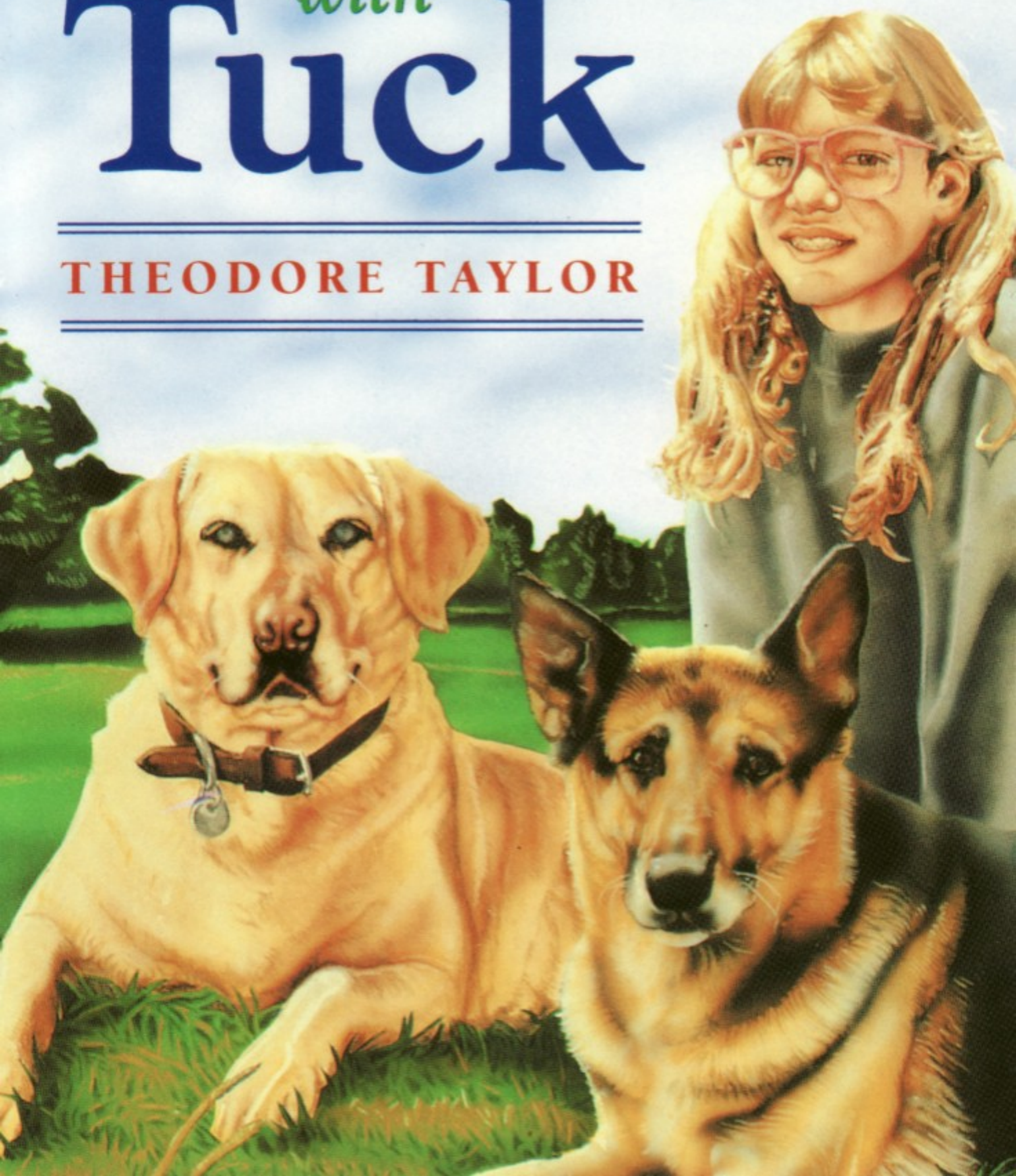




The Trouble *with* Tuck

THEODORE TAYLOR



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No one can definitely say when Friar Tuck began to go blind, not even Dr. Douglas Tobin, who was undoubtedly one of the best veterinarians in California. But the light probably began to fail for big Tuck long before any of us suspected it, and of course, being a dog, he couldn't very well talk about it.

I suppose that exactly when the shadows began creeping in, or when he finally slid into total darkness, doesn't really matter.

Yet I can clearly recall that miserably hot summer day so long ago when we first thought something might be wrong with Tuck. It didn't seem possible. Young, beautiful, so free-spirited, he had a long life ahead.

But the August of Tuck's third year on earth, my father, an electronics engineer, flew to Chicago on business, and the next day, a Monday, about midmorning, some neigh-

borhood cats got into a noisy brawl along our back fence, spitting and screeching.

To Friar Tuck, that was always an unpardonable sin. Not only were these cats intruding in *his* yard, a private and sacred kingdom, but, worse, they were creating an ear-splitting disturbance. His answer was immediate attack, as usual.

My mother was in the kitchen at the time and heard him scramble on the slick linoleum, trying to get traction with his paws, and as she turned, she saw him plunge bodily through the screen door, ripping a gaping hole in the wire mesh.

Up in my room, making my bed as I remember, I heard her yell, something she seldom did, and, thinking she'd hurt herself, I hurried downstairs and out to the kitchen.

Mother was standing by the back door, looking outside, puzzlement all over her face, which was usually a mirror of calmness. She still had her hand on top of her head, having forgotten it was there. Putting fingers to her hair was a familiar gesture when calamity occurred.

"Tuck just went through this door!" she exclaimed, unable to believe it. The hand came down slowly. "I declare." She was a Southern lady but had lost most of her way of speaking.

I then saw the big hole in the wire, as if something had exploded there.

"Some cats were fighting, and he got up and ran right through the door." Mother was awed.

I was sure that Tuck was far too intelligent to do a stupid thing like that. He'd always put on skidding brakes and just barked loudly if there was something outside disturbing him.

I said, "Maybe he was dreaming?"

Mother scoffed, "Helen!"

All right, he wasn't dreaming. He'd done a very dumb thing.

I looked out at him, thinking about excuses.

Tuck was sitting innocently on his powerful haunches in the grass, that dignified lionlike head pointed skyward. He seemed to be sniffing the air as if to make certain the squabbling cats had departed. To be sure, he wasn't concerned about any whopping hole in the screen door.

My mother shook her head and went outside, quickly going down the short flight of back steps and crossing over to him, maybe to scold him properly. He deserved it.

I followed her.

As she approached Tuck, his thick tail began to wag, switching back and forth across the grass like a scythe. She said, "You silly dog, you just broke the door," leaning over to take his big yellow-haired head into her slender hands and examine his eyes. She bit her lip and frowned.

Wondering why she'd done that, I had the strangest feeling.

Mother straightened up, still frowning widely.

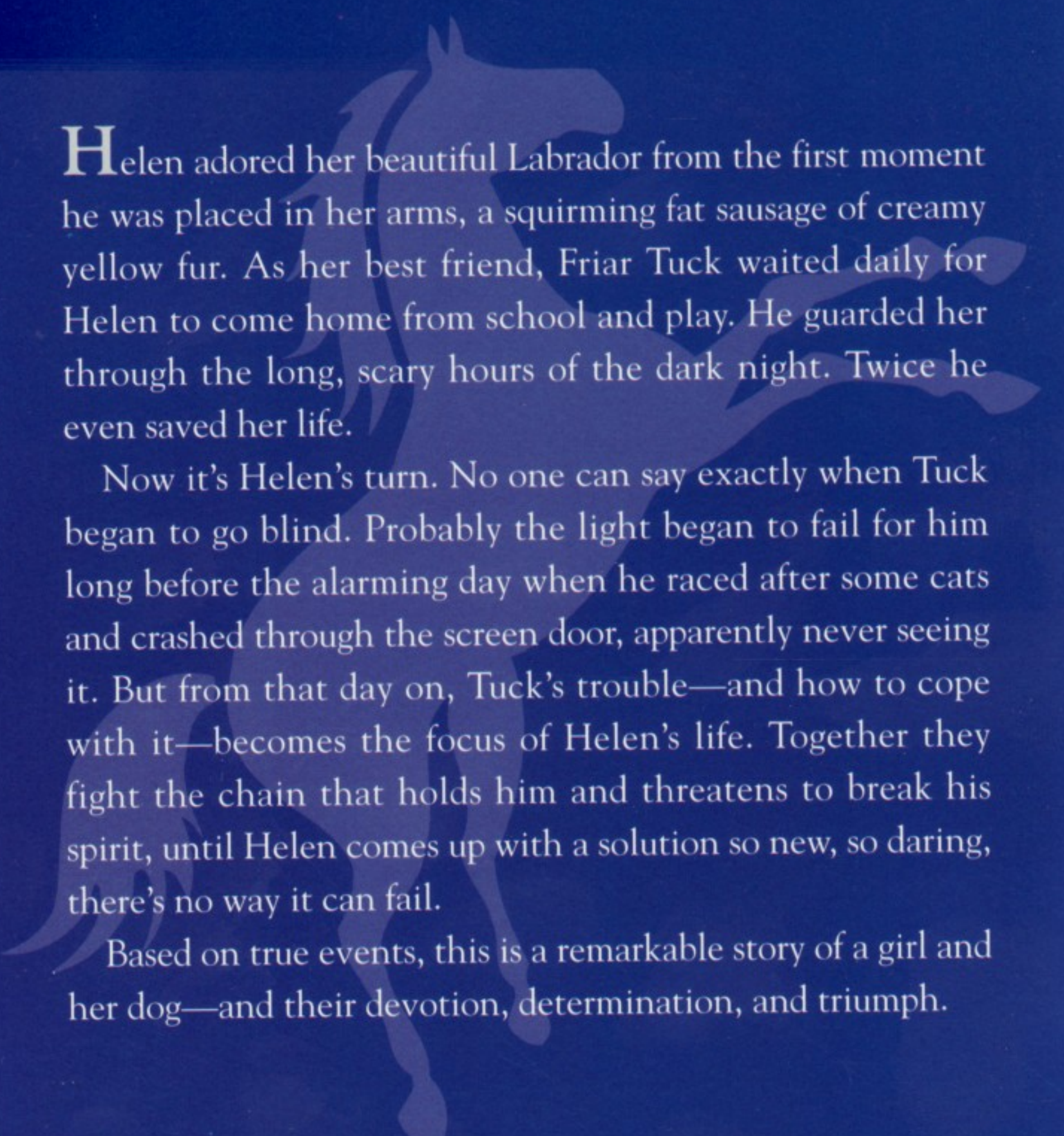
"Why did you do that?" I asked. "Look at him that way?"

"Well, he acted as though he didn't even see the door."

Now it was my time. "Mother," I scoffed.

Then I went over and peered down into his eyes. To me, they were the same as they had been for more than three years—liquid deep brown with dark pools in the center. They were so expressive, in laughter or sadness.

"Have you noticed anything different about Tuck lately?" Mother asked.



Helen adored her beautiful Labrador from the first moment he was placed in her arms, a squirming fat sausage of creamy yellow fur. As her best friend, Friar Tuck waited daily for Helen to come home from school and play. He guarded her through the long, scary hours of the dark night. Twice he even saved her life.

Now it's Helen's turn. No one can say exactly when Tuck began to go blind. Probably the light began to fail for him long before the alarming day when he raced after some cats and crashed through the screen door, apparently never seeing it. But from that day on, Tuck's trouble—and how to cope with it—becomes the focus of Helen's life. Together they fight the chain that holds him and threatens to break his spirit, until Helen comes up with a solution so new, so daring, there's no way it can fail.

Based on true events, this is a remarkable story of a girl and her dog—and their devotion, determination, and triumph.

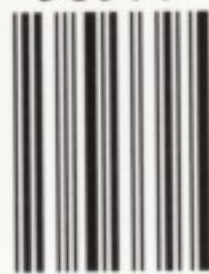
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