

“Where are we going?” asked Samwise. She was sitting, her head hanging out the passenger’s side window as their newly acquired Ferrari roared down the highway.

“Well, Holli Gregg is, for the moment, gone. I was able to read her mind briefly as she flew off to the East. All I caught was the word ‘carthage’. But, for now, I’m following up on one of the many leads that Carlton left for me. I don’t think Holli Gregg killed Carlton, but she’s somehow involved, and in a bad way.”

Want to know what happened to get the Ferrari? Oh, well, then I’ll tell you what happened. Hold on to your popcorn, mom and dad, cause it’s a-gonna be a bumpy ride-o.

Terry and Samwise walked for some distance until they came to a gas station. Then they saw a man with a Ferrari drive up and get gas. They also saw a man drive up with an old, rusty Chevy Cavalier. When they went in to pay, they left the keys in their cars, so Terry and Samwise stole the Ferrari, not the Cavalier.

I told you! You didn’t listen, and you read it anyway! And now you’re clutching your heart, inches from dying. Well, I can’t say that I’m feeling sorry for you. What I am feeling is a little bit proud of myself for telling such a heart-wrenching tale in just one paragraph. Truth be told, it wasn’t nearly interesting enough for inclusion into the story at first, but you all begged me (and the rest of you heard it) so I put it in there.

“We’re going to have to stop and get new license plates somewhere,” Terry cautioned, enjoying their full tank of gas. The way he figured it, they were marked animals. He couldn’t help but think of the irony that this car was the same shade of red as Holli Gregg’s lipstick. Maybe it’s the color that leaves the mark, not the woman. “I know a place. I’ll head on over there with you and this car.”

Samwise hardly paid attention. In his heart, he wondered if he would live to regret his choice in choosing Terry over Holli Gregg. She had been fantastically cruel. She always said, “My, Samwise! How you do smell!” At first, it was funny, and Frodo would fall off her chair laughing, but Samwise simply felt that Holli Gregg meant it. Holli Gregg hated Samwise on some

level, and that had pushed Samwise into Terry's arms (or legs, as had been the occasion). "What is the place?"

"Well, I knew a guy when I was a detective. He was a narc for us. He's bound to have some plates I can use. This is the turn up here." Terry turned the vehicle off onto an exit for North Whales, Pennsylvania. They had been driving most of the day to end up so far out of nowhere from where they had been.

Soon the Ferrari was off the wild frontier of the interstate and safely within the tree-lined suburbs of Philly. Terry quietly and carefully scanned the lines of houses. He had to stop several times for stop signs because these were safe neighborhoods, but he never saw anyone playing out on the grass. He checked his watch, which agreed with the car's clock, which agreed with the sunlight, to see that it was just after two in the afternoon. Everyone was at work or at school, Terry guessed. He knew his friend wouldn't be at either.

Then he spotted it; 2424 Twenty-four-berry Street was just ahead. He honked twice and flashed his lights as he pulled into the open garage. He parked the car and waited. Samwise got restless with no rushing air to cool her constant doggy thoughts. Soon, out came a snail from the garage door. The snail eyed the car with suspicion. Then he spotted Terry. "Terry!" the snail exclaimed, and he came sliding over to the driver's side of the Ferrari. "How are you, chap?"

"I gots me a bit of a problem, Steven," Terry answered. Terry opened the car door and got out. He addressed the snail with a look of pleading and ambiguity. The snail answered with a look of frustration and yet pleasure. Terry held out his hand. The snail, slowly, also put out his slithery, snail-hand.

"I'll help you. What do you need, Tear?" Terry shook the snail's hand triumphantly. Then he moved around to the back of the vehicle.

"I need new plates. This car is hot, as I'm sure you figured out. I would go through the department and explain that I commandeered the vehicle for official police business, but there's no time for that right now. In fact, there's precious little time for anything, including humor," Terry answered the slow moving insect-thingy.

Steven surmised the plates. "The plates are no problem, Terry. I'm always good for that, you know. And, normally, I'd ask what you need them for, but, in this case, I'd rather not know what's going on. Hey, puppy!" Samwise perked up at his species. "You want some water, girl? There's some in the house." Samwise got out of the vehicle and trotted into the house, in search of water. "Let's just hope she finds it in the fridge and not the toilet," Steven added, sourly.

"Oh, she's a good dog. Saved my life. She'll come in handy," Terry answered. "Do you mind if I get something to eat really quick, Steve-o?"

"Sure thing. Hand me my tools on that hook over there and then have at her," Steven answered. He eyes the plates like they were a complex math problem, like in Abstract Algebra or Cryptography classes at college. Terry thought that he might take his job too seriously, but he thought he best not say anything to this kind friend of his. He didn't have many friends like this anymore. After handing the snail his case, Terry went inside. He rooted around the fridge for strawberries or boiled chicken pieces or even some leaf lettuce and eventually settled for just water. He walked into the living room and turned on the television. There wasn't much on. He did catch an episode of Newsbleep on BleepTV. He watched it; it was a Lost parody set during Thanksgiving. He found it really super funny, and he laughed so hard that his gut seriously hurt. When the episode was over, which was way too soon, he turned to the news. There was a piece about a fire at the old hospital. Apparently Holli Gregg had torched the records room, too, before coming after him. I guess the info about his mother and father would be gone forever.

"Terry, take a look," came Steven's voice from the garage. Terry got up and went to the garage where Steven was beaming over his work. Not only were the plates changed but the car was now deep blue and the chassis of the car was all different. In fact, it looked like his old 2001 Chevy Impala SE. Terry couldn't believe it.

"How did you do that?" asked Terry. He was amazed.

"Oh, you know. Just a little duck tape and paint. Now, this will help you for a little bit, but not for long. Do you have any sort of decal you can put on the side, just to make it look like your old vehicle?" Steven slid toward the

trunk of the car as he talked.

“Uh, there might be something in the trunk,” Terry offered. “You’ll need the keys to open it.” Terry tossed the keys to Steven. They passed through the air as if in slow motion. The keys clanged as they hit the ground, several feet to Steven’s left. Samwise came bounding out into the garage, now full of energy with his drink. He had drunk from the toilet. He immediately sprang for the keys, knocking Steven over and knocking the keys out into the driveway.

“Oh, for Space God’s sake,” Terry muttered. Then he walked to the driver’s side, reached in, and hit the trunk release. Meanwhile, Samwise was jumping around and playing with the keys in the driveway, very pleased to be out of the car and into such a safe neighborhood as North Whales. Steven got up and slid over to the trunk, which was now sitting open. Steven and Samwise seemed to notice the trunk’s contents at the same time.

“Oh my Space God...” murmured Steven. His slimy hand-thiny went to his mouth. Samwise stopped playing and stared.

“What? What is it?” asked Terry. He walked to the back of the vehicle, and there was a body. It had been a human man in a business suit, but now he was more like six parts of a human man in a business suit. The trunk had been lined with garbage bags (thank Space God!) to keep the lining from soaking through with blood.

“I’m washing my hands of this,” Steven said. He went into the house, slowly but surely. Samwise approached the vehicle. There were tears in her eyes.

“Is he dead, Tear?” she asked quietly.

“He’s worse than that, Sammy. He’s destroyed,” Terry answered. His hand was about an inch from petting Samwise on the head when Steven’s voice called out from the house. Terry and Samwise made their way into the living room where the news was still on.

“That look like the guy in that trunk?” Steven asked.

On the screen was the same face they had seen in the trunk. It was the human man, all put together, in athletic clothes with a couple children and a

young woman next to him. It appeared like they were playing American football in the photograph. "That's him alright," answered Terry.

"I think I'm going to be sick," said Samwise. And yet, despite the urgings of Terry and Steven, she just barfed on the carpet, as dogs tend to do.

The reporter on the news show was saying, "...last spotted leaving his home earlier yesterday evening. His whereabouts are unknown, but his family did receive a ransom note in the mail. We'll have more on this as it unfolds. Now, this commercial break." Then the reporter turned away from the camera and the headline "Senator Malarky Missing!" flashed onto the screen.

As the commercial for a popular kind of toothpaste began to roll, Terry thought about how bad his luck was getting. "We should have taken the Cavalier," he muttered and rolled his eyes.