

“Holy Shellfish!” Terry said. He yanked on the steering wheel to twist them out of harm’s way when, inches from certain collision, they stopped. Terry felt as though time had suddenly been stopped, but it hadn’t. He could turn and look around, and everything else was moving as well. With his foot still on the accelerator, the car continued spinning its wheels at well past seventy-five miles per hour. Terry guessed that they were somehow hovering several inches above the ground.

Terry was still braced for impact, with his hands up and his face covered. Samwise was screaming his little puppy scream, and he was clawing at the chair in desperation. He screamed, “Please don’t let me die! I’m too young to die!” Terry tried to calm down the easily excitable Samwise, but he wouldn’t relent from his hysteria.

“Samwise, it’s okay. Calm down!” Terry tried to reason with the dog, but he wouldn’t have it. Terry instead relaxed in his seat. This must be the work of Carlton, his ghost friend who he hadn’t seen for at least a chapter. Just then Carlton appeared between Terry and Samwise to further the plot.

“How are you guys doing?” asked Carlton, floating partly within and partly without the car. Samwise saw the slightly familiar corpse and calmed a little, although the sight of a floating raccoon carcass ghost shouldn’t usually be a comforting for anyone, terror-stricken dog or not.

“Just dandy with candy. How are you, Casper?” Terry quipped sarcastically. If Terry could have, he would have smucked that schmuck behind the ol’ noggin. As such, he simply rolled his eyes in the most violent way possible. Carlton dared to roll his back, but his ghost eyes disappeared easily into his ghost head, and the effect was rather not the same. Terry, instead of feeling diminished or belittled, simply felt odd.

“What’s going on, Carlton?” Samwise had stopped long enough to be logical once more. He was still gripping the chair tight with a slow-leaking panic that seeped out his paw joints with all the speed of a sleeping poison. As Carlton spoke (which you will read below) he gradually let go less and less.

“Here’s the deal. I was gone because I pulled a favor for you. You know that a term of my Ghost Conditions is that I cannot help you solve this case. I can, however, find other ghosts who can. So, I went around looking for any

ghost friends that I have, and I didn't have any. So I went around making friends, which is a long process. I made friends with this former boxer named Jeremy. He said that he knew a guy named Ishmael who was a former serial killer. Ishmael knew a guy named Benny who killed thousands of people in Europe as a dictator. But Benny knew a girl who had the power to destroy the world. So, I looked the dame up, and I convinced her to help you guys out. What do you think?" Carlton beamed with satisfaction, but both Terry and Samwise looked disappointed. Who was this mysterious person?

"Who is this mysterious person that you have so craftily mentioned and described but not mentioned?" Terry asked the floating ghost person. In a way of answering, Carlton smirked and disappeared. Then, the doors ripped off of the vehicle. Terry and Samwise felt themselves being lifted from the vehicle. They were carefully floated out of the car and set down on the grass. Then the car was thrown into the air. When it reached a great height it exploded, and the explosion, though mighty, was suddenly squelched down to a spark and the car to a tiny pinpoint.

Terry and Samwise scrambled to their feet on the grass. The traffic was still frozen, no doubt captivated by the unusual events behind them, and they didn't realize that their vehicles could resume traveling. Slowly, however, the drivers remembered their passage and continued on. Then a cloud came over the area, and a dark shadow travelled toward where they stood. Behind the shadow trailed a line of darkened grass, not as if it had been kept in shadow but rather burned, or singed, by something traveling in the cloud.

When the cloud was upon them, it became the form of a woman. She was floating above the grass, but then she set down in front of them. "Hello," she said. She was dressed in a flowing, flaming outfit that was stylish and futuristic, yet classy and easy-going. "My name is Jean Grey, also known as Phoenix, also known as the most powerful mutant the world has ever seen. Maybe you've heard of me."

Samwise perked up at the word "mutant". "You're a mutant? Like an X-man?"

"Like exactly," she answered. Her eyes seemed to be the dancing life of a flame. "I am the one who saved you from that bomb in that car. I will not

waste my immense powers on something measly like solving a crime, but I will tell you that it was not coincidence that you picked that car, and it was not coincidence that it had a bomb and a dead US Senator in it. I will also tell you that, before the end, one of you will eat the other one. Samwise, I'm looking at you, buddy."

With a smile she rose again above the ground. She looked prepared to fly off, but she stopped and turned back to them. "There is one thing you can do to repay me. You can make sure that you use your new powers wisely." With that, she shot from the earth like Superman disappearing into the atmosphere. Terry was confused.

"What new powers?" he asked. Then he looked over at Samwise, but Samwise was now sporting three claws in each paw. "Samwise!" Terry exclaimed despite himself. He couldn't believe it. Samwise was deadly now. Samwise was slowly looking over his new claws with a detached smile. He moved them slowly in and out. Then he pulled them all the way in, and with a "snikt!" they expanded gleaming and strong.

"Well, we won't have to worry about the cops anymore," commented Terry. Samwise was still enamored with his new-found abilities, but Terry knew they had to keep moving. They either had to acquire a car or hope that Samwise could fly. Samwise could not fly, so they departed from the interstate. They headed back to North Whales, but not to where they had left (Steven's house). They headed further west of that, hoping to reach the downtown area where they could blend in.

The terrain they covered was very rugged. It seemed uncharacteristic of the suburban areas that they were entering, but it looked as if the entire city had been built into a very old and strong forest. It didn't surprise Terry, then, when they came to cliff dividing the hilly countryside. Looking down it, both sides, Terry didn't see any easy way across aside from going down.

"This is it," said Samwise excitedly. "I have a chance to use my powers. I can make it!" Then, taking only a few steps back, Samwise hurled himself over the edge and out into the canyon before them. He sailed through the air fairly gracefully, but, still many feet from the other cliff face, Samwise went plummeting into thirty-foot deep blackness before them. Terry heard the sound

of metal against rock as Samwise smashed into the other cliff face, near to the bottom, catching hold with his claws. Then, using mostly his upper body, Samwise climbed up the precipice.

Stab by stab he inched upward, the cliff face being very nearly vertical. Within the span of five minutes he had made it to the grassy slope of the other side. Panting, and lying on his back, Samwise stood when he could. He held his hand out, palm toward Terry, fingers up, in a classic "Stop" hand signal. "Don't try to make that jump. It's a lot further than you think."

"Oh, no kidding," answered Terry, once again rolling his eyes. "So, now that you're over there, how does that help me get over?"

Samwise, who had been smiling with accomplishment, felt his smile vanish. He really hadn't thought his plans out at all. "I could carry you, maybe."

"No," Terry answered as he shook his head, "that would work if you were over here. But you're over there."

"You could jump down and climb up, too. Right?" tried Samwise, trying to make the best of it. "You have powers, don't you?"

"I have the powers of observation, memory, and ... super-intelligence. But I had those before. I don't appear to have gotten any new powers. But, let me assure you, I will not be jumping down. That would just make every falcon's day, to see a turtle with a cracked shell dying in the sun. You stay there. I'll find a way down."

Samwise shrugged and sat down in the grass. Terry, meanwhile, went looking for a way down. He walked south down the gorge until he found what approximated a path downward. He knew that even finding a path down did not mean that he would find a path back up, but he had to take that chance. It was slow going, and Terry had to back track a couple times to find better foot-and-hand-holds. He mostly used the hard stone of the cliff face for his holds, but he would occasionally use bushes growing out of the hard earth and stone.

After a fair amount of painstaking climbing, Terry looked down and thought he could see the bottom. He took a step, but the stone dislodged and popped out of the rock face. He heard it clatter below him, as he felt his

balance shifting. He held on tight with his hands as his other foot hold popped out of place. He gripped tightly the rock face, but his fingers were sliding off the smooth and dusty rock. Then he let go.

Terry felt himself falling, but it wasn't for long, then he hit the ground, face up. Panic rose in his throat. This was the worst place for a turtle to be. He was stuck on his back. Terry strained with his arms, legs, and neck trying to get a grip on something to right himself by. Just then a bright light above him shown, blinding him temporarily. When his eyes adjusted to the light, Terry quit thrashing. As the burst of light faded, Terry heard a terrible lion's roar and the cliffs began to quake.

"Great Space God," thought Terry. "I'm going to die." Then everything went black.