

As the trunk slammed shut, Terry checked his watch. The dial glowed when he hit the upper-left button, and it showed him that it was 1:27 in the afternoon. He made a mental note of that, and he tried hard to memorize the turns and bumps along the road. Unfortunately, he was unable to remember them all and soon gave up.

“Another fine mess I owe to a pair of legs,” thought Terry, miserably. It had seemed that this was always just his luck. Whether his intentions were well-meaning or not didn’t seem to matter. A world with a dame is a world in trouble, his dad had always said. That was when the drink hit him.

Terry thought about the tags beneath Frodo’s and Samwise’s chins. It meant one thing for sure: they were domestic animals. Terry had the privilege of having been wild his entire life; he’d never been anyone’s pet. He had, however, studied the psychology of petted animals; the strange ways they thought, the way they had a never-ending devotion to their master. It was sick, this cult of petness. Terry had seen advanced animal psychologists testify at criminal hearings as to the horrible brainwashing that goes into making an animal into a pet. Terry had heard horror stories involving the complex process that humans use to “break” animals. Humans called them “domesticated”; Terry called them “broken”.

A lot of pets ended up drug addicts. Terry had seen his fair share of these collared animals turning to crime to feed their habits. Animals were sometimes found in trash bins, frozen to death. Animals that the humans didn’t want anymore were turned out, tags still dangling around their throats, lost and looking for a home. A wild animal will hunt for food; a domestic animal will scavenge for food.

Frodo and Samwise were both domestics, house pets. Terry could imagine them having knit sweaters with their names on them, sitting next to a fire place. Terry, being a turtle, was used to hibernating during the long winter months, or, if hibernating wasn’t an option and the force needed him, he would just sweat it out and learn how to make a fire. Problem solved; crisis averted.

“You know, the way your mind works; it’s really amazing.”

Terry looked around. He used the glowing face of his watch to give him some light to look around the cramped confines of the car’s trunk. He couldn’t

see any other bodies or people in the trunk around him. Where had the voice come from?

“Carlton?” Terry ventured a guess.

“Bingo, buddy. How did you know?” the voice answered back.

“I knew you wouldn’t leave me up a creek.”

“Look, Terry, I can’t say much. I’m back, to help you out, but I can’t help you solve this thing.” Carlton suddenly materialized as the happy-go-lucky raccoon that he had once been in life. He had a mark on his face, a symbol, that looked like an “s” with two notches sticking out of it at the top and one notch sticking out of it on the bottom. It looked kinda like DNA and it was really really really super-obvious in the middle of his forehead.

“You look like hell, man. Did the Ghost Master work you over?” Terry frowned at Carlton’s ghostly body.

“Sorta. I had to fill out six reams of paperwork to get here, and they branded me, and I’m here on one condition; I can’t help you solve this case,” said Carlton, floating above Terry.

“No offense, former best friend, but what good are you if you can’t help me solve this case?” Terry questioned the specter of his former friend.

“Well, you have to remember that having a friend who can pass through walls and be invisible is bound to come in handy on your way to solving my murder.” Carlton had a point that Terry couldn’t deny. Even if Carlton couldn’t give him details of the exact murder, he certainly could help him get out of his current predicament.

Just then the vehicle came to a stop. Terry and Carlton heard the three occupants get out of the vehicle and begin to talk to each other.

“Listen up, you two. I have to go in, but I want you to watch the treasure in the trunk. Can you do that?” asked the woman who got Terry into this whole mess, Holli Gregg the Falcon bird.

“Sure thing, master,” came a barking voice.

“Of course, master,” meowed another voice. “Mind if we rough him up a

bit?"

"Fine, you can let him out, but use these handcuffs so he doesn't get away. And, whatever you do, don't listen to him. He will outsmart and hurt you," the falcon bird answered them. Then Terry and Carlton heard the shuffling hops as Holli Gregg made her way off the driver's side of the vehicle. Then they heard the puppy and Kitten, Frodo and Samwise, laughing and playing, eager to hurt a turtle.

"Alright, reunited partner. What's our first play?" asked the turtle, his feet facing the sky.

"Well, you'd like to pay those idiots a lesson, right?" A strange glint glowed in Carlton's eyes. He was eager to pay back to those animals who undoubtedly had something to do with his strange vehicle-related homicide.

"You betcha," answered Terry enthusiastically.

"Well, then..." said Carlton, and his body became very transparent. Then Terry noticed, in big words right behind Carlton's head, was written the words "Emergency Trunk Latch". "Carlton, you're a genius. And I'm not just saying that because you're a ghost."

"Make me proud, you mother lover," said Carlton and he became completely disappear.

Terry reached up and yanked on the trunk release and kicked at the same time, which caused the trunk to hit the puppy, Samwise, right underneath the jaw, knocking him back. Samwise yelped and hit the ground.

"Bad dog!" yelled Terry, and he tried to get out of the trunk, but because he was on his back, he couldn't get flipped over. His face wound stung in the open air. Frodo hissed at Terry and pounced on his shell. Terry suddenly reached behind him and pulled out a shotgun. He aimed it right at Frodo's head. "Say 'hello' to Sauron in hell for me." And he pulled the trigger, spraying the cat in the face with bullets. The bullets tore through Frodo's skull, taking with it parts of skull and brain and fur. He watched in slow motion it seemed as pebbles of bullets tore through Frodo's eyes, pushing her face inside out and pulling out the back of her head.

"That darn cat," pipped Terry. He used the shotgun to push him out of the

trunk. The dog, whimpering on the ground, was starting to get up, but she was obviously afraid of Terry now. Good, though Terry. That's just how it should be.

"Are you going to kill me?" asked the cautious puppy, Samwise. He had his tail between his legs, and he was bent low to the ground, with his head just high enough to see Terry's face.

"No, I'm not going to kill you. You're a good dog, right?" Terry beckoned to the dog. Samwise started to wag his tail, slowly and frightenedly, but he cautiously moved closer to Terry. "Do you want a treat, girl, for being such a good doggy?"

At this, Samwise got excited and started to jump up and down, barking a couple times with glee. Terry bent down and petted the dog a couple times, then, with his other hand, he reached into his shell and pulled out a hypodermic needle. He plunged it deep into the dog's neck, then he pushed on the thing on the end of it forcing the truth serum into the dog's neck.

Samwise gave a yelp, but she didn't run off. She sunk to the ground and her eyes began to glaze over.

"Okay," said Terry. "Let's start with a test question: Are you a dog?"

"Yes..." came the hazy reply from the messed up mutt.

"Do you work for Holli Gregg?" asked Terry, checking the dog's pupils to ensure that the serum really was taking hold. The dog seemed to not notice anything. Her eyes were dilated. The truth serum was working.

"Yes..."

"Did Holli Gregg kill Carlton the Raccoon?" questioned Terry.

"No..."

"Who did kill Carlton the Raccoon?" said Terry, shaking the puppy.

"I don't know... I didn't see it..." said the puppy, his tongue dropping out of his mouth. Terry felt his nose, and it was dry. Samwise would only be conscious for a couple more seconds, then she would fall into a deep, coma-like sleep.

“Are you someone’s pet? Who owns you?” Terry tried for one last question, hoping that the puppy would last that long.

“Yes... I belong to The Great Ozwaldo... If found, please return to 999 West Corning Street...” then the dog, finally out of consciousness, collapsed to the ground at Terry’s feet. Terry frowned. He had gained nothing important from his questioning. He put the shotgun and hypodermic needle back into his shell. Then he reached into his shell and pulled out a doggy treat.

“Here you go, Fido. I promised you a treat, didn’t I?” said Terry as he tossed the milk-based bone treat on the ground next to the sleeping canine. Terry tried the doors to the car, but they were locked, and the vehicle was being traced probably anyway. Instead he took off running, heading for the deep woods that surrounded the area. He took a look around him. The direction that Holli Gregg had gone was a large military-looking warehouse. It had a Space Army insignia on the side of it, along with their slogan, “An Army of Zero G”. It looked abandoned, as if it hadn’t been used in years.

There appeared to be no security. There also didn’t seem to be any entrances beyond the double doors at the front of the building. There weren’t even any windows around it. Carlton appeared next to Terry as he was looking around.

“She just gave you the worst-possible scenario,” Tonnie said.

“Yeah. I guess going in there is pretty much like walking into a trap.”

“You know what that means, don’t you?”

Terry put a hand up to his torn face. It filled him with adrenaline. “It means I’m about to learn what a mouse in a mousetrap feels like.”

“Damn right.”

“Let’s spring this bitch.” And with that, Carlton dissipating into vapor, Terry reaching in, grabbed the Uzi from within his shell, and walked up to his certain death.