

The bus stop was closer to the house than the subway station by a block, so Tessie headed there first to take a look. It was wide open, a long bench covered by a metal roof. It was enough to keep 3 or 4 people from getting rained on, but that was about all it was good for. It did not provide enough cover for a small, black dog dressed up like a ninja to sneak on a bus, so Tessie moved on. Down the road a little, Tessie sat down next to the outside door of the subway station. It was above ground as this section of the subway ran until it got closer to the City then dipped down into the tunnels. Tessie sat in front of the glass wall and observed the people waiting for the train inside of the small building, about the size of the yellow house she lived in. When the train was about to arrive, the people stood up, almost in unison, and filed onto the train car through one of two doors. There was one door on the front of the car and one at the rear of the car. The people paused as they walked onto the train to swipe a card they carried as they boarded, just after they made the first step up. The doors remained open for about one minute as people got on and off the train, but during the last 10-15 seconds, no one moved to or from the car. The doors would sit open for these few seconds then close. Tessie saw this as her chance to sneak on; she could quickly jump onto it while the doors were open and no people were there. She just had to figure out how to get into the station. She walked back to the front door and waited for a person to leave to run through the door before it closed. She made it in on the first try but was quickly spotted and chased out by a person who just got off the subway. She ran back outside and around to the side of the building. *I need to get in there without anyone seeing me*, she thought as she sat outside. There was a chain link fence that blocked off access to the loading platform from the sides. Tessie walked up to the fence and noticed a small hole between the building and the tracks. *That could be my way in*. She looked at the tracks and loading platform, and a train horn blared in the distance. The loud blast startled

Tessie. Fear swept through her and just about paralyzed her body. *What am I doing here! This is crazy! I am going home. I'm not meant to sneak onto subways*, she thought, staring at the hole in the fence. She looked down at the smartphone and touched the icon to call Lola.

Lola answered her call and blurted out, "Headquarters!"

"Uh, Lola? Is this you?"

"Headquarters!" Lola reaffirmed. "Can I help you?"

"I think I found a way onto the subway, but I'm scared. I think I should just come home. This is too dangerous," Tessie said, hoping that Lola would tell her to come home.

"Oh, come on, Tessie! You are the fastest, most agile dog I've ever seen. You can do this! I know you can. Think about all the dogs we can help."

Tessie, looking through the hole in the fence, thought of how good she felt when they found Bella. She squatted down and pushed her way through the fence. She made it then backed out. She just wanted to see if she could fit.

"OK, Lola," she reluctantly replied, "I will try to get on the subway. But I don't like this!"

"Only go if you think you can make it. Take the subway toward the city for a few stops then get off and call me. I'll monitor your progress from the tablet. Lola out."

"Uh, OK, I'm out too... I guess..." Tessie replied with a nervous rattle in her voice as the call ended. She walked up to the hole in the fence again and observed the next train that approached. She timed how the people got off and onto the car, and once again, the doors stayed open with no one moving. A voice inside her head said, "*Go for it*," but her body did not respond. She sat there, looking through the fence as the doors closed, and the subway car chugged away down the track toward the city.

*I can't do this,* Tessie thought in disgust. *It's too scary. What if something happens? What if I can't get back home?* Negative thoughts filled her mind as she walked around the station. *What if they kick me out? What if they call the police? What if my tail gets caught in the door?* She sat outside of the station, thinking of all the things that could go wrong when off in the distance, she could hear the next subway approaching. She walked back over to the hole in the fence and looked upon the loading zone. There were 9 people standing there, waiting for the approaching subway. *That is too many people!* Tessie thought. *There is no way I can get past them. Oh well, I'll have to try some other day.* She turned and walked away down the sidewalk. She could hear the whistle of the subway as it came to a stop. She thought how she could be on the train right now as it pulled away from the station. She stopped and watched as it motored along the tracks, wondering if it was a mistake not to get on it. She turned away and continued down the sidewalk toward home. *Lola is going to be mad at me, but there were too many people there.* Suddenly, a loud bark scared her. A person was playing with their golden retriever in the front yard along the sidewalk where she is walking. Tessie stopped and looked at them. The retriever was old—white hair replaced the golden fur on his face, almost looking like someone spray painted on a white skull. The person playfully grabbed the dog as he rolled on the ground to expose his belly for a rub. Then he popped up and looked at Tessie as she walked by and barked again, “Hey, where are you going?”

Tessie stopped and stared at him. “I’m going back home. Why do you ask?”

“Oh,” he replied, “because you are all alone and you look scared. Do you need some help?”

Tessie stopped, “You would help me? I am a complete stranger. Why would you do that?”

"Because it is the right thing to do. One time, I was alone and scared, and a strange dog helped me. You are alone and look scared, so I thought you could use some help."

By this time, his owner was getting restless watching the two dogs playfully bark at each other and pull him away. "My name is Bear. Come back if you need help. I have to go now," he said as his owner motioned him back into the house. Tessie stood there, thinking about Bear's offer to help as he ran back inside his house. She gazed back at the subway station then back the opposite way toward home and an angry Lola. Bear's words echoed in her head: 'Because it's the right thing to do.' She looked at the house he went into, "Lola came up with a great idea to help lost animals, and here I am, too scared to help them," she huffed and let out a big sigh, unsure of what to do. "Maybe he will know, I need to ask him."

Tessie sat on the sidewalk, facing the house, hoping Bear would see her and come outside again. It only took a few minutes before he stood up on a couch and poked his head through the blinds to see Tessie standing there looking back at him from the sidewalk. He barked and whined until his owner noticed. "Do you want to go outside and say hi to the little black dog? Okay, Okay, let's go." He opened the door, and Bear ran up to Tessie, tail wagging furiously like a metronome keeping up with a heavy metal song, even in his old age.

"Hi there! You're still here?"

"Yes-I-thought-about-what-you-said-and-I-do-need-your-help. I-have-to-ask-you-a-question," Tessie replied very quickly, her excitement speeding up her words.

"Whoa, slow down a little. My old ears cannot keep up. What did you say?"

"Yes, I thought about what you said, and I do need your help. I have to ask you a question," she replied at a much slower pace.

"Alright, first though, what is your name and why are you wearing that weird outfit?"

"My name is Tessie, and this outfit holds my smartphone for me." She made sure not to talk too fast.

Bear looked puzzled at the answer. "Ah, you kids with all your gadgets. All you are going to get with that is a shorter attention span," he replied gruffly. "So, what's your question, Tessie?"

"I have the chance to try and help a strange dog, maybe more. But first, I must go out on my own and do things I am so very scared of doing. I want to help, but I am afraid of what might happen. What should I do?" she asked quickly.

"Well, all I can say is what my Dad told me when I was scared, and that is to run through the fear. If you stop and think about it, sometimes the fear will grow and become more than it is. If you just run through it, you don't have much time to think, and before you know it, you beat it."

"Run through the fear..." Tessie paused, thinking of the hole in the fence. She also realized how far she had come. Just days ago, she never would have thought to jump the fence and go to the park alone. Yet, she did it and found Bella. "I got it. Thanks, Bear! You helped me out a lot."

"Anytime Tessie. Come back and let me know how it went." Bear turned and ran back to his owner, who was watching the two dogs calmly bark to each other from his front porch.

"Bye Bear! I will be back." She turned toward the subway station. "Run through the fear." She said aloud and raced down the sidewalk.

Only three people were waiting for the subway this time. She could hear the subway car screeching toward the station. The voice in her head returned: *You can do this.* Tessie took a deep breath and said to herself, "I can do this, it is the right thing to do. Wait until the people are done then run to the door of the subway as fast as I can." She thought of how good she felt when she helped find Bella and wanted to feel that way again. This was about helping those lost animals,

and she must do this. With determination now in her eyes, she watched as the subway rolled to a stop. The doors hissed open. No one got off, and the three people got on. *Now!* she thought. She quickly squirted through the hole in the fence, but her costume caught a piece of the fence, and it stopped her short. She dug her claws into the ground and pulled with all her might, staring at the open subway car door. The fence leaned in with her but did not let go. The subway train whistle blew. The doors were about to close. She backed up and pushed through one more time. "Come on!" she yelled. As if the fence heard her, the barb that snagged the back of her costume ripped through and released her. She shot forward, sprinted to the open door on the subway car, and jumped onto the train just as the door closed behind her, almost catching her tail. She crash landed on the first step of the entry into the subway car, and there was a small opening under the first seat. With the conductor focused on leaving the station and the noise of the powerful engine starting up covering the sound of her landing, no one noticed that a small black dog, dressed up like a ninja with a smartphone in her front pocket, just boarded. She squeezed into the opening and lay down in the darkness, panting rapidly, but safely, under the seat. She took a deep breath. The train smelled like an old, dirty sneaker that ran through a swamp then sat in a hot car all day on a summer afternoon. The subway sped up and rattled along the tracks. Tessie braced herself in her little hiding spot in the dark while the train shook and shimmied as it quickly got up to speed. It jolted to the right and left suddenly as the old tracks forced the car toward the City. The wheels rattled like a giant steel drum rolling down a hill of jagged rocks. The noises and movement were a lot more than Tessie expected, and she immediately regretted her decision to jump onto the subway. Her legs spread for balance, her ears pulled back in fear, and Tessie muttered to herself, "What have I done?"