

Dear Grandchildren,

Last night it was very dark when I took Beau Dog for his walk before bedtime. I always walk him a short way down Meadowlands Lane, toward the butterfly field, before we go to bed. Since Beau Dog is afraid of the dark, he always stays very close to me. To my surprise, on our way home, Beau ran down the pasture behind the barn, barking his angry bark, high pitched and frantic. "Oh no!" I thought. "What if it's a skunk down there?"

Since the barn blocked any light from the moon, I couldn't see anything as I cautiously walked through the dark pasture towards my little friend. "Beau Dog!" I commanded. "Come here right now! You're going to get skunked."

The rascal ignored me completely, barking and growling viciously. As you know, little Beau is smaller than most cats, but he can be quite foolhardy. Once when we were walking on the Guilford Green, he was challenged by an Australian sheep dog. Instead of humbling himself and lying on his back with his belly in the air, he attacked the bigger dog and leapt for his throat. Luckily, his teeth got stuck in the big dog's collar, or he might have hurt it. Anyhow, I knew that Beau had completely lost his temper, and if there was a skunk, he wouldn't have the self control to back down.

I finally caught him by the back gate to the swimming pool. "Hush Beau!" I ordered, and tried to scoop him into my arms.

The angry little dog danced away and continued to bark, even louder and more frantic, if that is possible. Then, to my shock, I heard splashing in the swimming pool. I looked over the fence, but it was so dark that I couldn't see much- merely a large shape swimming in the deep end of the pool.

Beau Dog suddenly turned towards the hill in the pasture, and growled softly. I looked, and saw a shadow running towards us in the darkness. In response to Beau's warning, and the threat of an unknown presence, my heart began to hammer, and the hair on the back of my neck rose.

"Be not frightened," called the low soft voice of a young girl. She spoke with a heavy accent, but I could understand her words quite easily. "Ben Gel will not hurt even a flea. He does love to swim however. I am sorry that he makes so free with your swimming pool."

Tomorrow I will send you a letter telling more of the story of Ben Gel and the girl.

Love,

Rainbow.

Dear Grandchildren,

I stared into the darkness. "Who is there?" I cried. Even in that moment when I first glimpsed the girl, I felt unsettled, already affected by her presence.

As she glided down the hill towards us, I heard a loud splash in the pool, and a soft low growl. Beau Dog danced angrily by my feet, barking the high pitched angry warning used in moments of maximum distress.

(Grandchildren, you may think it strange, but even though Beau is quite afraid of the dark, he gets very angry when he senses trespassers on his property at night. As I think about it, often my own anger is mixed with fear or another powerful emotion such as humiliation or greed. Perhaps we are not so very different from dogs.)

As the girl approached, I nervously walked to the control box by the pool filter, and turned on the lights. Suddenly the pool was flooded with shimmering green light. Beau Dog fell silent, and clawed at my legs. I picked him up and cradled him in my arms, as I stared at the most frightening sight I had ever seen.

There was a giant tiger in the swimming pool, and he was grouchy that we were disturbing his swim. I could tell he was grouchy by the way he lifted his lips showing his big white shiny teeth. Then he growled at us.

"Behave thyself Ben Gel," called the girl. "Thou art scaring the little white animal."

"We should play dead," I muttered quietly to Beau. "If we don't move, maybe he'll get distracted by something else."

"That may work on bears, but not on this guy. Have you ever seen a cat with a mouse?" Beau Dog replied caustically.

"Okay," I said, "maybe if we run in different directions, he'll only get one of us."

Beau Dog was perched in my arms, staring in dismay at the huge tiger, which paddled to the edge of the pool, and with a slow graceful movement, pulled himself onto the concrete deck. "You can run," Beau growled. "I will stay here and fight him."

Ben Gel, the grouchy tiger, took a step towards us, and ignoring the girl, inhaled deeply, opened his mouth baring his sharp teeth, and gave an earth shaking growling roar.

More tomorrow.

Love, Rainbow

Dear Grandchildren,

Beau Dog growled his reply. "Perhaps," said the girl, "it would be better if the small white animal were silent. Ben Gel can be quite grouchy." She reached out and softly stroked Beau Dog's head and his violent shivering ceased.

"That Tiger is going to eat us both. There will be nothing left of us for Anni to find but your black rubber sandals, and maybe some white fur," whispered Beau Dog into my ear.

"Oh little animal, do not worry so about Ben Gel.," said the girl. "He appears very fierce, but he eats not flesh. He lives on fruit and vegetables. He much enjoys burgers of soy."

"And little dogs," growled Ben Gel. "They are my favorite vegetable. They are even more tasty than vegetables of squirill."

"Ben Gel, thou are entirely naughty tonight. Frighten not the little white animal with thy stories," said the girl fiercely.

"He's telling the truth," Beau Dog whispered to me. "That big tiger is no vegetarian."

Ben Gel roared so loud the ground beneath our feet shook.

"Humble yourself," Beau Dog barked, "or I will bite you on the tail so hard you won't be able to curl up to sleep for at least a month."

"Shh Beau Dog," I said. "That is not helping."

In the light reflected from the pool, I looked at the girl. She was slim and dark skinned with fine aristocratic features and a small red spot painted in the center of her forehead. She wore a long silken covering that reached her ankles, an Indian dress called a sari. There were golden sandals on her small feet. Her shiny black hair was pulled back in a braid that hung below her shoulders. She was young, although older than my granddaughter, Emily. I would guess she was thirteen years old.

"Did your tiger escape?" I blurted. "Is he dangerous?"

"Be not afraid," she murmured, "for I am with you." She put her hand on my arm, and suddenly my fears dissolved, and I was filled with warmth. I knew we were safe.

"Who are you?" I asked. "Why are you here?"

"My name is Walla Tag," she said. "My family is in great difficulty and we know not where to turn."

More tomorrow.

Love, Rainbow