers of observation on the early customers. Sherlock, a rare dun-brown whippet, was a master of deduction with a keen nose. His faithful companion, Watson, was an all-white bull terrier. Watson was not clever, but he was stout of heart and could always be counted on for muscle. Hercule was Sherlock's equal in brains but was prone to distraction when grooming. He was a fastidious grey Persian with a white

mustache and tummy. Lastly, Jane was an older calico of no pedigree. Her specialty was observing how a person or animal behaved to determine their psychology. She had honed this skill living for years among a community of barn cats in Fort Meade, Maryland.

Watson began the analysis. “I say he’s a dog’s human.”

“Why do you say that?” Jane asked, as the athletic, young man walked directly toward the front desk and got in line. “He has a gentle poise. Notice how gracefully he walks.”

“He reminds me of my old human,” said Watson.

“Not very scientific, old friend,” said Sherlock. “Single men are more likely to favor dogs, and I observe the absence of a wedding ring. Not all married men wear rings, but I think we can safely assume he is single, as any wife would have long ago discarded that tattered garment he’s wearing.”

“I say he’s a dog’s human based on what appears to be a long, white hair clinging to his derriere,” said Hercule. “We cats have fur, not hair, and any self-respecting cat would have deposited much more fur on his human than that.”

“Still,” observed Sherlock, “there’s no substitute for a good sniff.” With that, he walked over and put his head near the man’s leg and shoes. Returning after a pat and a scratch, he declared, “Definitely a dog’s man. His dog is a female, and he feeds her a grain-free, small-breed formula with tuna. The little Maltese in the cage next to me used to eat something similar. I hate that smell. It reminds me of the shelter.”

“How on earth do you know what she eats just by smelling her human’s shoes?” asked Watson.

“She drools—probably naps on them,” answered Sherlock.

“From his scent, I can also tell the man ate sausage pizza from Spicoli’s recently. I’ve made a study of food smells, and Spicoli’s sausage is unique in Rehoboth for their use of Jamaican allspice. My old human used to take me tracking. I won every competition save one. Lost to a setter named Irish Adelaide, a remarkable female. Out of respect, she will always be known to me as ‘The Bitch’.”

Jane tried to predict the man’s preference in books. “I’m having a hard time getting a read on him. He just seems upset. Maybe self-help, but I wouldn’t bet on it.”

“I did smell adrenaline,” said Sherlock.

When the man’s turn came for his “audience” with the owners of the store, “Her Majesties Victoria and Regina, the Empresses of India Ink,” as they were known to their animal subjects, he put his hands a foot apart and spoke quickly and nervously.

“Wow. That’s a big book,” said Watson.

“Non, mon ami. He is relating something about his little white companion,” observed Hercule, in between licking his paw and grooming his mustache. “Given his agitation, I surmise they have been separated.”

Sherlock leaped to attention. “A case! Watson, on your paws. The game is afoot!”



For the rest of the morning, Jane assessed customers and animals, but didn’t pick up anything useful. Sherlock gave everyone a good sniff for signs of the little white dog. Not finding any, he chewed his squeaky pipe to contemplate, while Hercule restored his “little gray furs” with a nap in the sunny

windowsill. Watson had named their investigation “The Case of the Missing Maltese.” He helped Sherlock until story time, when he had to go to work. Watson treated children suffering from a fear of dogs by sitting adorably as they read stories to him. He liked the petting, and the condition of his patients always improved.

Shortly before “high sun time,” known to humans as noon, they got a break in the case. A young woman with a beautiful coat of black head-hair came into the store with a small, white dog sporting a pink leash and collar covered in rhinestones. Jane correctly predicted the woman was headed for the “large human pectorals and mammaries” section. Sherlock went over to say hello. After they each got a good sniff, the little dog turned and pleaded, “Help me.”

Sherlock recognized her scent immediately. “That woman is not your human.”

“No. My human is lost. I got out this morning to go exploring and he hasn’t caught up with me yet.”

“Didn’t your human provide you with tags?”

“Yes, of course, but they were attached to the most dreadful collar. I mean, if you’d seen it. The first thing I did was scrape it off against the corner of a building.”

“Do not distress yourself. My colleagues and I will help you. Does your human eat sausage pizza and display questionable taste in his wardrobe?”

“That’s him! Is he here?”

“No, but he was here this morning looking for you.”

“Oh, thank DOG! I was afraid I would never see him again. I met this woman this morning. She’s very nice, but I prefer

a large male as pack leader. Still, she has fabulous fashion sense. The first thing she did was take me shopping. I hope she'll let me keep this outfit."

Sherlock called his cohorts over. Hercule raised an eyelid and said he could hear fine from the windowsill.

"I am Sherlock. Allow me to present Watson and Jane. That is Hercule."

"Is this the missing Maltese we've been looking for?" Watson asked.

The little dog bristled. "Please. I'm a Lhasa apso. Maltese. I mean, really!"

"I forgot to ask your name," said Sherlock.

"Lucy, with my human. However, this woman is calling me—"

As if on cue, the woman took a few steps and gave a tug, "Katniss, over here, honey."

Sherlock said, "The problem is how to find your human. Do you know his name?"

"It sounds like 'Collar,' but I'm not sure. I call him Meal Ticket. I think her name is Walkies, but I only heard it once."

"Not very helpful. Can you describe the area where you last walked Collar?"

"Yes, there were lots of wooden houses with screen porches."

"That describes most of the town. Can you think of anything else?"

"On our walks, I saw a German shepherd, a golden retriever, and a tiny little dachshund."

"Shepherds and retrievers lead their humans on long

walks,” said Sherlock. “Even if we find them that doesn’t narrow our search. But miniature dachshunds don’t stray far from home. Can you describe him?”

“Oh, yes. He’s very handsome. Black and brown with a long, luxurious coat. He’d be just my type if he weren’t such a pussyfoot. He won’t walk unless his human picks him up and carries him away from the house. Then he trots home ... looking gorgeous.”

From the corner, Hercule perked up an ear. “Ah. No doubt you are referring to Monsieur Hartley, or ‘One Way,’ as he is known. He’s a year-round resident and lives near the noisy place with screaming children and lights that spin at night.”

“That’s him!” Lucy said.

Just then, book in hand, Walkies made her way to the cash register, pulling Lucy behind her. As they were leaving the store, Lucy pleaded, “Oh, please hurry. The way Walkies has been wrinkling her nose makes me think she wants to give me a bath, and we hardly know each other!”

“Where does Walkies stay?” Jane called after her.

“We’re on a street near—”

And with a tug of the leash, she was gone.



Hercule joined Jane and Watson in a huddle around Sherlock as he spoke.

“We have two problems to solve. Where is Collar, and where is Walkies taking Lucy? Watson, you and I need to get onto Lucy’s trail before it gets cold. Hercule and Jane, you go find Collar. Then we have to get them both back to the shop

at the same time.”

As Jane and Hercule made for the cat door, Sherlock went behind the counter with Watson close behind.

“Which one, Sherlock?” asked Watson.

“Regina, I think. She’s easier to walk, and I see she’s wearing her fang shoes today.”

Watson began pushing at Regina’s leg, while Sherlock pawed at the leashes hanging on the wall. Regina turned, and from her tone they could tell they had been successful.

Once outside, Regina made her usual turn to the right. Watson started to follow, but Sherlock stopped him. “Not that way, Watson. Our quarry went to the left.” Watson stopped on the spot and waited for Regina to reach the end of her leash. Then he turned and began pulling her in the direction of the boardwalk. Teetering on her high heels, she had no choice but to follow.

When they reached the first cross street, the scent became even stronger. Sherlock followed it as far as Basher’s but lost it in the maze of sweaty legs and squashed french fries. Sitting down, he said, “I’ve lost the trail, Watson.”

Watson sat next to him. Regina pulled on Watson’s leash, but it might as well have been tied to a lamppost.

Thinking out loud, Watson said, “They can’t have gone on the wooden street—no dogs allowed. And they can’t have just disappeared.”

“Watson, old boy, you’ve done it again. Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth. Lucy brought Walkies here to get fries, then doubled back. That’s why the scent was stronger after

we crossed the street.”

They were off again, retracing their steps back to the corner, where they turned right. Little Regina was being dragged unsteadily behind Watson’s sturdy gait as though she had harpooned a whale. Away from the big double street, with its heavy concentration of smells, it was a snap for Sherlock to follow the scent. After turning this way and that, the trail finally led up a front walk.

As they approached, Lucy gave a yelp from the screened in porch. “However did you find me?”

“Alimentary, my dear girl,” said Sherlock. “You eat a lot of tuna fish.”



As he and Jane went out the cat door to the alley, Hercule said, “Shall we proceed to the noisy place to find Monsieur One Way?”

Jane had the beginning of an idea, so she bathed her paw to think. After a moment she said, “We could search, but I think I begin to understand Mr. Collar. It’s almost ‘high sun time,’ and he does not have a female. Odds are good his refrigerator is empty, so he will need to find sustenance.”

“Jane, my wise friend. You suggest we watch the dining establishments? A good thought, but there are so many. How will we choose?”

“He’s dressed rather humbly for any of the finer restaurants, and I suspect he will want something he can eat while he continues his search.”

“And we know he likes ze pizza,” said Hercule.



“Spicoli’s!” they said in unison and began racing in that direction. After agreeing on a plan, they took up positions on either side of the door. They didn’t have to wait long before Jane spied Collar in his torn T-shirt.

“Hercule, he’s coming.”

“Mon Dieu! It is too soon. Our friends will need more time. We must wait before we act.”



Per Sherlock’s instructions, Watson marched up to the screen door, dragging Regina behind him. With his paw, he ripped open a gash large enough for Lucy to jump through. As soon as she was out, Sherlock bit his leash and pulled it out of Regina’s hand. Then, Sherlock and Lucy took off running. Watson, despite Regina’s pulling and pleading, planted himself in front of the door and, doing his darndest to look mean, kept Walkies inside. Several bystanders tried to catch Lucy, but Sherlock moved in serpentine fashion around her as they ran. Once his two friends had a good head start, Watson turned around, yanked his leash out of Regina’s hand, and sprinted back to the shop.



About the time Collar entered Spicoli’s, Jane and Hercule heard a commotion and turned to see the madcap chase on the opposite sidewalk: Sherlock clearing the way for Lucy, Watson close behind, and the two women doing their best to catch up. Time was now of the essence, and Jane and Hercule waited anxiously outside Spicoli’s for Collar to exit.

Finally, Collar grabbed a bag and turned toward the door.

Jane got into position, and just as Collar stepped out, she ran squarely into his legs and let out a convincing screech of pain. She lay there for a moment, feigning injury, and then slowly got up, holding out one of her front paws and limping.

As they had hoped, Collar made soothing sounds and bent down to read her tag. Then, he scooped her up in his free arm and began walking toward the store.



Out of breath and frantic, Regina and Walkies ran to the bookstore, where they were met at the door by Victoria.

“Whatever happened? Sherlock and Watson just showed up barking at the door with this little, white dog.”

A few feet inside the store, Sherlock was sitting up, looking regal as if nothing had happened, while several yards back, poor little Lucy was flat on her belly, panting furiously. Watson, also panting, had placed himself between Lucy and the door.

Stepping forward, Walkies exclaimed, “Katniss, thank goodness you’re safe.”

As she approached, Watson stood, showing his teeth and growling softly, stopping her in her tracks.

Regina ran over and grabbed Watson’s collar. “Watson, what’s gotten into you?” She then turned to Walkies. “Don’t worry, he looks fearsome, but he’s just a big puppy dog.” Regina tried to pull Watson toward his crate in the back of the store, but he stayed rooted to the spot.

“We are so sorry,” said Victoria. I can’t imagine what’s gotten into Sherlock and Watson, chasing your little dog like that.”

“Thank you, but she’s not mine. I wish she were. I found her wandering around lost this morning. She’s so sweet I couldn’t bring myself to take her to the shelter, so I called them and left my number. I bought this cute collar so I could walk her around and look for her owner.”

“No luck, clearly. And no one called?”

“Someone may have. Like a dummy, I forgot to charge my phone last night and it died sometime this morning. I’ve had so much fun walking her around town that a part of me hopes no one ever calls.”

“I don’t blame you, but I think I know who her owner is. There was a guy here this morning looking for a little, white dog just before you came in. The way you’ve got her all blinged-out, I never imagined it could be the same dog.”

Just then the door opened and in strutted Hercule. Behind him was Collar, with a paper bag in one hand and Jane draped over the other arm like a furry football. He saw Victoria and walked over.

“Hi, I’m Colin—I was in here earlier looking for my dog. I’m really sorry, but I stumbled over your cat. I think I hurt her paw.”

Safely home, Jane hopped down and began rubbing against his leg with no sign of injury. Upon hearing her human’s voice, Lucy let out a happy bark and ran up to him wagging her tail.

“There you are, you rascal!” Colin got on one knee and set down the bag as Lucy jumped into his arms, licking his face profusely. “Where have you been, girl, and where did you get that collar?” Then, he held her up out in front of him and said in his best Ricky Ricardo voice, “Lucy, you’ve got

some 'splaining to do!" Standing, he asked, "Who do I have to thank for taking such good care of Lucy?"

A blushing Walkies shyly raised a gently waving hand. "That would be me. Hi, I'm Whitney."

Victoria politely excused herself and resumed her position behind the counter. Regina was busy rubbing Watson's tummy, as he had rolled over the moment Colin had come into the store.

"Thank you very much," said Colin. He returned Lucy to the floor, and she lay down with her head on Whitney's shoes. "She seems to like you."

"And I adore her. Such a sweetie pie. Honestly, I was hoping she was a stray so I could keep her."

"That's what I was afraid of. The shelter gave me a number, and I've been calling all morning, but no one ever picked up. I guess that was you."

"Yes, I'm sorry—my phone died."

"It happens. Excuse me a second. Let me get rid of this." Colin picked up the bag holding his uneaten takeout and walked over to a trash can. Then he walked back, smiling. "I'm kinda hungry. Can I buy you lunch as a thank-you?"

"That'd be great," said Whitney, running her hand through her hair. "Just let me go home first and change. I chased after Katniss—sorry, Lucy—for blocks. I must be a mess."

"If that's a mess, I can't wait to see you put together." He smiled and looked down. "Seems I could use a change, too."

"Shall we meet back here in an hour?"

"Sounds good. If there's any problem, I'll call you."

“And I’ll answer this time!”

Lucy trotted over to Watson and licked his face. “My big, strong terrier.” She seemed about to say more, but Colin picked her up and carried her out of the store.



A few minutes later, with Jane on her perch by the door and Hercule napping on the windowsill, Watson walked over to Sherlock.

“Well, Sherlock, another successful case.”

“Thank you, Watson. I couldn’t have done it without you.”

“Your brains and my brawn, eh?”

“Precisely. But now I am again faced with the tedium of existence. Watson, I must have a case!”

“How about The Case of the Missing Milk-Bone?”

“You never tire of that one, do you, old friend? Very well.”

They walked over to their queens, Victoria and Regina, and began pushing hard against their legs. Victoria held their collars while Regina took two treats and stalked out into the store, looking for a good hiding place. Upon her return, Sherlock leaped to attention. “A case! Watson, on your paws. The game is afoot!”



Doug Harrell has spent much of his life in Delaware. In high school, he read Sherlock Holmes stories and Agatha Christie novels with a black cat named Midnight on his lap. Doug and his late wife, Carolyn, were the humans of

orange tabby cat brothers named Sherlock and Watson, who spent a lot of their long lives detecting food and warm laps. When Doug met his wife, Michelle, he fell in love with her and with her orange tabby cat, Mr. (Mario) Lemieux. Although Mr. Lemieux wasn't so sure about Doug, before long they were best buddies.

Doug and Michelle now live with their three orange tabby cats (are you sensing a pattern here?): Raymond, Robert, and Frankie. Raymond, Robert, and Frankie send their love to Aunt Jane and the other nice humans at Faithful Friends Animal Shelter who took such good care of them before they found their forever home.