

Brutus

During the day, Brutus looked like a joke. He wasn't tall or muscular like the dogs people expected to be tough. Instead, he was wide—so wide that his stomach brushed the grass when he walked. He breathed loudly even when he was lying down, and when he tried to jump onto the couch, he often failed and slid back to the floor. The humans laughed and scratched their heads, calling him “big guy” and joking about how lazy he was. To them, Brutus was just a big, sleepy dog.

What they never noticed was that Brutus always faced the window when he rested. His ears twitched at every sound outside, and he never truly slept. While the humans believed he spent his days being lazy, Brutus was really waiting for night.

When the house finally went dark, Brutus slowly stood. His joints cracked as he stretched, and he walked to the back door with heavy steps. With a push of his nose, he nudged it open and stepped outside into the cool night air. Above him, pigeons shifted along the powerlines and rooftops. One pigeon gave a quiet coo, and suddenly several more lifted into the sky. The sky lookers had spotted him.

Across the neighborhood, something else was already moving. The raccoons called themselves collectors, but everyone else knew the truth. They were a cartel. They controlled the trash routes, the storm drains, and the late-night shipments behind the pet store. They moved through shadows, stealing food while the humans slept peacefully in their homes. Their leader was El Bando, a scarred raccoon with one torn ear and a calm voice that every other raccoon obeyed.

For years, Brutus had been the only thing standing in the cartel's way. The dogs of the neighborhood followed him, trusting the big old dog to keep the raccoons from taking everything. But things had begun to change because of Princess. Princess was a small chihuahua with sharp eyes and a perfectly tied pink bow. Night after night, she whispered to the smaller dogs that Brutus was old and slow and that the raccoons were stronger.

The final fight began on a rainy night. When Brutus reached the alley behind the pet store, he immediately knew something was wrong. The delivery truck was already open, and raccoons were dragging heavy bags of food toward the storm drains. There were far too many of them. El Bando stepped out of the shadows and calmly told Brutus he was alone.

Then Princess stepped into the alley, followed by a long line of chihuahuas. They spread out and blocked every exit. Princess lifted her head proudly and announced that Brutus was too old and that the neighborhood now belonged to them. The chihuahuas rushed forward, biting at Brutus's legs and ears. One jumped onto his back while another pulled at his collar. The pack he had protected for years had turned on him.

Above them, pigeons circled lower and lower. One pigeon, smaller than the others with crooked feathers, hesitated on the wire. El Bando raised a paw, and the first pigeon bomb fell. Then another. Within seconds, pigeon poo rained down across the alley, splattering pavement, raccoons, and dogs alike. The ground became slick and chaotic. Princess lifted her head dramatically to shout something important, but a perfect splat landed directly on her pink bow before she could finish.

The fight exploded. Raccoons swarmed Brutus while chihuahuas snapped and barked around him. Brutus roared and slammed his massive body into a dumpster, crushing two raccoons beneath him. Another raccoon slipped into the mess and crashed into a stack of crates. El Bando launched himself straight at Brutus's throat, and the two collided with a crash that shook the alley. Brutus slammed into the pavement while raccoons clawed at his sides and chihuahuas tried to hold him down.

Above them, the hesitant pigeon watched for another moment before suddenly diving down. Instead of dropping a bomb, it slammed into one of the raccoons attacking Brutus and knocked it away. Slowly and painfully, Brutus pushed himself back onto his feet. Across the alley, El Bando stood waiting.

Rain dripped from Brutus's fur as he lowered his head. Then he charged.

He ran straight through the middle of the raccoons like a wrecking ball. Bodies scattered as his massive weight smashed through them. When El Bando leapt again, Brutus met him head-on. They crashed into a stack of wooden crates, shattering them into splinters. Brutus kept pushing forward until El Bando slammed into the alley wall and collapsed.

The raccoon cartel broke and ran for the storm drains. The chihuahuas scattered in panic, and Princess ran with them, her ruined bow hanging crooked. The alley grew quiet except for the rain.

Brutus tried to take another step. His legs trembled beneath him. He took one more slow step before collapsing onto the wet pavement. The hesitant pigeon landed beside

him. Brutus lifted his head one last time and looked toward the neighborhood he had protected for so many years. Then he rested his head on the ground and did not move again.

Morning came, and the humans opened the back door and called his name. When they couldn't find him in the yard, they searched the street and the nearby park. Eventually, one of them sadly said that maybe Brutus had run away because he was getting old. They never looked in the alley.

That night, the dogs returned. They came quietly from every direction and carried Brutus together. It took many of them, because even in death, he was still heavy. They buried him beneath an old oak tree at the edge of the park where humans rarely walked at night.

A golden retriever placed a chewed tennis ball on the grave, and an old bulldog left behind a worn collar. The hesitant pigeon landed gently on the fresh dirt and bowed its head. After a while, Princess stepped from the shadows. Her bow was gone, and she stared silently at the grave before lowering her head as well.

The raccoons never returned, and the dogs never forgot the night Brutus stood alone.

Brutus had been heavy in life,

But even heavier in legend.

