

**THE CASE OF THE
DIAMOND
DOG
COLLAR**



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Holiday House / New York

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Printed and Bound in May 2011 at Maple Vail, York, PA, USA

First Edition

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

www.holidayhouse.com

Art on page 50 by Clement Goodman

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Freeman, Martha, 1956-

The case of the diamond dog collar / Martha Freeman. — 1st ed.

p. cm. — (A first kids mystery ; 2)

Summary: Seven-year-old Tessa and ten-year-old Cammie, the first female president's daughters, investigate when a diamond goes missing from the collar of their very rambunctious dog.

ISBN 978-0-8234-2337-8 (hardcover)

1. White House (Washington, D.C.)—Juvenile fiction. [1. White House (Washington, D.C.)—Fiction. 2. Presidents—Family—Fiction. 3. Sisters—Fiction. 4. Dogs—Fiction. 5. Lost and found possessions—Fiction. 6. Washington (D.C.)—Fiction. 7. Mystery and detective stories.] I. Title.

PZ7.F87496Cas 2010

[Fic]—dc22

2011005019

For my mother,
Barbara Parks Freeman

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CHAPTER ONE



MY sister, Tessa, ran into our bedroom yelling: “One of the big, fat diamonds is missing!”

I didn’t look up.

Tessa waved her arms to get my attention. “I’m serious, Cammie!”

There are not that many big, fat diamonds in my life, so most likely Tessa was talking about one from our dog’s new collar. It had come the day before yesterday, a present from Empress Pu-Chi. She’s not a real empress, she’s a dog, and she belongs to the president of a nearby nation.

I sighed and closed my book. “They’re big, fat, *fake* diamonds, Tessa.”

“I know, I know, I know,” Tessa said. “But anyway, one of ’em’s missing, and you gotta come see.”

Have I mentioned my sister is a drama queen?

Still, when she grabbed my arm, I went with her. I didn’t have anything better to do. It was Friday afternoon, the start of our March break. Right about now

my family was supposed to be on Air Force One flying to California. Only at the last minute, my mom was too busy working on the energy bill to leave Washington.

We didn't want to go to California without Mom.

Since January, when she got to be president of the United States, Tessa and I don't get to see her that much.

Tessa pulled me out the bedroom door and headed for the West Sitting Hall, which is kind of like our living room. Our dog, Hooligan, was there, dozing in his old bed. I was surprised to see him. Usually about now Mr. Bryant would be taking him for his afternoon walk on the South Lawn.

Tessa let go of me and ran over to Hooligan. "Look!" She pointed at the collar, which was bright red, with twelve big, fat, fake diamonds all around it.

Make that eleven.

Hooligan must've heard us because he stretched his paws and opened one eye.

"We should find that missing diamond, Cammie," Tessa said. "It looked real to me. I bet the letter's wrong."

Tessa meant the letter that came with the present. Here is what it said:

*Greetings to Hooligan, Esteemed Dog of the First
Children of the United States of America,*

*On behalf of my master, President Manfred
Alfredo-Chin, democratically elected leader of a
certain nation nearby to your own, I am pleased*

to offer you the gift of this canine accessory. Please accept it as a token of our admiration and respect, as well as evidence that President Alfredo-Chin bears you no hard feelings for the unfortunate incident earlier this year.

While President Alfredo-Chin's own dog (me!) is practically perfect in every way, he wisely recognizes that in most cases, dogs will be dogs.

*Supreme Regards,
Empress Pu-Chi
Pekingese*

P.S.—In keeping with the laws on gifts to the pets of presidents, the stones adorning the accessory are not genuine diamonds but attractive facsimiles.

Tessa and I didn't know the word *facsimile*, but our Cousin Nathan did. He is ten like me and lives with us here in the White House along with his mom, my aunt Jen. According to Nathan, *facsimile* is pronounced *fak-si-mi-lee*, and it means "copy"—in other words, fake.

Also, I should explain that when President Manfred Alfredo-Chin visited earlier this year, Hooligan did something that almost caused an international incident. I was glad to know there were no hard feelings.

"What do you mean you think the letter's wrong?" I asked Tessa. "You think someone's lying about the diamonds?"

Tessa shrugged. “All I’m sayin’ is they look pretty sparkly.”

Hooligan opened his other eye and wiggled his ears. At the same time, I heard canary hysteria from the second-floor kitchen.

“What is wrong with Granny’s new—?” Tessa started to ask, but before she could finish, Hooligan jumped like a string had yanked him.

“Hooligan?” I made my voice all calm and soothing. “Be good now.”

Hooligan cocked his head as if I had made an excellent suggestion, one worth thinking about...but not right now. Right now he was too busy...

...going *crazy!*

He does this sometimes: lunges forward, thumps his paws, springs high in the air and spins so fast he turns blurry.

“*Catch him!*” I yelled.

Tessa dived, but too soon, and Hooligan, long tail flying, made a neat leap over her and ran like he’d seen rabbits in the distance.

Twee-twee-twee! came from the kitchen, and then the clatter of canary wings against the cage.

Distracted, I turned and didn’t see Tessa’s body, which I kicked—“*Ow, Cammie!*”—before falling over onto the floor. Lying there, I heard a squeal from down the hall. Then there was an *oof*, a *thump*, a pause and a *thwack*.

Oof and *thump* mean Hooligan’s crashed into someone and knocked ’em over. This happens a lot.

But *thwack*? What did that mean?

Twee-twee-twee!

And then: *Aah-rooo!*

Hooligan had started to howl.

Tessa and I untangled, scrambled and ran.

In the center hall, we found a body.

“Are you okay, Mrs. Hedges?” Tessa asked.

She was lying on her back with her eyes closed. Her hands clasped a feather duster to her chest.

“Go away.” Mrs. Hedges is one of the maids. She is usually grumpy.

“Hooligan’s not really bad,” I explained. “He just has—”

“—too much energy. I know.” Mrs. Hedges did not open her eyes. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll just lie here till my strength returns.”

“What if it doesn’t?” Tessa asked.

“Then someone will cart me away.”

Aah-rooo!

“We’ll be back!” I told Mrs. Hedges.

We found Hooligan outside the Lincoln Bedroom, singing to the ceiling. High up on the closed door were the unmistakable marks of doggy toenails. Hooligan must’ve leaped at the door—*thwack*.

“*Hooligan! Be QUIET!!*” Tessa yelled.

This had no effect.

Then the door opened.

A beautiful blonde woman stood there. She was dressed all in white except for a gold necklace and gold earrings. She was smiling...luckily. “Why, Hooligan,

shouldn't you be out walking? Hello, Cameron. Hello, Tessa. *Oh!*"

The "*oh!*" was Hooligan pushing past her into the bedroom.

"Hello, Ms. Kootoor," Tessa said. "Sorry about—"

"Never mind, Tessa," said Ms. Kootoor. "You know how I love dogs. Be with you in a moment." The door closed.

Ms. Madeline Kootoor is a friend of my mom's from high school. She used to be a supermodel, then she married somebody rich, then he died. She's been staying with us for a week. According to Dad, we can't throw her out because she raised so much money for my mom's campaign. Plus she and Tessa get along great. They talk about clothes and purses and junk.

The door opened again. Ms. Kootoor came out, holding Hooligan by the collar. At the same time, Mr. Bryant walked up behind us.

Hooligan was thrilled to see Mr. Bryant. He wagged his tail, smiled a big doggy smile and lunged—pulling Ms. Kootoor right over on her face.

"Hooligan!" Mr. Bryant is usually patient, but now he was angry. "Can't a man grab a cup of coffee without all be-whatz-it breaking loose?"

Hooligan finally figured out he was in trouble and dropped to the floor with his paws over his ears. For a moment, he and Ms. Kootoor were lying side by side. Then Ms. Kootoor pushed herself up on her elbows, squinched her eyes, and shook her head.

"Are you okay?" Tessa asked.

Ms. Kootoor tried to smile, but her lipstick was smeared, so the smile came out crooked. “Nothing a mirror won’t fix,” she said bravely, “and maybe some aspirin.”

From down the hall we could still hear Granny’s canary: *Twee-twee-twee!*

CHAPTER TWO



WITH things under control outside the Lincoln Bedroom, Tessa and I went back to check on Mrs. Hedges. She was gone.

Did her strength return? Or was she carted away?

To find out, we decided to go with Mr. Bryant and Hooligan on their walk. On the way to the South Lawn, we could stop and ask Mr. Ross if Mrs. Hedges was all right. Mr. Ross is the chief usher, in charge of taking care of the White House.

We found him in his office on the state floor, also known as the first floor. We live mostly on the second floor.

“She’s a little shaken up but otherwise fine.” Mr. Ross looked at Mr. Bryant. “I thought Hooligan was supposed to be supervised?”

After Hooligan caused the almost international incident, some changes were made in the White House. Like Hooligan has his very own bedroom where he goes to bed in his crate at nine every night. Also,

Mr. Bryant, who used to run the presidential elevator, got the job of taking care of Hooligan from morning till dinnertime every weekday. On weekends, there's a new guy, Mr. Ng, which is pronounced *ing*. He is from Vietnam. At night, the family—meaning me, Tessa, Granny, Nate and Dad when he's in town—take care of Hooligan till bedtime.

“I left Hooligan napping in his old bed in the West Sitting Hall so I could get a cup of coffee,” Mr. Bryant said. “Until yesterday, he'd been behaving so much better. I didn't expect any—”

“Hmm,” said Mr. Ross. And he wasn't smiling.

The White House South Lawn is like the biggest backyard ever. During a war a long time ago, a president kept sheep here so he could save money on mowing. Now, there's a swing set and a fountain and a putting green. There are mini forests of trees, a vegetable garden and a basketball court. There is a hidden garden that has paving stones with the hand prints of presidents' kids and grandkids from long ago.

There is also a swimming pool, but we can't use it till the weather gets warm enough.

It was a cool, clear March day. I was wearing a sweatshirt, but Tessa had refused to put one on. She said she didn't have one the right color to go with her outfit. To keep warm, she started to bounce up and down, which made Hooligan hyper all over again. As soon as Mr. Bryant unbuckled the leash, he took off, sprinting in circles.

Mr. Bryant looked down at us. “He had been doing better, hadn’t he?”

“Up till yesterday,” I agreed.

By now I guess you’re wondering about yesterday. Short version: Hooligan broke his leash, and because of that, my sister, a bunch of marines, half the Secret Service and the vice president of the United States almost got blown to Kansas in a helicopter hurricane!

Long version: After school, Nate, Mr. Bryant and Hooligan, Tessa and I had been standing under the awning outside the Diplomatic Reception Room waiting for my dad’s helicopter to land.

When anyone in our family travels in a helicopter, a couple of extra ones go along, too, to fool bad guys. So three helicopters were descending toward the landing pad when some birds burst out yakking, and Hooligan went so crazy he busted his leash and raced right toward the spinning blades!

Tessa ran after him. I closed my eyes. The Secret Service agents yelled into their headsets: “South Lawn emergency. Fireball in danger! Repeat, Fireball in danger!”

Fireball is the Secret Service code name for Tessa. Mine is . . . well, never mind what mine is. For our family, they all have to start with *F*.

Anyway, to avoid squashing anybody, the pilots kept their helicopters hovering in the air, and the blades acted like giant fans. When I opened my eyes, it looked like a massive game of wind-whipped tag, one that turned into hide-and-seek when Hooligan got himself lost in the trees by the tennis court.

Meanwhile, the vice president had been working with his staff in the West Wing. When he saw all the excitement, he came out through the Rose Garden to help.

The scene was frantic and confused with people running every which way, and for a few minutes I couldn't see Hooligan at all. Finally, he reappeared sprinting toward us on the driveway, and that's when Mr. Bryant cut him off.

"How come his paws were so muddy?" I asked Mr. Bryant now. "It's not like it rained this week."

"With the dry spell we're having, the gardeners had been watering," said Mr. Bryant. "I had mud on my shoes, too."

One thing about living in the White House, there are always news guys around, which is why every dinky thing ends up on TV. I mean, sure, my dog and my sister and the vice president and the marines and the Secret Service almost got mixed-up in a helicopter crash in the White House backyard . . . but is that supposed to be news?

Anyway, the helicopters finally landed, and my mom came over from the Oval Office to meet my dad—same as she does every week.

By then, Ms. Kootoor had joined us under the awning. The news guys love Ms. Kootoor. Dad calls her "cameraman catnip." When she air kissed my dad, their cameras clicked and whirred.

"Whatever was all the fuss, girls?" she asked Tessa and me.

When Tessa explained, Ms. Kootoor laughed her tinkly laugh. Then she knelt and spoke to Hooligan. “Silly puppy. Didn’t anyone ever teach you not to chase helicopters?”

Hooligan smiled a big doggy smile and licked her face. He had forgotten all about being in trouble.