

# Matti and the Tiger

by Vera Bendl

Matti had been dreaming about tigers again.

The tiger roared, and Matti ran for his life.

It was awful.

He didn't even dare to mention it. But at nursery school he told his best friend, "I don't like snappy dogs, but tigers are totally terrifying."

Guess what happened later! When he was tucking himself into bed, something jumped up onto it, something big, something soft and furry. Matti began to tremble and shake and he couldn't utter a sound. In the moonlight that was pouring in through the window, he could see what it was though: it was a tiger. A sort of middle-sized one, let's say about as big as he was.

What are you going to do, Matti?

"I've lost my mummy," said the tiger, "I'm not very big you know, I'm only just old enough for nursery school," he explained. "I'm from the tropics, where it's hot." He knew quite a bit about himself. "And here it's snowing outside. I'm freezing. Can I stay here?"

Matti hesitated.

"I hardly dare to let you sleep beside me. You won't hurt me, will you?"

The tiger lay down beside him and Matti could feel how soft he was. They warmed each other up nicely.

"Tigers are dangerous," yawned the tiger, "but not to their friends". It began to snuffle and snore gently, which made Matti drift off, too.

The next day, Matti gave him some salami, and taught him how to do puzzles.

On the third day, they played cards, and on the fourth day Matti was really longing to get home from the nursery to see his friend. In the evening he asked, "tell me, where is your mum?"

"At the zoo. I managed to slip out, but then I got completely lost."

"Do you miss her?"

"Of course, I do!"

"Then I'll take you back," Matti announced. Although, truth be told, he would much rather have kept him. Still, he knew that even a tiger needs its mummy.

Outside it was minus three degrees, and snow was gently falling. Matti got out his favourite hat and put it on his friend's head. He pulled a blanket over him, too.

"This way people won't recognise you," he said. "I'm afraid they don't like tigers in this town. That's the kind of place we live in," he added.

After that, they boarded a trolleybus.

"That dog is rather stripy," the driver said, eyeing the stripes that were peeking out from under the tiger's hat suspiciously. "What kind is it?"

"A tropical terrifier," Matti replied, matter-of-factly. "It's extremely rare".

The driver was happy when they got off. Having a five-year-old boy and a tropical terrifier on board was a bit unnerving to say the least!

They had almost reached the zoo when a fearsomely huge dog came up to them and growled horribly. The tiger got a terrible fright. His claws slipped on the ice, and he sprawled on the pavement. Matti was scared, too.

What are you going to do, Matti?

Matti decided that he was going to be really brave.

"Leave my friend alone!" he shouted at the dog, "can't you see his mummy isn't here? You're scaring him."

He realised he had said something important, and it was easier to say it because he loved the tiger.

"Oh no! Is he just a cub?" asked the giant dog in amazement. "Sorry!" He drooped his head, ashamed that he hadn't barked something nice instead of growling. "Can I help you?"

"Yes, of course!"

The zoo's main gate was closed, so they took the shivering tiger to the side gate. Andrew—that was the fearsome dog's name—nudged the tiger in the right direction with his nose, while Matti occasionally stroked him.

The mummy tiger rushed over when she saw her stripy son, she even licked Matti. Actually, she got him all spitty, but never mind.

"Feel free to visit whenever you like, we will never hurt you," mummy tiger said. Matti was chuffed, but he also felt a little bit sad because he wouldn't be able to cuddle up with his friend anymore.

From then on, Matti visited the tiger every week, along with Andrew the fearsome dog. And he never did have any more nightmares.