

Rey And Carth

By

J. Brodie Shirey

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CHAPTER 1

It was just another quiet night on a small Pennsylvania farm. The farmer who owned it had finished his work for the day, and was due for a good night's rest. He was kneeling by the doghouse of his small beagle, petting him lovingly while giving him his orders for the night.

They were the same orders as any other night: guard the farm, don't let anything near the livestock, and bark if you see anything. Carth the Beagle knew these instructions by heart, and if humans could understand animals besides their own kind, he would tell The Farmer just how devoted he was to following them. But since he couldn't, he did

the next best thing and barked in acknowledgement at his owner. Satisfied with Carth's response, The Farmer headed toward his house for some much-needed sleep, leaving Carth to his duties.

Duties Carth took to heart more than anything else. To a farm dog, nothing was more important, in this life or any other, than serving your owner to the best of your ability. Carth loved The Farmer like he would his own father, and if any creature were to do anything to threaten The Farmer's livelihood, be they a flock of birds trying to eat some of his prized crops or predator wanting to take his best laying hens, they would have to answer to him.

At least, if there were any creatures *to* try something. There hadn't been a problem at the farm for as long as Carth had been there, and his guard patrols mostly consisted of him starring at the night sky. It did get kind of boring after a while, and Carth on occasion found himself wishing a garden pest would come along and provide him with some much needed excitement. He would soon scold himself for wishing trouble on his owner's estate, telling himself that he should be grateful that nothing bad has happened. And he was.

That, and he could appreciate the quiet things in life. Like the beautiful night sky currently on display in all its glory. Indeed, life was good for Carth the Beagle.

However, elsewhere on the farm, unbeknownst to Carth, a shadowy figure was slipping in under the nearby fence through a hole it had just finished digging. The small, sleekly shaped creature then snuck his way across the barnyard with a level of skill like no other. Suddenly, a little building at the side of the barn caught his eye: the chicken coup. *Aw, pay dirt!* the shadow thought to himself as made his way to his quarry.

Back at his doghouse, Carth heard a small rustling off in the distance. *So much for "just another quite night."* he thought to himself as he headed off to investigate. He sniffed the ground as he went along in the general direction of the sound, hoping to identify the source. He paused for a moment once when he noticed a familiar scent, one he had been taught not to take lightly. *A fox.* "Oh man, the chickens!" he cried out once he realized what was happening.

Back at the chicken coup, the fox was getting ready to make his steal. "Alright Superfly." he playfully muttered to himself. "Do your thing." However, Carth's voice

interrupted him before he could actually do so. "Hey! What's going on here?" The fox turned to see Carth standing behind him, looking quite understandably angry.

"What are you doing on this property?" he asked. "What are *you* doing on this property?" the fox retorted. "I live here!" Carth sounded, stunned that someone would ask him this. "Oh." the intruder muttered. "Well in any case," he went on in a casual, non-caring manner, "my name's Rey, I'm here to steal one of your chickens, and if you'd kindly go back to whatever you were doing beforehand, I can do my job and be out of your hair faster than you can gain the ability to see color, 'kay?"

His voice sounded smooth and ironic, like he didn't take his own words seriously but was trying to make them sound good to someone else. There was something strangely appealing in the way it sounded, though, as if you would like him if he wasn't trying to steal something from you. Carth imagined that this must be what human con artists sounded like.

Regardless, this fox was trying to steal from The Farmer, and Carth couldn't have that. "Nobody's stealing anything, alright?" he sternly replied. "You're going to get as far from this farm as you can before I'm forced

to wake up my owner.” “Your owner?” the fox asked. “Yes, the human who owns this farm.” Carth explained, his tone slowly changing from stern to confident, “He’ll come out here if he hears too much of a ruckus. And let me tell you somethin’, if he catches a fox over here stealing one of his prized chickens, he’s going to be pretty mad! Yup, pretty mad indeed. And all I have to do is bark.”

Carth may have been quiet and shy most of the time, but he knew how to act tough when the situation called for it. His threat seemed to work, as the fox backed away a bit. “Okay, okay, slight pause.” he stammered nervously. “Let’s just settle down, alright. There’s no need to go overboard. Just because there’s a cat over there trying to steal your milk doesn’t mean we have to go bring a human into a canine matter.” The fox was pointing with his eyes at the doorway of the barn, in the direction just behind Carth.

“Wait, what are you talking about?” Carth asked, confused. “What cat?” This fox was most definitely lying. All his life, Carth had been warned not to trust foxes. That they were sneaky thieves, who would say anything to get you to turn your back for a mere second. All the time they needed to cheat you

out of what you had. Still, it helped to be sure... He turned over to the barn, where things looked as normal as ever. "There's no cat." he said as he turned back...

...to find the fox leaping over the fence and running back into the wild. Carth was stunned. *How could I have fallen for that?* he thought to himself. He checked the chicken coup to make sure the fox didn't make off with one of The Farmer's chickens, breathing a sigh of relief when they were all present and accounted for. Carth could count his blessings on that. "And stay out!" he yelled to the distance, before yawning and heading back towards his doghouse. He hoped he had seen the last of this matter.

CHAPTER 2

The following morning, Rey the Fox was wondering along the wilderness, still upset from the events of the previous night. “Nice job breaking it, Rey.” he muttered to himself out loud. “That guard dog’s going to be even more paranoid now that you’ve made yourself known.” He let out a sigh. “Well, back to the drawing board...”

“The drawing board?” a familiar voice responded. “I hope you’re further along than that...” Rey gulped as a grey wolf with cold eyes and a cruel voice walked in front of him in an almost playful trout. Unfortunately for Rey, he knew this creature.

Not now. Rey thought to himself. *I don’t need this now.* “Alpha!” he addressed the wolf nervously. “Fancy running into you here. You’re looking big and bad as ever this

morning. Is there anything I can help you with?" "Sure there is." Alpha answered in a casual, almost sinister tone. "You can help by providing that chicken you promised to steal for me. You *do* have it, don'tcha Rey?"

Rey frowned. He didn't have the chicken, but he was dreading Alpha's response once he found out. *Maybe I can bluff for more time.* "Oh, the *chicken!*" Rey chirped playfully. "Yeah, you know, I seem to recall saying I'll have it for you *tomorrow.*" "You said that *yesterday!*" the wolf snapped in anger. So much for that. Rey sighed. "I was hoping you didn't notice that..."

The fox backed away a little as three other wolves emerged from the nearby brush and began to circle him. They all looked just as cruel and unpleasant as Alpha. "You remember the boys, Rey?" Alpha asked playfully. "Beta, Delta, Omega?" "Hi, Rey." the other wolves greeted in a rather sinister fashion.

"Hi, pack." Rey replied nervously. This was not going well for him *at all.* Alpha and his pack were feared throughout the forest, and stringing them along like Rey was currently doing was widely considered a death wish. Still, he hoped he could stall them long enough to come up with a way out of this

mess. “You know, I always thought it was cool how you guys have whole theme-naming thing going on.” he mused playfully. “It’s all good and Greek to me, am I right?”

Alpha had about lost his patience “The chicken, Rey!” he demanded. “Do you have it or not?” Rey frowned. It was time to come clean. “Okay Alph, it’s like this...” he answered solemnly. “I ran into a slight problem last night, it couldn’t be helped. But I’ll get your chicken, I promise, just give me another day!” And Rey meant it, too. “I’m not giving you another *second!*” Alpha snapped in anger. When Alpha the Wolf set a deadline, he *enforced* it! “Change of dinner plans, boys.” he addressed his pack malevolently. “Tonight we’re having fox! Shred ’im!”

The wolves inched toward Rey threateningly, forcing the outnumbered fox to back away even further. “Whoa, whoa, whoa! Don’t you think we’re all rushing into things a bit, guys?” Rey pleaded. Alpha shook his head and sighed. “Boy’s got a point.” he noted. Rey smiled for a moment. “Shred ’im *slow!*” the lead wolf then ordered. Rey’s smile faded again. *Guess that backfired on me.*

The pack continued to bear down on Rey menacingly. “Last words time, Rey.” Alpha declared with a sinister smile. “Let’s hear ‘em

if you got any.” Rey thought for a moment. He only a one trick left: the oldest (and cheapest) one in the book. The same one he used on that beagle last night. It wasn’t the most sporting thing to do, Rey admitted, but at the moment he didn’t have much of a choice. He casually looked up at the sky and flatly muttered the following phrase: “Huh. Look, a full moon.”

“What are you talking about?” Alpha asked angrily as the entire pack looked up at the clear, blue sky. “Stupid fox, there’s no moon out at this time of...” By the time the pack looked back down, Rey was already running away as fast as he could. One of the packmates started after him, but Alpha cut him off. “Hold on! I know that path he’s taking: he’s headed for human territory.” he explained.

It was well known throughout the forest that Alpha and his pack *feared* humans. They would gladly push around the animals of the wild, but they dare not enter the settlements of mankind. “One fox can hide himself pretty easily there. A pack of wolves, not so much. We wouldn’t last five seconds.” Alpha stated. “So, here’s what we’ll do: He’s gotta come back to the forest sooner or later, right? We’ll get him then.” The pack nodded in approval

of their leader's plan as he called out a threat to Rey. "You hear that?!? We'll get you then!"

Rey heard this, but chose to ignore it for the moment. He couldn't worry about Alpha and his pack catching up with him. He needed to come up with a plan. There had to be a way out of this predicament he had gotten himself into. He needed time to think. And he could get it, if there was someone he could turn to. Someone who could shelter him. Somewhere to hide. *Well, there's always... no, they've been through enough already. Somebody else.* Then it hit him.

CHAPTER 3

Back at the farm, Carth was carrying on with life as usual. But as he went about his morning, napping lazily in his doghouse, his thoughts kept turning to the events of last night. *Why was the fox there? What was the reason?* He kept asking himself these questions as he tossed and turned.

It doesn't matter. he told himself. *He was hungry, I guess. He's a fox. Foxes are thieves, don't you remember what The Farmer told you? He steals, and stealing is wrong.* Still, Carth would have liked to think that there was good in even the most seemingly crooked of species. In fact, he found himself smiling when he remembered the fox's sense of humor. And the way he escaped was kind of clever. If circumstances were different, Carth might have even *liked* the guy. *But they aren't. You know that.*

Not that it mattered. The fox was gone.

He didn't get what he came for. If he was half as smart as his species was made out to be, he wouldn't bother trying again. Not at this farm, at least. *Then why am I still thinking about this?*

"I have a problem." a voice sounded, breaking Carth's chain of thought. "Pull a number and take a seat." the beagle sighed as he looked up to the source. He then stood up when he saw that it was *the fox from last night!* "You?" the beagle cried out in shock. For all Carth knew, the fox was trying to steal from the chicken coup again. "What in the name of Lassie are you doing here? I mean, doing this in *broad daylight*, are you insane?!?"

"I know, I know, not the best time." Rey replied urgently. "But hear me out: this isn't what you think. I need you to hide me." "Hide you?" Carth asked, confused. "From what?" "Oh, just the pack of wolves who want to rip off my tail, glue it to a stick and use it as a feather duster." Rey replied in a casual tone. "Nothing major." Carth was still confused. "What? Why do they want to do that?" he asked.

"I did something." the fox answered wearily. "Something they didn't much care for..."

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