

## ***The Bedtime Book***

*Ben and the tiger under his bed* by Frode Grytten

### **Ben and the tiger under his bed**

By Frode Grytten

Of course, Ben's parents check under the bed before bedtime, but there are never any tigers there. The clever tiger waits until the parents are out of the way. As soon as they are safely back in the living room, the tiger shows up.

The first night Ben discovered the tiger, it scared him senseless. He was just going to check one last time, just in case there was a tiger after all, and just as he feared: a great big tiger was hiding in the dark. Ben assumed that the tiger would chomp him up in one go. But the tiger simply asked: Finding it difficult to sleep, Ben?

Ben still couldn't utter a word. The tiger crawled out from under the bed and took a look around the room. He scampered over to the model railway and eagerly nodded his head. He sat down and pushed one of the buttons. One of the trains shot off from the station. The tiger said: Cool railway. Coolest I've ever seen actually.

The tiger controlled both the passenger trains and the freight trains, led them on to different tracks, and drove the express train over the mountain where Ben and his dad had placed a flock of deer. The tiger laughed and cheered as the train ploughed straight into a snowdrift.

– Aren't you going to eat me? Ben managed to whisper.

The tiger turned around.

– Eat you? he asked.

– Aren't you going to gobble me up?

– Well, I hadn't thought about it. Eat you, huh? Nah!

– But, you're a tiger, aren't you?

– Like, hello! Yeah!

– In that case you are really supposed to eat me, aren't you?

The tiger came over to the bed. He had a thoughtful frown on his face.

– You know, maybe I should eat you? Maybe I should gobble you up whole? You've got a point.

The tiger punched Ben in the chest with his paw.

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– What do you taste like, boy?

Ben sank further underneath his duvet on his bed, as if the thin duvet could save him from a deadly tiger.

– Just kidding! the tiger said. -Eat you? Are you nuts? Why on earth would I eat you?

The tiger walked back to the model railway, drove the trains full speed towards each other until they inevitably crashed. The tiger roared in delight. He got up and went over to the bed once again. He tucked Ben in and said: It's time you got to sleep, it's getting late, boy!

– So you really aren't going to eat me then? Ben asked.

– That's right. But I will tomorrow! And I'm bringing ketchup and salt.

The tiger laughed.

– So you're coming again tomorrow? Ben asked.

– Yup, you bet! Your railway is so cool you're not going to get rid of me that easily!

That night Ben dreamed that he was running on the roof of a speeding train. He was being followed by a man-eating tiger. Ben had to escape by jumping from one car to the other, When he woke up he was drenched in sweat.

Ben thought he must have dreamt the whole thing, including that the tiger had been in his room playing with his model railway. The next evening, Ben's dad checked under the bed. No tiger. But as soon as he left the room, there the tiger was again.

– Yo, Ben! the tiger said.

He patted Ben on the head. He asked how Ben had been, how things were going at school, whether he had done his homework.

– We don't get that much homework, Ben said.

– What kind of a slacker school do you go to? said the Tiger.

– I'm at primary school, Ben said.

– I know that, Ben.

– How do you know my name?

– These ears I've got on me are good for listening, being a tiger and all.

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The tiger went over to the model railway, sat down and started driving the trains.

– This is just soooooo cool! the tiger said.

He drove the trains and had a big grin on his face. Ben stared at him from the bed. After a while the tiger came over.

– Time to go to sleep, Benny-boy!

– Do you like my train set? Ben asked.

– It's awesome! the tiger replied. - At home I've only got Nintendo and Game-Cube, some boring car games, a real train set is way cooler!

– Does that mean you'll be back tomorrow?

– Abso!

– And the night after that?

– Abso, Ben!

Since then, the tiger has turned up every night. He says «Yo, Ben» or «High five, Ben». The tiger loves Ben's railway, and Ben loves the tiger.

The only problem is that Ben always wants to stay up when the tiger comes. He does not feel like sleeping. The tiger has come up with a solution. Every time it gets too late, the tiger starts talking about cricket.

– Cricket is the coolest sport ever! the tiger says.

But Ben doesn't know the first thing about cricket and gets sleepy by the sheer mention of the word.

– No! Don't fall asleep now, Ben! the tiger says. - I was just about to tell you about the toughest cricket match in history!

Ben's eyelids grow heavy, really heavy, he can't manage to keep them open, all he wants to do is sleep.

– Ah, come on, Ben! the tiger shouts. - Cricket is sooooo cool, man!

One night the tiger didn't show up. He had been there every night to play with the trains and talk about cricket, but one night there was no tiger under the bed. Ben's parents were back in the living room but still the tiger didn't come.

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Ben checked several times under the bed; it remained empty. He lay awake wondering where the tiger could be. Ben couldn't sleep, he thought about cricket, possibly the world's most boring sport, but he still couldn't sleep.

The tiger didn't show the next night either. There was no sign of him the whole week. Ben missed the tiger, he had trouble sleeping, because the tiger wasn't there to tuck him in and talk about cricket.

– Aren't you sleeping well, Ben? his mother asked in the morning.

He hadn't told anyone about the tiger. He knew that nobody would believe him and there was no way he could prove he was telling the truth. After two weeks without the tiger, Ben decided he would ask his granddad. He reckoned his granddad would understand.

– It's a secret, his granddad said. - But all kids have a tiger under their bed, a friendly tiger. Well, maybe not all kids have a tiger. Some have a crocodile, others a bat or a viper. I had a hippopotamus under my bed.

– You did? said Ben.

– Yes, the hippo was there until I was a teenager. We used to play mikado. And then he would tuck me in and make me go to sleep.

– Did he talk about cricket?

– No, he read poems by John Milton.

– Who's that?

– It doesn't matter. But listen: my hippo also went away once. And what you have to do is crawl under your bed tonight and have a good look around, because the tiger has to get in somewhere, right? You have to find the hole.

– Did you find the hole, granddad?

– You bet I did. Bon voyage, my boy!

After bedtime that night, Ben crawls under the bed. At first, he can't find any holes; it's just dark and dusty. But in the farthest corner, behind a box of lego he finds the hole.

Ben thinks he's too big to fit through the hole, but strangely the wall gives way and he disappears inside. It is pitch black inside and suddenly he falls forward. It's like being in a black tube, a bit like the Screwdriver at Waterworld, only with a few rays of light flickering by every now and then.

Then everything stops, and he tries to spy a way out. He can see a light ahead. He lies still for a moment, and then starts to creep slowly towards the light. He can feel something soft and

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hard, and reckons it must be the underside of a bed. He can hear strange voices, a door being shut and then silence. Ben waits.

All of a sudden a face pops down, and two eyes search underneath the bed. The face is green and covered in boils and sores. The thing is dressed in pyjamas, has eyes the size of table tennis balls, and has an antennae on the head. Ben sees the face upside down and is convinced it's a martian.

– QUELLI! QUELLI! THA PING!!! shrieks the martian.

Ben hears footsteps and shoots back underneath the bed, back into the darkness and quickly crawls towards a new light. He wriggles through and can feel with his hand that he is under yet another bed. After a short while another face appears. This one also upside down. A penguin!

– EEEEEAAAAA OOOUUUEEEEE! squeals the penguin.

Ben hears footsteps and vanishes under the bed again. He wants to ask about the tiger, where he can find him, but he is almost as scared as those he is scaring.

And so it continues. Ben keeps crawling around, ends up underneath dozens of beds and scares the living daylights out of everyone he meets. Here is a list of the ones Ben scares this time:

*1 vampire*

*1 toad*

*1 Cyclops*

*3 Portuguese Man o' Wars*

*2 platypuses*

*Tweedledee and tweedledum*

*1 tiger shark*

*2 ponies*

*1 American president*

*6000 tadpoles*

*Frankenstein's daughter*

Ben keeps on ending up under the wrong bed. No tiger. No tiger. Ben is almost exhausted when he finally ends up underneath a tiger bed.

– HUMAAAAAANOUUEEEEEEE! Screams the young tiger who is just about to go to sleep and was checking one last time to see if there were any humans under his bed.

– Bingo! says Ben and crawls out from under the bed.  
The young tiger trembles.

– Don't be scared! says Ben.

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But the young tiger is terrified. He shrinks to the far corner of the bed and hides behind his duvet.

– Aren't you going to shoot me? asks the young tiger.

– Shoot you?

– Yes, aren't you a human? If so, you're supposed to shoot me!

– No, no, I hadn't even thought about it. I'm just looking for a tiger with a thing for cricket.

Then from behind, he hears a familiar voice.

– What's up, Ben?

And there's the tiger. Ben recognises him even though he is holding a bat in his paws and wearing a helmet and batting pads.

– I see you've met my brother? the tiger asks pointing his bat towards the trembling young tiger.

– Where have you been? Ben asks.

The tiger shrugs and nods to all the equipment he's wearing.

– Guess what, Ben? I made it to the tiger national cricket team!

He laughs.

– And guess what else! We beat Pakistan. How fantastic is that?!

– But that couldn't have taken two whole weeks!

– Hey, Ben! Respect, man! We're talking cricket here! It takes at leeeaaast two weeks.

Ben stares at the floor.

– I've missed you, says Ben.

The tiger walks over to Ben and puts his arm around his shoulder.

– I'll be there tomorrow, Ben. I promise. I'll tell you everything about the match. It was soooooo awesome!

The tiger starts to talk about the match and Ben immediately starts to feel tired and sleepy. He is so tired he could sleep for weeks on end. He creeps under the bed and into the darkness once more.

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The last thing he hears is the tiger, who shouts: Bye, Ben, see you tomorrow!