

# Chapter Four

## LOCATION LOCATION VOCATION



When we finally catch up with Simon it is with youthful 80's beard style and face and all-in-one, skin-tight, white boiler-suit. He was polishing away at his shuttle shaped Space-trophy that's practically the size of Mars. This was back in the day when Simon had a joyous whistle 'twixt his lips - happy, but not as happy perhaps as he had been in his own personal golden years/days. Those days with N.A.S.A. when Simon thought nothing could go wrong. Before his glorious milk soured. Still, he'd escaped a terrible pre-pre-emptive strike from his comeuppance and was very happy with that.\* If Space Camp had taught Simon anything it was that possibly everything in the Universe was relative and so given the current situation he felt great. He had a wonderfully secretive past - how romantic!† Things were going swell...

*Cue*

SUDDENLY: BAM! Out of nowhere (from a quite a height) a falling spanner, sharpened for self defence... oh the irony. Simon had always been a Cautious Calvin especially since he got added to Michigan's Most Wanted. Since then he'd sharpened most of contents of his garage. Just in case. Useful for self defence and fixing things, like escape plans and local elections. And this was the biggest, the heaviest, the sharpest tool in the shed.

Simon was not not the sharpest tool in the shed but he had spent all of his life getting into trouble and almost dying because of unjust attacks upon him. He had, after all, almost been executed for the murder of his parents - a crime he did not commit. Yes, he'd thought of killing them but after drawing up a list of pros and cons he had landed on the same side of the fence as the law - but obviously that wasn't good enough for Fate.

The world owed him a debt. He believed his parents had got their comeuppance without their deserving it and something similar was obviously after him. From the day they died he had vowed to collect that debt by pushing his comeuppance to the limit but always being one step ahead. It would be Simon, not Fate nor Comeuppance, laughing all the way to the Human Back of Life.

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\* He was told his parents had got their (or maybe his) comeuppance and so presumably assuming that Simon would launch a pre-emptive strike (always a firm believer that attack is the best form of defence, religion, wood-work, ...) his comeuppance had pre-empted this and attacked him immediately (i.e. by sending in the authorities to bring Simon in for execution, the U.S.A. always being a firm believer that execution is the most polite form of murder).

† Most people would like to tell someone that they had been to Space and been framed for a murder but not Simon. He wasn't a social type and knew no one's admiration was as good as his own. But was that enough? Was his self-admiration beginning to fade?

Thus it is possible to see how the falling spanner incident was one that that imprinted itself thoroughly on his mind as well as more directly on his ability to walk and his leg bone.

Off it came.

Owch. Simon's whistle leapt an aching octave before he cut it off like a shape spanner through ankle. Simon writhed in agony for a good half hour trying to think what he could do to save himself but all he could see was the pain. Around the peak of our handicapped hero's misery, Snuggles, doing self-taught loyalty training, brought his master his slippers (M&S times two). Very intelligent for a dog perhaps but a bad choice of actions nonetheless.

This poetic injustice hit Simon hard, hurting almost more than his footless ankle and the original auto-attack from his self-defence weaponry. He leapt to his foot, shouting:

"Et tu, Snuggles!? How dare you, you heartless bastard! How am I bloody supposed to wear these!? Et tu motherfucker!"

Doglette, apparently oblivious to Simon's meaning, yet sensing something amiss, nosed the slippers towards his master, presumably in the hope of quelling his rage.

The rage went unquelled. Instead, the opposite was achieved. Indeed, this was the final straw that broke the bars of Simon's rage-cage and his intrinsic mistrust and jealousy for all dogs flooded to the fore, as he imagined his murderous puppy pal gently nosing the spanner from the top shelf (where was Snuggles when it fell?):

"That was an ugly move, Snuggles. As God is my witness, I will strike you down!"

As God was his witness, he was true to his words and almost in time to his gramophone's lovely classical tunes the horrendous scene, balletic yet brutal, unfurled. Sensing and indeed seeing and smelling blood, Simon is filled with that age old chestnut: Bloodlust.

He hacks, he hacks, and hacks some more. That little doggy said no - now he's been lamed.

Simon had spent his time shrieking on the floor and desperately trying to recall the veterinary he'd learned all those years ago. He'd attached limbs back then and maybe, just maybe, he could fix his severed foot now. But he was in too much pain and that was too long ago. He could only picture little animals and their tender little tendons. He made a makeshift tourniquet and rapped his leg in a blanket. But that was all he had the strength to do.

Then Snuggles had given him the rage (and therefore the strength) to fight and he remained conscious.\* There was only one cure for him then and that was the soothing balm of Bloodthirsty Revenge.

Finally satisfied with his gory work, Simon fell into his deckchair (the one in the garage doorway), and his better judgement clouded (being as he drunk on bloodlust and blood loss), he winked at a passing witness. A risky move only to be attempted by those truly desperate to drunkenly attract the attention of their comeuppance.

Unfortunately, this passing member-of-the-public, was a very gay man. You see Simon was a one-comeuppances monogamist and the wink was meant for her if anyone. But there it was, a saucy wink released onto the streets and how could it not

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\* Quite helpful, in hindsight.

intrigue?\* The passer-by edged a little closer to the crime scene, hoping to meet this newcomer of the hamlet. He liked them thin.

Suddenly Simon, now calmer and no longer 'in the moment,' realised what he had just done. He began to fear the worst which only got worse when he caught a glimpse of this approacher's R.S.P.C.A. membership hoody.

That hoody really may as well have read, "Right Simon Perhaps Comeuppance Alert?" because that's what Simon saw in those letters – a comeuppance alert.

### **"Right Simon Perhaps Certain Annihilation"**

Although he made these words up in his head, Simon still took some time to think about them. He was guilty as anything: Snuggles' blood on his hands; Snuggles' leg in his pocket. He tried to push it further in so it wouldn't stick out, so the 'lipstick' on his collar, shirt, trousers, hands and Snuggles' leg (both alike in DNA) wouldn't tell a tale on him. At least Snuggles was quiet. Simon's fist harsh blow had knocked the hapless critter unconscious but that was not enough to satisfy a vengeful future vet like his master.

### **"Right Simon Practically Convicted Already"**

If anyone was guilty here it was him and the last thing he wanted was the pink police on his tail. And so, Simon did his best to find a place to place the blame:

Was it the slipper that did the cutting? That slipper had only ever brought comfort (especially in that last bloody hackfest) – No, it couldn't be: slippers don't kill people, soldiers and earthquakes and executioners and vets and syphilises do.

"How did I come to be here holding this bloodied slipper, involved in a very violent situation? Who put me here, those blind bitches the Fates? Why do I have such a strange love-hate relationship with dogs?"

Simon might have asked himself any of these questions but he already knew the answer (to the last one at least). Before he could think on it properly though, the pressure of his impending comeuppance and his low blood pressure sent him a-swooning. A-swooning all the way back into a flashback. Why did that always happen, why couldn't he let go of the past?

## **Dogs – Betrayals – Heartbreaks**

Suddenly Simon was back in that moment in Fifth Grade G.M. class when Miss S's dog, Butch, had *definitely* asked him to kick him, even if he hadn't said it out loud. They had a close relationship. Why would Simon refuse a request from a close friend?

And then, when the favour was done, treachery rained down on Simon from stormy clouds of betrayal as that pathetic wiener went and whimpered at Miss Streckowski's heels – more detention for a young and innocent Simon Z.

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\* Simon was tall, pail and gaunt. Yet personal preference dependant (remember plenty of boys and girls dig the powerful, bad boy, murderer look) Simon would more than once be described as 'devilishly handsome.' Suffice to say, most people just found him devilish.

He remembered it like yesterday. Butch came to him after that detention. Perhaps because Miss S made Simon call him over to apologise but Simon was fairly sure it was only Butch making sure he'd burned the bridge of their friendship (but obviously not 'till after he'd tied Simon to it first). A few animals had chatted with Simon back in the day. On that basis, his parents made him get a C.A.T. scan but the results showed 'nothing conclusive' so Simon got the last laugh. Obviously, his parents were mad, probably with jealousy as dogs never spoke to them.

On this day, however, it was Butch that was mad: mad with betrayal plans. Simon just thought they were having a normal conversation:

"...you're not like the other boys, Butch ...Butch...? ...I feel like I can tell you anything... and you can tell me anything too... What? ...But why? ...that sounds absurd ... come on, Butch ...kick you?!? ...kick you real hard?? That sounds like exactly the kind of action that's gonna land me in a detention ditch... what? ...you promise as a friend - sorry best friend - that it won't get me a detention? ...well ...I guess I should do something you want me to do for once... you always do the things I want you to do, even if they are pretty degrading... okay, I'll kick you, but just this once, and only because I trust you and you've sworn on the strength of our friendship."

And heartbreak followed like an over-zealous stalker.

Years later, Simon was old enough for Santa not to have stopped visiting him and dogs to have stopped talking to him, but not for dogs to have stopped fucking him over. There was obvious dog jealousy and hatred re the N.A.S.A. debacle. After all, Simon manned a death-trap, tin can 'spaceship' designed for a dog to pilot; as the first human to orbit the Earth, experience the vastness of Space, he suffered simultaneously the terror of insignificance in the infinite nothingness and the crushing claustrophobia of what was to all intents and purposes the most advanced kennel the world had ever know. Yet all the advancements were designed to get the doghouse into Space and they dropped off, one by one, on the petrifying journey upward, each time technologically downgrading the shuttle by decades. At that point Simon was just a statistic. He had no control. He was glued to the floor by Gravity and there was no way he could reach any of the six buttons he had at his disposal. The only reason Simon survived was that his Physics and convention defying reverse meteorite was crashing upwards into, well, nothing.

Even once orbital, Simon had a similar lack of control. He made notes, he took pictures, but his life was in the hands of Huston Control Room, assuming the primitive communication systems were still working, not that that mattered as Simon later found out.\*

Mission Objective One (complete) was to get Simon up and Mission Objective Two or Secondary Objective was to bring the shuttle back and a reassuring Tertiary Objective was to bring back Simon, alive.

All this, all this and Simon was on top of the World on so many levels. It didn't matter that they had only packed enough dried food for two meals - Simon was

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\* On hearing that Simon and the spaceship were still alive, they were so surprised (not so good to know) and so pleased (nice to know) that they entered into a two day celebration (half the time Simon was up). At least they were sure enough of success that they'd ordered stand-by strippers.

gobbling glory twenty-four/seven. And he had of course trained at Astronaut School to live on next to nothing. All this he loved and would not have changed given the chance to do it again. He didn't really care when he found out that all the partying had lead to setbacks and breakages that meant Simon was fished out of a crater two days later than expected... it was that evil Greyhound that had spent the week hovering canapés and heavily petted while Simon toiled in Space. Somehow, SOMEHOW, it had convinced them all that it was the one who was toiling! The N.A.S.A. workforce acknowledged Simon's work with buckets of cash but when the press releases went out (i.e. when a spy "accidentally" left his reports on the Trans Siberian Express, it was that fucking dog in the picture - Russia was weepingly chasing a wild goose chase! Simon was told new not to tell anyone the truth as this might endanger them all. Simon had other plans - true he was happy with his personal glory and we all know animals deserve more but they shouldn't be allowed to steal it from a great man like Simon!

Everyone Simon did tell the truth to said Simon was mad. He wasn't that mad At least he'd squirreled away enough glory into his heart to save him from the insult but it still hurt.

It still hurt and was proof positive that dogs were essentially selfish, ego-centric glory-hunters; maniacal natural robots, onetrackèdly programmed to assiduously follow the dogmatic school of thought that said that pissing on Simon's parade was a dish best served regularly.

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As Simon swooned, rememorising all those dogs he'd loved and lost, he conceded to himself that dogs were good actors - damn it - fine actors! That was the well from whence this problem had sprung: every time he forged a new intimacy, moulded a new hope, deep within his soul, a hope that this time would be different because this dog acted like such a good friend - but that was just it - the dog was only acting the part of Suchagoodfriend. Time after inevitable time, Simon's withered hopeful frame was fastened to the stake of his naïve hope and torched to toast by fathomless amounts of canine treachery.

"And what of Snuggles? Oh what of Snuggles!?" Thought Simon as he began slipping back into consciousness. Could it be that the one dog that had never betrayed him had been betraying him all along or just waiting for this big opportunity? Snuggles wasn't like the others.\* And he was a rubbish actor... or perhaps he was such a good actor that he acted the bad actor? Simon felt sick at the thought. Who had betrayed whom? He was painfully confused, caught in the crossfire of his two duelling emotions: guilt and hurt vengefulness. Guilt was clearly going to lose as it was the emotion at the bottom of the pile, supertrampled by its hierarchical lords like Lord Callousness and Baron von Hatred. But it was definitely there, fighting for its corner of Simon's Pandora's Box, and Simon wanted to know the truth. Not the acted truth nor any other non-truths. Let not your emotions do the sentencing, he thought. This is the time for science and data.

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\* The means by which Simon obtained Snuggles was just too romantic. A rescue! He had come to Simon gently as Simon had violently bagged him up after he found him, as puppy, in the arms of an irresponsible young birthday girl on the same freight boat over from Stateside. They were kindred spirits... or so Simon thought.

The facts:

- Snuggles had taken the time to mock Simon's pain when he really needed a hand, and a foot.
- He had driven Simon to the violence. Seriously, the last thing you want to do is fight when you've just lost a foot.
- Simon was about to get his comeuppance.

The explanations:

- Simon deserved his comeuppance as he had just betrayed the one dog that cared for him. Perhaps Comeuppance was coming so scarily close this time because this time Simon truly deserved it. Or,
- This was the ultimate betrayal. He got in trouble for the innocent Butch-kicking and now he was about to go down for this....

No time! Simon quickly totted up all the science. Phew! Probability was an ass but much more trustworthy than any evil canine. Probability said that one hundred percent of all dogs Simon had trusted had betrayed him in the past so it was most likely that Snuggles had too. The stats spoke for themselves.

"Curse you Snuggles! Oh if I wasn't swoony I'd..." Wait this felt just like the days when dogs used to talk. Suddenly all was clear.

"Kick me in the head," was Snuggles' siren song, "Kick my head off!"

"Not today! Not today, Snuggles." Simon re-took control.

Science on his side, Professor Simon Ph.D. Zimmermann leapt back to current affairs and faced the Royal Society for the Pretension of Cruelty to Animals, with a conscience clean as crystal.

He acted too soon... 'cause there was not need!! Simon woke up in the arms of the witness, still fearful but perhaps the bonds of love and attraction are stronger than those in the T. & C.'s of the R.S.P.C.A. subscription). There was no need to be fearful of retribution just yet (bleeding to death should have been slightly more of a priority worry).

"My golly, you are a devilishly handsome vet, am I right?" said the stranger.

"Spot on about the handsome part I bet, but I've never even seen a vet let alone been one ever or now."

"G.S.O.H. too. You can't be serious, Mr...?"

"Simon. I've just moved hear from America. Is everyone in England this gay?"

"You don't have the accent, Simon, and as for England, well, here's hoping! But seriously, you're not a vet?"

"I'm not a flipping vet! I've had this trouble all my life with people saying I'm a wannabe vet, or a vet-in-training, when I'm not even any of these things at all."

"But that wound you just administered on that there doggywogs is one of the cleanest in history and I should know - I subscribe to the R.S.P.C.A. vet newsletter."

"I did it with a slipper, you pansy."

"Hee hee, Simon, you should be a vet! There must have been something terribly wrong with him for you to perform an emergency amputation like that. Did that horrid

spanner there fall on him or something? - and then you fainted from exhaustion, you angel! You must care terribly for animals! Shall I help you bandage him up?"

Step back Simon'll do it.

The Lion/Tinman/Scarecrow watched awestruck as Simon, still apparently swoony began to reattach the severed leg to the unconscious Snuggles.

"Boy oh boy! Such grace! We need a vet like you down the dog track - they just fired Tony, trainee dogsman, for unspecified sex acts. I'll put a good word in for you."

Simon, not usually accepting from the Community or any kind of bunny huggers, pushed him hard, but it brought no comfort. Instead Simon realised that his half-hearted job hunt was over (Simon had spent almost all his Space-cash on the hundreds of fugitive bribes it took him to get to this town and most of the rest on his house which was quite nice).

Glorious visions of Town Vet now clouded his thoughts. Besides, his boiler-suit was bloody as. He really needed this opportunity to live in blood-stained clothes and be respected for it.

He did not say yes but the skill and alacrity with which he dressed Snuggles' fresh wound and splinted the now reattached pet's leg was enough for the fan of animal protection to realise he was on board:

"You so start Monday, you feisty vet! Bring down that dog as proof and they'll never say no." He Somerset-gay-lisped.

Simon knocked him out by way of affirmative (always having been a firm believer that a violent act paints a thousand words).

"Well Snuggles, looks like you've escaped your comeuppance this time. Maybe we're not so different, you and I." Well, he knew what they probably said about treacherous dogs - if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

"Now where the heck would I find a doctor?"

Snuggles and the local both lay unconscious, unable to answer. They would later wake up to dull and distant pain and confusion. Simon, a gaunt fellow and certainly no Atlas, already had a world of pain on his shoulders and only one foot. Struggling under his pain, he made his way, half way to the nearest medical practice.

When he could go no further, he summoned his last k.g. of strength and penultimate pained breath to attempt once again to do what he had done for Snuggles. Simon had fixed a much worse wound and he knew, after a week or two, Snuggles would be good as new! Now surely he could do it on himself. But, for Simon, it was like tickling, you just can't do it to yourself.\* He was no doctor, he was a vet...

He was a vet!

He was lucky someone found him when they did. His foot sadly wasn't found in time† but Simon survived and took up residence (not by choice) in Bristol Hospital's critical ward. From here he planned what would be a very successful campaign to infiltrate the veterinary world.

Snuggles, now a stray, wandered from house to house carrying, like an adorable plague rat carries fleas, the quickly spreading rumours that the hamlet's mysterious

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\* Remember Simon was not yet the experienced vet we know and love, so could not know this obvious fact.

† It was found a bit later. By wolves.

newcomer had given all but his life to save the poor sweet dog and was something like one canonization short of a modern St. Francis.

Though neither of their prides would let them acknowledge it, Simon and Snuggles, had had their ups and downs but were basically a hot team, Hollywood's most powerful Power Couple come to Smalltown, Sticksville, U.K.. When it came to it, Simon aced the interview and veterinary trials and was soon training alongside one of the great, great vets in Bristol.

### **Another montage**

...Simon making hilarious mistakes that claim the lives of many a cheapskate pet looking for a low cost, quick fix from a trainee vet. How they laugh together (not the pets, obviously) but soon there came a time when Simon simply had nothing left to learn from his teacher:

"Can we have a little chat, Simon?"

"I'd rather keep cutting stuff up in silence, if that's okay... alone with my thoughts..."

"Simon, I look back at my career... and this old dog has had his day on the track. It's time I retire and let someone else take over. I'm too old for this beehive business of veterinary."

"Too old? What are you saying..? You want me to put you to sleep or something?" Simon was well aware by now that 'retiring' was a veterinary euphemism - they'd retired their fair share of greyhounds and racehorses from the surrounding countryside while Simon had been apprenticing.

"Ha ha, Simon, always thinking about veterinary! That's m'boy."

"I'm real good at euthanizing stuff now." Simon interrupts.

"Hmmm, yes you are... So, you see, I simply don't want to do this anymore... I'm not training you as a veterinary nurse, Simon."

"Good." Simon interrupts again.

"I'm training you as a replacement."

"Gee thanks!" Said Simon, lifting him in a heterosexual embrace.

"Put me down Simon!"

Simon (veterinary always on his mind) misinterpreted this to fatal consequences and family grievances that he did well to avoid.

"You got that vein without even looking. Veterinary is in your blood, m'boy, but unfortunately, because of a misunderstanding on your part, poison is in mine. Forgive and forget though, eh?"

Deep down inside, Simon felt the void where remorse should be, but he did his best to fill it with glee - he'd be one of the great Somerset vets!

Meanwhile his mentor lay dying, and a strange sympathy stole over Simon:

"If there's bum-bags in the afterlife, I suggest you get one ...real useful. I'm sorry...something my father used to say and something in the way you were dying reminded me of it."

"I was right about you. You're a damn fine vet, Simon, and a philosopher ...with a slightly questionable heart and an itchy needle finger albeit... but the world needs vets like you ...Little Bosnia needs you."

"I live there, yes, but they don't even have a practice there."

"It's... time... someone... reopened... the... Vetterage."

"The whaterage? I'm not convinced. I mean, I'd be the only vet."

"Exactly... ughhhh..."