

The Gollipoo

By Chick BeVier

Introduction

This story, written more than ten years ago by Chick BeVier, has been told to countless campers and even produced as a play at campfire. It is more than a children's story; it is a reminder to us all, there are things, "...much worse than being eaten by The Tiger."

Illustrations by Susan BeVier

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The Gollipoo

Gollipoos are hard to describe because they change so quickly. As a matter of fact, in no time at all they're no longer Gollipoos.

One little Gollipoo who lived with her mama, papa and grandmother was quite normal in every way that is normal to Gollipoos, except that she was afraid of — oh, so many things.

The Gollipoo did not like going to bed because she was afraid of being alone, especially in the dark. So, after her grandmother had tucked her in the Gollipoo said, "Grandma, please leave the light on."

"Oh my little Gollipoo," said Grandma, "there is nothing here to be afraid of."

"I know," said the Gollipoo, "but please leave it on anyway."

"I'll leave a light on, but just the little one in the bathroom."

"All right Grandma," said the Gollipoo, but as her grandmother began to close the bedroom door the Gollipoo cried, "No Grandma, please don't close the door."

Grandma went back to the Gollipoo's bed and sat down. She sat on the edge of the bed for the longest while, looking at the little Gollipoo with a strange expression. Finally the Gollipoo asked, "Grandma, what's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter my child," answered Grandma, "but I was thinking that it is time for you to take a trip to the zoo. Would you like to do that?" she asked.

"Oh yes Grandma, that would be wonderful."

"Then you go to sleep and tomorrow I'll arrange it."



The next day the Gollipoo went to the zoo with her mother and father. For some reason her grandmother had decided not to go. This seemed a bit strange since the idea of going to the zoo had been her grandmother's. Nevertheless, she became very excited and quickly forgot about Grandma.

When Mama, Pappa and Gollipoo passed through the gates of the zoo, Gollipoo became so excited that she ran off into the crowd. She rushed from cage to cage looking at all kinds of interesting creatures. The Gollipoo was having a very good time, such a good time that she soon was very lost. She had wandered beyond the normal area of the zoo into the place where new and special animals are kept before they're given cages in the display area. As the Gollipoo looked in cage after cage, she came to one that had the *biggest tiger she had ever seen*.



The big cat, who was lying on his side in the center of the cage, appeared to be tired and very old. As the Gollipoo walked around the cage the old cat never moved. Suddenly the Gollipoo heard a voice coming from inside the cage. "Hello Gollipoo," said the voice. The Gollipoo looked around to see who was speaking, but found no one.

"Hello Gollipoo, it's me," said the voice again. The Gollipoo continued to look for the person who was speaking, but the voice was coming from inside the cage. As the Gollipoo examined the tiger, she noticed he had a strange look about him. As she looked carefully at his face, she saw what appeared to be a smile. No, she knew that tigers don't smile. It couldn't be that. But when she heard the voice again, she saw the tiger's lips slightly moving. The voice was coming from the tiger!

The Gollipoo thought to herself, "This can't be. Tigers don't talk and they surely don't smile." But this one was doing both!

"Hello Gollipoo," said the tiger, "I've been expecting you."

"You have?" asked the Gollipoo.

"Yes, most Gollipoos visit me eventually. Some come when they're little like you, others wait a while. Of course there are a few that never make it, and that's too bad."

"Tiger," asked the Gollipoo, "how did you know that I would come today?"

"Your grandmother told me, she's a *wise* old lady you know." As the tiger said "wise" his voice hardened in a way that the Gollipoo did not understand. He was remembering something he did not care to reveal.

The Gollipoo wondered how Grandma could have known a tiger like this. He was so scary, but then he was old, and so was her grandmother. She thought to herself, "Maybe all old people just know each other. I'll have to ask her when I get home."

"She won't tell you," said the tiger.

She won't tell me what?"

"How she knows an old tiger like me."

"How did you know what I was thinking?" asked the Gollipoo.

Slowly, and with an air intended to reveal his own wisdom, the tiger said, "Oh, I know a great many things."

The Gollipoo was beginning to feel at home in the presence of the old cat. He seemed so lazy and his eyes so languid, but also a bit mysterious, which peaked her interest.

"How old are you?" asked the Gollipoo.

"A lot older than you think," he replied.

"You have such wonderful stripes and soft looking fur. Is it as soft as it looks?" asked the Gollipoo.

"Oh, it's even softer than it looks. Would you like to stroke it?" The tiger's tone became *very* encouraging.

The Gollipoo considered the tiger's invitation to stroke his fur and then replied, "Yes I would. Why don't you come over here by the bars so I can reach in and pet you?" The thought of reaching into a tiger's cage would have normally been much too scary for the Gollipoo to even think about, but this old cat had a kindly air that was putting the Gollipoo *quite* at ease.

The old cat never moved. He sighed or purred, it was hard for the Gollipoo to tell the difference. He was so old that the one sound had become indistinguishable from the other. "What's the matter Tiger?" asked the Gollipoo with a concerned tone in her voice.

"Oh I'm so old and tired that it is painful for me to move about, that's all," answered the tiger. "It would be much easier for you to come in here," he added.

Though the Gollipoo had become quite comfortable in the presence of this very big tiger, she was not comfortable enough to actually enter the cage. Besides, how could she get in? The cage was locked.

Not wanting to show her fear, the Gollipoo said, "Yes, that would be okay but I can't get in for the same reason that you can't get out; your cage is locked and I don't have the key." The Gollipoo was feeling quite good about her clever answer, when the old cat once again surprised her.

"Gollipoo, you don't need a key to get in," replied the tiger.

"Well of course I do," said the Gollipoo and then thought to herself, "Certainly this wise old cat is smart enough to see that the door has a lock on it."

Again the cat surprised her, he had read her mind,

"Gollipoo you don't need to use the door to get in."

The Gollipoo was getting accustomed to this strange form of conversation that required no words and said with a bit of contempt in her voice, "Of course I do."

"Listen Gollipoo," the tiger's voice changed, "I have been visited by Gollipoos for longer than you can imagine and none of them has ever needed the door to get it."

The change of tone in the tiger's voice scared the Gollipoo, but his words intrigued her. "What could he possibly mean by that?" she wondered.

She stood by the bars for a long time saying nothing. The tiger also grew silent. After a while the Gollipoo placed her hands on the bars of the cage and leaned forward resting herself. As she pressed her forehead against the bars she discovered, quite by chance, what the old cat had meant. The Gollipoo's head slid between the bars. It was a tight fit, but she could pass between the steel bars.

The tiger was still lying on his side facing away from the Gollipoo. "So now you understand," said the tiger without looking toward the Gollipoo.

The Gollipoo knew that the cat had not been able to see her, but she was now fully accustomed to his uncanny powers. "Yes I do," replied the Gollipoo.

"Then come in and sit with me for a while, and I'll let you stroke my fur." The tiger's voice had become *very* encouraging. So, without hesitation, the Gollipoo pushed her little body through the bars; it actually fit quite easily, and she entered the cage.



Now while all this was taking place in the back of the zoo, the Gollipoo's parents were frantically searching for their missing Gollipoo. They went in different directions and looked in each of the buildings and displays. They asked everyone they met, "Have you seen our Gollipoo?"

Some said, "No," and others said, "Yes, but she was here for only a moment and then moved on."

Finally they came to the policeman, whose job it was to watch out for things such as this. He had seen the Gollipoo several times, and he said something strange, "You know," he said to her parents, "she went from cage to cage and from building to building with such," he paused while trying to find just the right words for what he had seen, "... with such determination that I thought she must be a regular visitor to the zoo. She also appeared to be looking for something or someone and wasn't quite sure where it or they had gone." The officer shook his head and said, "Lost you say, she certainly did not look lost to me. More like she had lost... no, no," he stopped again

and pondered, "no, more like she was searching. But lost, no, definitely not lost."

"Well," replied the Gollipoo's mother, "she is lost and we can't find her."

"Then let's get some help and we will search the whole zoo until we find her."

The officer began to talk into his radio, and within a few minutes the head zookeeper, several more policemen and a number of other zoo workers had all assembled and a search was quickly organized.



The tiger, having sensed that the Gollipoo had entered his cage, never moved. The Gollipoo stood just inside the cage with one hand stretched out behind her holding on to the bars. "Your grandmother was afraid too!" the tiger said in a casual tone, which caught the Gollipoo by surprise.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Yes, your grandmother visited me once, a very long time ago. You are much like her..." the tiger paused and pondered before adding, "maybe that's why she sent you." The Gollipoo could no longer resist. The tiger had roused her curiosity so much that she forgot about her fear of him. "Come sit by me," said the tiger once again, and the Gollipoo did.

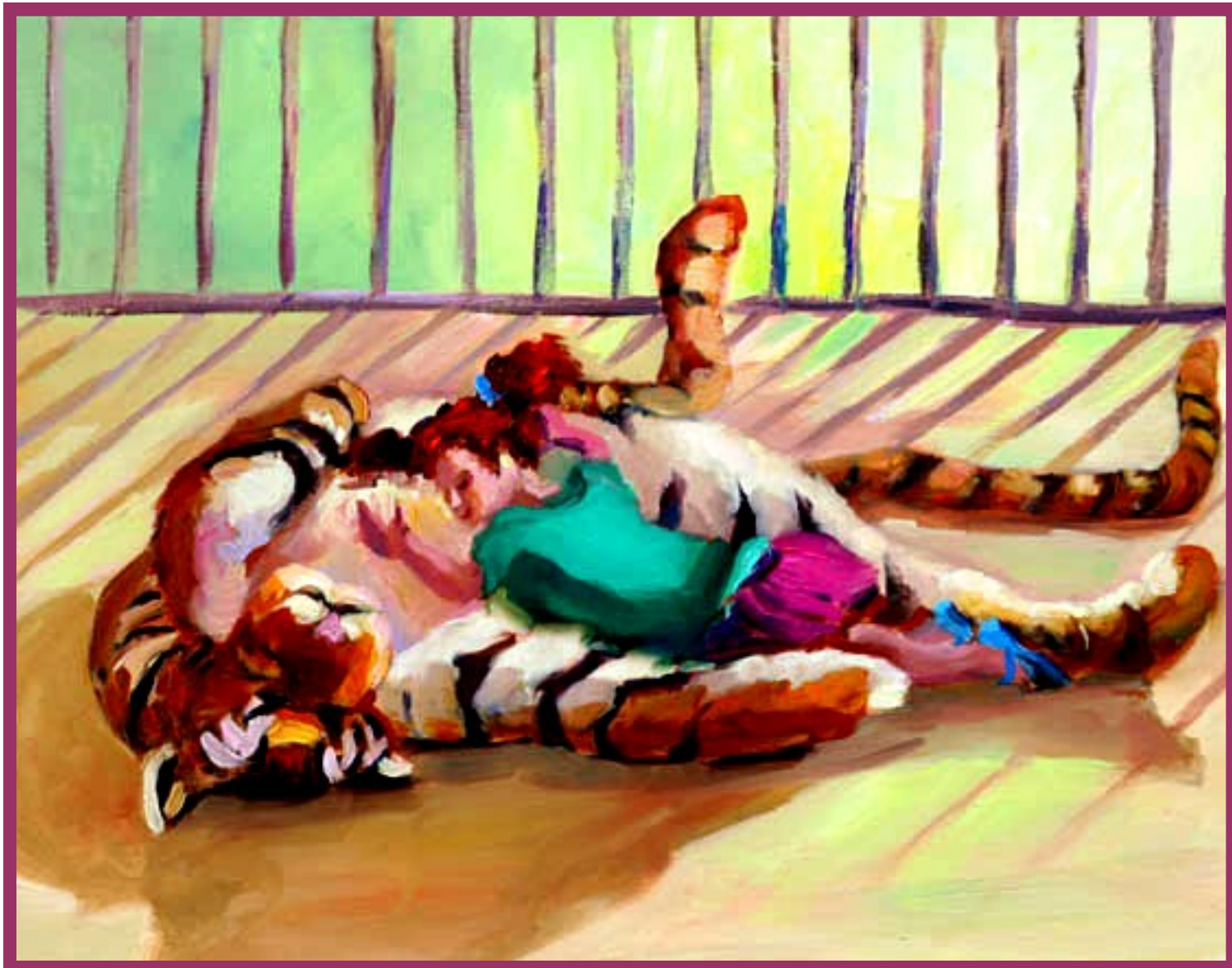
The Gollipoo sat behind the tiger and began to stroke his fur. It was softer than it looked and surprisingly warm. The Gollipoo began to feel at ease sitting next to this very large, very old, very wise, and though she did not yet know it, very *cunning* tiger.

"Yes, she visited me," began the tiger, "it wasn't much of a visit though," he said after a pause. The Gollipoo could see that the tiger was thinking back to that time so long ago. "Perhaps this time things will go better," he said, very softly as if he didn't want the Gollipoo to hear, and she did not.

"Tell me about her visit," asked the Gollipoo.

"I would rather know more about you," said the tiger, quickly changing the subject. "Are you here all by yourself?" The tiger moved his head just enough to look around the perimeter of his cage as he asked the question.

The Gollipoo quickly slid back a few feet when the tiger moved. She was feeling comfortable sitting next to him when he was motionless, but his sudden movement startled her. The tiger sensed he had moved too quickly and silently chided himself, "Slowly old boy, slowly, she's probably got the same stuff her grandmother had. Take your time."



The tiger slowly laid his great head back on the floor of the cage and asked, "Did I frighten you?"

"Yes, a bit," answered the Gollipoo.

"I'm sorry, I was just getting a bit stiff. The floor is quite hard you know. I wish the zookeeper would give me some straw or something soft to lay on," he added wistfully. His ploy worked. The Gollipoo nestled herself against him and began to stroke his fur. She said, "You poor old tiger, the zookeeper should take better care of such a nice tiger like you." The old cat softly purred with satisfaction.

The zookeeper was now almost finished with his search of the public part of the zoo, and still there was no sign of the Gollipoo, although many people had seen her. It seemed that she had been everywhere.

The zookeeper gathered his helpers and began to instruct them as to how they would search the back part of the zoo. Workers were dispatched in pairs to various corners of the zoo's working area and a final careful sweep of every corner of the zoo was begun. The keeper was cer-

tain they would find the Gollipoo. He reassured the Gollipoo's parents and then joined the searchers.

"Gollipoo," asked the tiger, "do you know where a tiger's softest fur is?"

"No," replied the Gollipoo.

"It's on my tummy."

The Gollipoo leaned over the tiger to try and see his tummy, but he was so big, and she was so small that she couldn't see. The tiger then said, "Why don't you come around here." The Gollipoo, without giving it a second thought, got up, walked around the huge cat, and sat down alongside his stomach.

She was now sitting between his front and rear paws. The old cat once again began to purr. "Take your time old boy, take your time, you're not as fast as you used to be."

The Gollipoo buried her hands in the soft fur of the tiger's underbelly and began to softly rub his stomach. The old cat played his part perfectly; he laid motionless and purred.



The search for the Gollipoo had been underway for over an hour, and the searchers were finally closing in on the area where the old cat's cage was located. They could be heard in the distance shouting to one another.

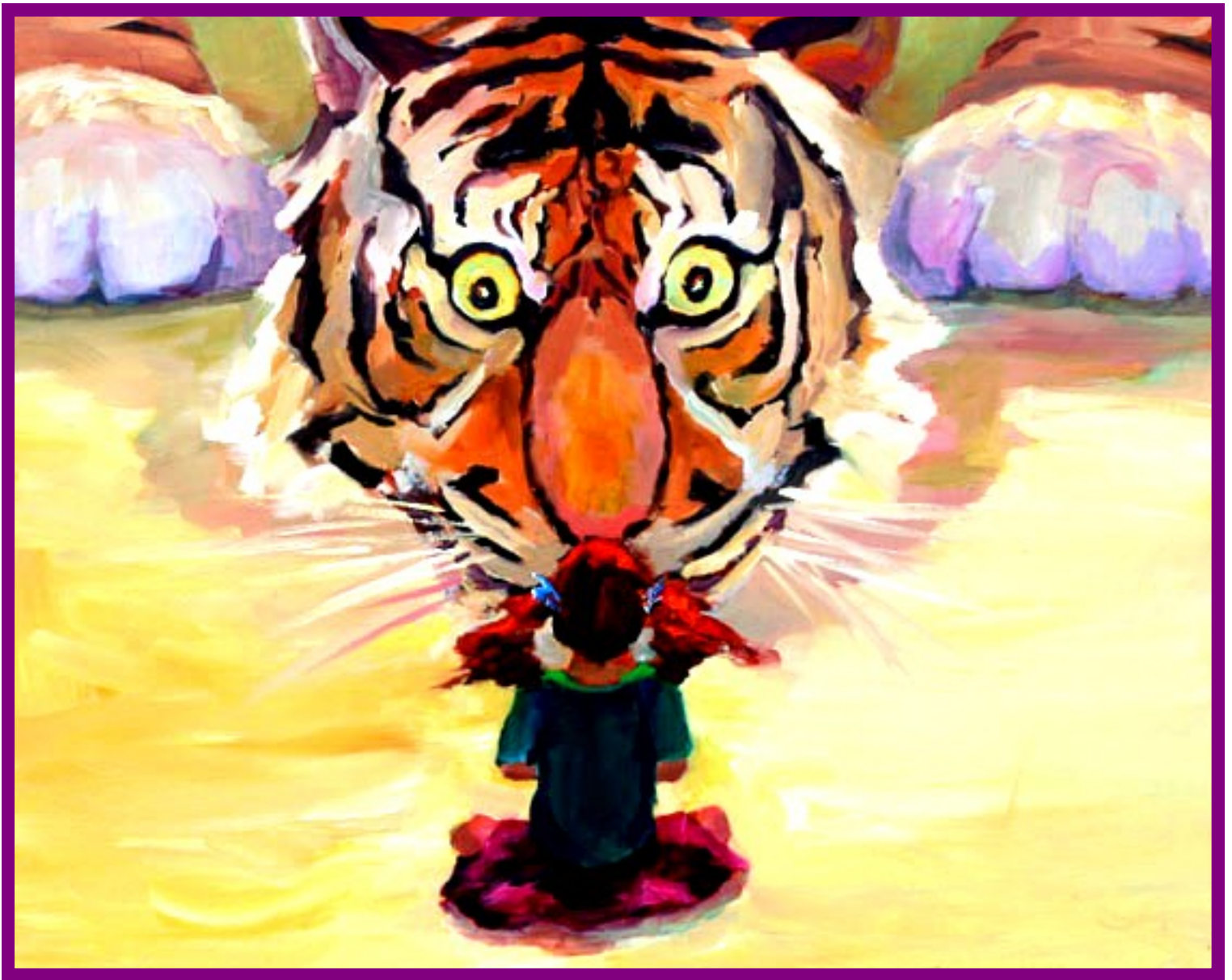
When the tiger heard the shouting he knew that he was running out of time. He had to act now. His fur really was wonderful to touch and he had made himself appear so docile that the Gollipoo was now fully at ease in his presence.

"Now's the time old boy," he said to himself. Slowly, the big cat began to project the long sharp claws that he had kept carefully retracted. One paw at a time he extended them to their full limit. His plan was to swing his powerful front paws down into the Gollipoo and pull her against his belly, while he jumped to his feet. The anticipation caused his upper lip to quiver, and as it did, one of his long white teeth was uncovered.

The Gollipoo, who had been completely absorbed in her rubbing of the cat's tummy, saw just a glimmer of light

bounce off that huge tooth. Without an instant of hesitation, both the Gollipoo and the tiger reacted.

Pushing off the cat's tummy with her hands and the floor with her feet, the Gollipoo sent herself hurtling away from the tiger. At the same instant, the cat's razor like claws came whistling toward her, but missed. The old cat had been right, he wasn't as fast as he used to be and this Gollipoo was unusually speedy, just as her grandmother had been.



While the tiger rose to his feet, the Gollipoo scrambled to the back part of the cage. There was a concrete wall that separated the cage from the working area behind. It had no bars!

As the Gollipoo began to edge along the wall, trying to get to the bars, the tiger slowly moved to cut her off. Tiger and Gollipoo were now gracefully moving back and forth in a deadly dance. After several attempts to reach the bars had failed, the Gollipoo realized that she was not going to escape.

The old cat now employed a very old tactic. With one deafening roar, the tiger leaped to within a few feet of the Gollipoo and fixed her with his huge eyes, which were no longer languid, but had become hypnotic! Once he had frozen her against the back wall of the cage, the tiger asked himself, "I wonder if it will work this time?"

The Gollipoo did the unexpected; she sat down right in front of the old cat and looked deeply into his huge eyes.

Neither tiger nor Gollipoo moved. The deadly dance about the cage had ended, and a new battle was joined. .



As each peered deeper and deeper into the other's eyes, the battle was carried into remote areas where both tiger's and Gollipoo's really live. This was a place the Gollipoo had never been before. It was, however, a place the Tiger had been before, and he had not liked it.

Within the minds of Gollipoos there are many rooms containing all sorts of treasures and horrors. The rooms are joined by miles of dimly lit corridor that must be walked before all the room's contents can be discovered. This became the scene of the final battle between the Gollipoo and the tiger.

When the tiger had visited this place before he had lost his way. Now he moved carefully, for the horrid thing he had seen last time still haunted him. The Gollipoo also moved cautiously. Each opened door after door as they passed through the dark corridors

When the Gollipoo opened one particular door she saw a most beautiful sight. Inside the room was a flame that emitted a wonderfully warm and orange glow. As she drew closer, it began to burn brighter and hotter. When the tiger entered the room and felt the heat he was repelled by it. The Gollipoo, however, found the heat to be

comforting and was drawn closer still. Finally, she was standing alongside the fire, which had become a raging blaze. Compelled by something deep within, like an ancient memory that had been planted during some long forgotten primordial time, she reached out and touched the flame.

At the touch of her hand the flame instantly disappeared from sight, and the Gollipoo found herself back on the floor of the tiger's cage. The tiger was no longer crouching menacingly before her. He had moved to a far corner of the cage and was now cowering.

The Gollipoo rose to her feet and strode across the cage. The tiger huddled into a small ball as she approached. The Gollipoo sensed his fear of her and pitied the old cat. Walking to the bars she attempted to wriggle through them, but she wouldn't fit! Something was now *very* different about the Gollipoo; the great cat feared her, and the bars through which she had earlier passed were now too close together for her to wriggle through --- but that couldn't be!



As the Gollipoo stood looking at the bars, the first of the search party arrived at the cage. "Oh no! I found her!" screamed the policeman.

Within a few minutes the cage was surrounded by the search party. The Gollipoo's mother screamed, "Get her out! Get her out!"

"We've got to get the tiger away from the door," yelled the zookeeper. One of the workers was dispatched to get a long pole, which was used for such desperate occasions.

Before the worker was out of sight, the Gollipoo walked over to the big cat (the whole group gasped as she did this) and told him to move to the other side of the cage. The cat instantly obeyed by skulking across the cage and laying down.

"Now open the door," shouted Mamma.

"No, no, it's still too dangerous, that tiger is too fast, wait until the poles arrive," said the zoo keeper.

"Open it now," said Pappa.

"No," shouted the zoo keeper.

The Gollipoo walked to the door of the cage, looked the keeper directly in the eye, and quietly said, "I'll take care of the cat, and you open the door." The keeper quickly opened the door and the Gollipoo stepped out into the arms of her Mamma and Pappa.

Then came all kinds of questions. Everyone wanted to know how the Gollipoo had gotten into the cage, and how she had managed to keep from being eaten. This cat evidently had a bit of a bad reputation.

The Gollipoo said nothing except, "Mamma can I go home?"

"Yes Gollipoo," said Mamma and they left.

Mamma and Pappa wanted to hear the whole story, but the Gollipoo wasn't ready to talk.



Later that evening, when Mamma, Pappa and Grandma were sitting in the living room, Mamma said, "Something strange happened in that cage." Grandma, who was sitting quietly in the corner knitting, gave a knowing smile and said, "I'll put Gollipoo to bed tonight," and went off to the Gollipoo's bedroom where she found the Gollipoo already in bed and deep in thought.

Grandma sat on the edge of the Gollipoo's bed and said, "Tell me about your trip to the zoo."

"You knew him didn't you Grandma."

Grandma replied, "Yes I did. Tell me what happened."

"Grandma was the tiger a friend of yours?"

"In a strange sort of way I suppose he turned out to be a very good friend," Grandma replied.

"Grandma, I did something terrible today," as the Gollipoo spoke her eyes began to fill with tears.

"What did you do?"

"Grandma, when I stole the tiger's fire I felt wonderful, but the tiger was afraid of me."

Grandma began to smile and then to chuckle. "No, no, my dear, you did not steal the tiger's fire."

"But I saw it deep inside him, and when I reached out to touch it, it became mine, and the tiger became very scared."

"Oh Gollipoo, I had hoped, no I *knew* this would happen. Listen Golli..." Her Grandmother stopped in mid-word and said, "Listen my dear, tigers don't have fire inside them."

Her granddaughter interrupted, "But I saw it."

"Yes, yes my child, you saw a fire, but it wasn't that of the tiger, you saw the reflection of your own fire in the eyes of the tiger."



"I found my fire in those same eyes a very long time ago," answered Grandma.

"But Grandma, I might have been eaten by that tiger..." Gollipoo began, until she was interrupted by her Grandmother.

"Yes Gollipoo, you might have been eaten by the tiger, in fact some Gollipoos are, but looking deep into the tiger's eyes is the only way to find your own fire. Yes, I took a chance today, but it was a chance that all good parents and grandparents must take eventually. If I had never sent you to the zoo, you might not have found your *God given* fire, and *that my little Gollipoo would be much worse than being eaten by the tiger.*

Grandma's words were hard, but even a Gollipoo could see the wisdom in them. Eventually, her grandmother got up and walked into the bathroom to turn the light on. "No Grandma, I don't need the light on anymore," said Gollipoo.

Grandma smiled and walked through the dark room to the door and asked, "Shall I leave the door open tonight?"

"No grandma, I'm not afraid anymore."

"Oh my little Gollipoo you have learned a lot today, haven't you."

"Yes, Grandma, but why do you call me, 'little Gollipoo?'"

Grandma stood frozen in the doorway as tears began to trickle down her cheeks. "I don't know my dear," she finally answered.

"Grandma"

"Yes dear," her grandmother replied.

"Am I still a Gollipoo?"

Grandma slowly considered, "No my dear, you're not." Then, as she turned to close the door, a small voice came from the darkened room, "Grandma, I have just one more question."

"What is it my dear?"

"Will I ever be a Gollipoo again?"

Without hesitation, but with a bit of sadness, Grandma replied, "No my dear, never again."

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