

BIG DOG

by James Collins

Nell was tired. She climbed the stairs of the multifamily apartment house. She climbed eight steps to the first landing walking east turned on the five square foot landing and climbed up the next eight steps headed west. As she approached the first floor landing, she looked hesitantly to the left because of the big Dalmatian who resided in one of the apartments and had a reputation of being ferocious and attacking people.

To her right was the Cohen family opening the door to their apartment. The six-room apartment held the family consisting of three displaced persons from Eastern Europe. The parents were Jewish and owned a small candy store a couple of blocks away. The son, approximately forty years of age, was mentally handicapped but high functioning. The parents had just opened the door and entered the apartment while their son was struggling with a package.

Nell was carrying two bags of groceries including milk, butter, eggs and a number of cans. She had come three blocks and was tired. As she leaned on the banister to balance the package and relieve the weight, the door to her left opened and the monster erupted, running and snarling. Nell, in complete panic, yelled "God save me," dropped the packages and ran away from the dog. She rushed the Cohen's open door way as if it were a port in a storm. She ran into the young man, knocking him down, and spun around to close the door.

"Big dog! Big dog! Big dog!" was all Nell could say in her panic.

"Mama! Mama! Mama! The lady knocked me down!" were the cries of the young man on the floor.

Unintelligible phrases in Yiddish and Polish interspersed with English indicating the concerns of the parents who thought their son injured by some crazy person.

"My son, you knocked him down. What did he do to you? He has an illness and bothers no one. Why did you knock him down?"

"Big dog! Big dog rushed out of the apartment. Big teeth. Big teeth. He tried to kill me. He tried to bite me like he bit those other people. Lucky a door was open or I would be dead."

Ignoring all the frantic cries of the three Cohens, Nell put the chain on the door and opened it slightly to view the hallway. The large dog had stopped to lap up the milk and that is what saved her. The owners of the dog came out, put a restraint on the dog and

pulled the dog into their apartment. At that point, Nell removed the chain, opened the door, thanked the Cohens for saving her life and ignoring their cries, grabbed the few undamaged cans of food and ran upstairs to her apartment. The Cohens immediately called the police to report the incident.

Shortly thereafter, a police patrol car with two officers arrived at the apartment house. They went to the Cohen's apartment, noted the spilled food in the hallway, and took a statement. Communications were a little difficult because of language differences but the police were patient and got their story. Then they went upstairs to Nell's apartment to get her version. They knocked on the door and announced,

"Police, we're here to investigate the incident downstairs."

"Glory be to God. Thank God you are here. That dog tried to kill me I'm just lucky to be alive." announced Nell as she opened the door.

She was holding a gin bottle while pouring the liquid into her hand and splashed it on the two officers. They both backed up as the liquid hit them and one reached out gently and took the gin bottle out of Nell's hand. He sniffed the bottle gave a quizzical look, tasted the liquid on his finger and then passed the gin bottle over to his partner as he said,

"Check this out."

The second officer took the gin bottle sniffed it, tasted it and shrugged his shoulders.

"Lady, what's in the bottle?"

"Why holy water of course, to protect us from harm and evil."

"Why is it in a gin bottle?"

"Ah, three times I've broken the bottle sprinkling holy water on the neighbors and one of them got me this gin bottle because it's much more substantial. So now I keep holy water in this bottle and I haven't broken another bottle since."

After the laughter subsided, the police took Nell's report and went down to see the owners of the Dalmatian. They had previous reports on this dog and filled out some form of paperwork, which made the family report to court.

Nell baked a cake for the Cohens and went down with it to their apartment with abject apologies.

At family get-togethers, the tale of the big dog always draws laughter.

THE END