

the floor and the mahogany bookcase was too thin for Adrian's fingers to penetrate and the bookcase itself was too dense and heavy to be moved without ruining the hardwood floor.

Tristan was already crying over the betrayal he had experienced from the sharp teeth of his pet. Adrian was unsympathetic. He was not an animal person, or a child person, and he resented his girlfriend for leaving him with these small wretched things. He did not know how to talk to children, he could not remember what it was like to be six, and the parts he did remember he reflected upon with disdain. In some ways, he had never really grown up, and this was reflected in his rare collection of fairy tales and old science fiction novels, but this was a different, more sophisticated kind of immaturity that did not relate to the chaotic and antisocial behavior expressed by most children.

"Yeah. I'm not dealing with this now. You get that thing to come out of its hole before I get home, or it's curtains for you." Adrian chuckled at his death threat, pleased with its sophistication and left the apartment.

Tristan watched the door close with anticipation. Finally, the irritated man was gone. It is questionable whether Tristan disliked Adrian as much as Adrian disliked Tristan, but Tristan loved Adrian's apartment. There were pretty books to look at and fancy pens to draw with and Adrian had a very large television that got more channels than he could count. It was okay. Tristan knew his mother was only seeing Terrence because he was rich. The man was absolutely terrible with women.

The first thing Cameron did was address the ferret, "Taco, I hate you."

A tiny paw appeared from the depths of the bookcase.

"What's that? Precious?" said the ferret.

"I said, I HATE you."

The paw retracted into the darkness, "Sssss, *gollum.*"

Tristan had watched The Two Towers on Adrian's television a few days ago and it had made a lasting impression.

The next thing Tristan did was search through the pile of books that had collected around the base of the bookshelf. He retrieved a delicately illustrated copy of *An Arabian Night's Entertainment* and began to sort through it. Tristan was a good reader, but he only enjoyed reading the captions under pictures. He liked books for the feel and look of them, more than the words. In many ways, Tristan and Adrian would have a lot in common if they could ever get over their cultural differences. As Tristan began to rip out the pages of Adrian's beloved books, Taco, having already emerged from his den, dug into the roots of the dieffenbaccia plant.

## part two

Adrian walked up and down the streets of Manhattan in an enraged power walk. Blue and white squares of city windows glittered all around and blinded him, sending him into the depths of an even greater fury and he lunged into the shadows like the slithering ferret he despised. It was madness to leave a six year old alone in his apartment, but all Adrian could think about was revenge, revenge against his gold digging girlfriend and that horrible animal he was forced to keep. As he caressed the stack of twenties folded in his coat pocket, his mind

began to go to dark places. He stared through boutiques and shop windows as if through the eye of Sauron, imaging how he could use such merchandise to remove Taco from his life once and for all, visualizing his vengeance.

Of course, it would have to look like an accident. Adrian still wanted to keep Tristan's mother around for reasons he did not like to admit to himself. He could arrange for the bottom shelves of his bookcase to collapse, fifty pounds of his heaviest hardbacks would tumble down upon Taco's hiding place, crushing him. How ironic to end the ferret's life in the very place he counted upon for safety! A twisted grin surfaced onto Adrian's face.

"Are you interested in something on this rack?" Adrian's glazed eyes slowly phased into focus and he realized he was staring demonically at a women's yellow tank top displayed at the front of a line of similarly colored tank tops. The sales wench looked at him cruelly, arms folded.

"Oh, no, I was only browsing." Adrian turned abruptly and staggered out of the clothing store. He was so caught up in his internal plots he did not even realize he had gone into the boutique and was quite embarrassed to have become so far removed from the material world. As his racing heartbeat slowed, his mind began to settle into more civilized threads of thought. Killing a small animal, no matter how much it deserved to die, was a bit extreme, he decided. He would go back home, make a cup of coffee and think of a more realistic way to deal with his

situation. Perhaps Taco might simply get loose and find himself *lost* in the back alleys of Manhattan. No, no, no, Tristan loved that thing, it would be cruel to do that him.

Turning the key to his apartment, Adrian felt magnanimous. He was in a forgiving mood when he opened the door. However, through his black eyes the state of his apartment revealed itself to him in its dirty and broken state. Dirt and roots from his dieffenbaccia plant had mixed with the spilled coffee on the table and rug, creating a murky, black paste which had spread throughout the room in the form of ferret and child-sized footprints. Books and pages of books were strewn through this mixture irreverently, the words and pictures now soiled, torn and brown. Tristan was sitting on the kitchen floor, cutting up a pile of coffee filters he had pulled from a bottom cabinet into ugly, snowflake-like patterns and Taco was out of sight. Adrian knew what he had to do; Taco could only be in one place. A familiar rage filled his heart and Adrian moved to retrieve a hammer and crowbar from his supply closet.