

## The Guard Dog

By A. C. Zito

"Where did you find the thing again?" My aunt asked as I stopped by to drop off this month's stack of books for the neighborhood's book club.

"Moose was just sitting on my porch step when I got home from the library. I think I'm *gonna* keep him." Aunt Shannon shook her head in disgust.

"I've always hated dogs. Nasty, *nasty* things! Don't let it go inside your house! And what did you call it? Moose? What type of name is Moose? Sounds like you two are going to move to the Canadian wilderness and live off the land, giving the thing a name like *Moose!*" I laughed thinking about how that would actually be pretty cool, fighting off bears and various wildebeests. Maybe Moose and I could find a lost civilization out there and become a part of their village.

"Not leaving for the Canadian wilderness yet, Aunt Shannon! Moose and I have to watch over the library and keep the books from running off!" The joke went right over her head as she stared at me, blankly. Then, with irritation in her eyes:

"Look, Vanders; I've got my book club in half an hour. Just get that smelly thing off my doorstep." She slammed the door in me and Moose's faces. We both looked at each other and then I laughed saying to him:

"*C'mon*, buddy. Let's head back home!" We walked down the street and passed old man Whilicker's place. He stuck his cane out in the air, screaming:

"It better not poop on *my* yard!" I picked up Moose so as to not make old man Whilicker mad and jogged over to where we were instead in front of his neighbor's yard. I put Moose down, and we kept walking until I saw an open field that we could relax in for a second. I unleashed Moose, and he sprinted into a flock of birds having them fly up and away in ever which direction. I laughed as I saw the look of joy and sweet bliss stretched from ear to ear across his face.

I lay down under a shady sycamore tree and took out the book I was currently reading: *The Bedlam Stacks* by Natasha Pulley. I really did wish her all the best in her writing career, but I still had a hard time reading the newly published author. It was like I had stumbled upon the 21<sup>st</sup> century Jane Austen.

"Moose!" I screamed out as I saw that he had a hole that could've been the size of Kansas already dug up. I pulled him out and looked him up and down from head to toe. He was covered, filthy as could be, in dirt and grime. "You're getting a bath when we get home!" I muttered, sulkily, to him. I was irritated because when I got home I wanted to curl up by the fireplace and keep trying to figure out if Natasha Pulley is a writer I'd be interested in still reading or not.

*Bark Bark Bark Bark Bark Bark* Moose let out in a storm of fury. He bit down on my hand, leaving me to scream out in pain, having me drop him as I clutched the stinging sensation.

“Moose! You little piece of...” I stopped short as I looked down at what Moose had unburied. It was a brown box that Moose had already clawed open with his paws. Inside there was a blue ball that was already in Moose’s mouth. It had been sitting in there along with a letter. “It’s addressed to me!” I said, shocked beyond belief. I looked around to see if this was some type of prank but there was no one in sight. I opened it:

*Dear Mr. Vanders Hanes,*

*Moose is in your care now. Watch over him as he watches over us.*

*-The Committee*

I stared at the piece of paper and crumbled it up, throwing it on the ground. Someone was messing with me. I knew for sure someone was hiding in the bushes somewhere ready to come out and say ‘Happy late Birthday’ or ‘Happy Hanukkah’ which I would’ve been more than pleased to hear. But no one was anywhere to be found.

“Moose, let’s go home! And leave that here. I don’t like this one bit!” I tried to take the ball from Moose’s mouth, but he wasn’t having it. So I let him have it. But when I got home, I had to get to the bottom of it. I began calling up every last person who would play a prank on me like this.

“No, Vanders, awfully strange is what it is.”

“Vanders, how weird! I’d get rid of that ball if I were you!”

“Vanders, it’s only someone playing a prank on you!” That dog didn’t dig it up other than maybe someone put some treats in that whole. You have no reason to be worried. The dog is only a gift!” All my friends were right. But, at the same time, they were all completely wrong. This was such a weird thing that I just couldn’t accept it. I wanted answers.

But months went by. And years went by. And Moose and our life together moved along just fine. He grew out of being a puppy and became a good, reliable companion. We went everywhere together. And no one ever told me that I couldn’t bring Moose to the library because, well, it was *my* library! And we lived in a small enough town that everyone got along fine, and no one had dog allergies so it wasn’t ever a problem.

One day a girl came into the library. She was visiting a friend that moved to the town a couple weeks ago. And how we hit it off! I had never felt more in love than ever before! She was the light to my world, the candy to my smile, the sunshine to my cloudy days. We got married and have been living together in a house that I built on the plot of land where Moose found the ball and I, the note. And she was surprised as I that Moose still had the ball after all these years that have gone by.

But then the sad day came. Moose was fourteen years old, and he was on his last leg. We went and got the ball as he lay on the porch couch. He licked it a few times, smiled one last sweet smile and then drifted off into his endless sweet dreams.

“Vanders, look,” my wife said to me as I felt the need to shed tears away from the two. I turned around, confused at what she could possibly be asking me to look at, at a time like this. But there it was: the ball; it was hovering above Moose, spinning rapidly. Suddenly, it stopped and the two of us looked at it in amazement. There, instead of the blue ball I first found with Moose that sunny day, was what seemed to be Earth. Its blues and greens seemed so lifelike as we looked at it in amazement. The room became dark as the mini globe glowed like never before. Then a voice, as sweet as rain, came forth declaring:

*Vanders and Yara Hanes; the guardian of Earth has chosen to rest. Go and bury the guardian and a new guardian will be chosen.*

The ball then became an orb of water that fell from the air and splashed Moose’s resting body.

“I always knew Moose was special.” Yara told me, a tear rolling down her cheek. I caught it and caressed her cheek, replying:

“So did I,”