

Terry was very smart. Terry knew all kinds of things about economics and pottery and hygiene. Terry also knew the solar system (before they changed it), and how to get blood out of leather. Terry was a very funny turtle who had lots of friends who loved him. Or her. It could be a him or her, I suppose. A bit ambiguous, that is. It doesn't matter. Kids don't really understand genders, do they?

Onward, lad. We're losing them. Terry was also very friendly. He...r also had lots of friends, including Miles's friend Tony and his girlfriend. But they were named Carlton the Raccoon Carcass and Holli Gregg the ... bird. Falcon bird. Terry's friends would come by when he was feeling sad or down in the dumps or angry at God. Sometimes his friends and he would dress as humans and make fun of their silly ways. And sometimes, only sometimes, Terry would cry and wish his father had never left him when he was three.

Terry got a call at six o'clock before coffee. There had been a murder.

Carlton laid there lifelessly, his tail flapped in the wind that came roaring by after every vehicle on the highway. Dust and gravel scattered, as did the animals, and we all closed our eyes against it. Holli Gregg came stumbling up the ditch towards us. She looked like she couldn't decide if a forty would be enough or a bottle would be too much and decided to research them both. She looked like hockey sticks.

I, on the other hand, knew this dame was trouble from the way she wore her lipstick. My father used to say that a woman who wears that shade of red means to leave her mark. I guess ol' pops was good for something, now and again. I could tell before she opened her mouth to ask that the next words out of her mouth were going to be. I knew because I'm also psychic.

"How did you find-" she began.

"I followed the smell, sweetheart."

Both she and Carlton gave me the same look, a yearning in their eyes. I had to look away. I couldn't look at my dead partner like that. Not her; him, the Raccoon. We'd been on the job together for nearly ten years. It would have been ten years tomorrow, and the day after that, I was set to retire.

"Tear. You gotta find out who did this. You just gotta," came Carlton's

voice. Whether I heard it out-loud or just in my own head, that remained to be seen. I held back my tears.

"You're our only hope, Terry," whispered Holli Gregg. She moved in closer, the booze on her breath mixing with her expensive perfume. I found it hard to tell if this was the cautious flirting of a crime scene onlooker or the start of something foolish. It's best to not take chances today.

"I know." I pushed her away and picked up Carlton by the tail. "And call me Tear."

Back in the squad car, the compressed, skid-marked corpse of my former detective confidant sat awkwardly in the squad car next to me.

"So, what happened, Carlton? Tell me; who did this to you?" I asked.

"You know me, Tear. I never was good at details. Best I can remember, it was a group of Serbian communists looking for a good cop killin'. I was on assignment, a solo, for the captain. I was looking for a link between that art heist in the Louvre last year and that political assassination in India. I was on to something, Terry. I was this close to finding out who killed JFK, when all of a sudden--"

Then, just as Carlton, or Tonnie as we called him, was getting to the juice of his story, Holli Gregg came at the car in a rage, pecking and flapping and screeching. I rolled down my window, and I rolled my eyes. This broad was starting to get on my nerves.

"I demand to know what you're doing with that body!"

"Calm down, miss. This is standard detective procedure. You should really go on home, and we'll bring you in for questioning later. Why do you find this body so interesting in the first place?"

"Because that was my husband, you arse!"

And there it was. I looked at Tonnage's lifeless corpse, but he gave no reply. How could my partner have a wife that I didn't know about?

"Get in, lady." I could tell it was going to be a long day. Helleck, it was, already.

"If you're going to help us," I cautioned her as she stepped into the vehicle, "then you have to know something. I can talk to ghosts."

"What? Like anyone can talk to ghosts. You're just that crazy, I think."

"Why do you think I have a perfect record with the detective squad? It's not just pushing papers and solving Quick-e-mart robberies. It's listening to ghosts. Who can tell a story better than the one who lived it? I need you to shut up while I talk to my ex-partner here. I guess he's your ex-partner, too, isn't he." But it was no time for jokes. We had to press on.

"Go ahead, Tonnie. You were saying?"

"I just don't know what happened, Tear. There was so much going on at once. It was like we were setup. I remember hearing foreign languages. You know how I'm a wiz at languages. I heard swahili and ancient egyptian and some language I've never heard before. And there was a voice on the radio. It was giving us a Code 11-A6. Code 11-A6, Terry!"

"What's he saying? You can talk to my husband? What's he telling you?" interjected the falcon in back.

"Ma'am, please! If you can't be quiet you have to leave! Tell me, what's your name?"

"My name is Holli Gregg."

"Well, Holli Gregg; I need you to calm down. I can talk to your husband, but he needs to be able to talk to me, too, and he can't do that with you chirping your head off."

"I'm sorry. It's just that this whole thing has left me so confused," and she sunk down into the leather seats of the 2001 Chevy Impala SE. I heard her fuddling around, and I assumed she was finding a better angle for sleeping.

I turned back to Tonnie, when I noticed something shiny suddenly flash in the back seat. It caught my attention. She must not be ready to sleep yet, I thought.

"Holli Gregg, you have to be quiet or-" but my words suddenly stopped. Sitting in the seat was a large time bomb, and its front panel gave me five

second to get out. I unbuckled, opened the door, and jumped from the vehicle as the explosion ripped it apart. The shock-wave pushed me to the ground, scraping my face on the highway. The doors rocketed past me, landing in the ditch on the other side of the road. The whole road-side was bathed in orange light and heat.

I got up, with blood trickling down my scraped face, and I saw that the car was a flaming inferno. Surely, Tonnie's body didn't survive this second murder. My best friend; dead twice in one day.

"There goes my best lead," I spat into the flaming shell of the vehicle. "Now, I wonder where that-"

My voice caught when I heard the gun cock behind my back. Then I felt the metal against my torn uniform shirt, pressing hard into my chiseled muscle features. It didn't hurt, though, because my muscles are so strong.

"You must look surprised. I almost wish I could see that dumb expression on your face, detective."

"Don't flatter yourself, Holli Gregg. It takes more than a pretty girl and a time bomb to surprise me. Hockey sticks; you made me rip my favorite shirt. You'll pay for that."

"Turn around, Mr. Turtle. I want you to meet my two associates." I turned slowly around to see a black kitten and a white puppy. Both, it seemed, had scars in their faces. "The kitten is Frodo, and the puppy is Samwise. They will be caring for you until I get what I want."

"And what exactly is it that you want? Not that anyone in their right mind will listen to a maniac like you."

"I want the \$10 million that the Dharma Initiative promised me. And I want The Weapon."

I scoffed at her. "Lady, you must be crazy because that's gibberish. The Dharma Initiative is a ruse to prove the cover up the authenticity of the Area 51 alien crash. It only exists to make everyone thinks that aliens don't exist."

"Whatever you say, Mr. Turtle. I'm sure you know everything. But, of course, if you really were psychic, then you would have this case solved

already.”

She had me there. My powers had seemed latent lately. I found it hard to concentrate, like someone was blocking my psychic abilities. It had been happening for the last couple of days.

“How about we get off this road before there’s another accident.” She led me into the ditch, the muddy grass coming up to way past my shell. The ditch butted into a corn field, which we then entered. A short distance walk later and we had found a vehicle, obviously belonging to Holli Gregg and her minions.

“Get in, Shelley. You can’t detect your way out of this,” crooned the kitten, Frodo, and she pushed me against the vehicle’s boot.

“Careful, Frodo. You don’t have your precious ring in this book.”

“Shut up, stupid. The master wants you to wait here,” screamed the dog, and she pushed me hard against the boot.

“Put him in the boot. We don’t need him figuring out how to outsmart you two.”

“Yeah. In the boot, you retarded turtle,” said Samwise.

“In the trunk, turtle, and maybe we’ll drive into a pond, and you can swim out,” said Frodo, and they both helped heave me into the boot, face first. The last thing I saw before the boot slammed shut was the shining tag beneath both animals’ chins.