

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and dark shorts, is walking away from the camera on a dirt path through a vast, golden field. A white dog is walking beside her. The background features rolling hills under a bright, hazy sunset sky with soft clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

*Angel
Without Wings*

*A True Story
Written by Billie Atamer*

ANGEL WITHOUT WINGS

I stood at the overcrowded JFK airport newsstand,
and eyed books to help me pass the nine hour that
would
hopefully help me pass the nine-hour flight to Alacati,
Turkey where my husband Jack and I would spend the
next several months.

The books laid in neat rows on gleaming chrome
shelves; romance, fiction, non- fiction. My fingers
glided over the book covers until I noticed one about

angels. A beautiful rosy-cheeked cherub with long white wings stared back at me, *Your Guardian Angel*. I picked it up and thumbed through several pages, then placed it back on the shelf. My search continued until I saw *Tomorrow's Sorrow*. It sounded like a good mystery that would keep me interested throughout the trip. I wasn't looking forward to the long trip that would take my husband Jack, a photographer and me to a small village of about seven thousand people, nestled on the shores of the Aegean Sea.

"Flight 1084 to Istanbul, Turkey will be boarding at gate 38," a shrill voice announced.

"Got something interesting to read, Kate?" my husband asked, as he suddenly appeared from the crowd.

"Hope so." I shifted my carry-on bag to the opposite shoulder and walked toward the gate with, *Tomorrow's Sorrow*, tucked tightly under my arm.

We finally arrived in Istanbul, where we rented a car and drove to Atlacita, Turkey. There, we rented a house close to the beach where Jack would begin his assignment. He unpacked his gear and started out the same day we arrived. He was excited about taking underwater pictures of a rumored ancient city hidden in the shores of the Aegean Sea, located near the small village of Atacati.

After settling in, I looked forward to resume my early morning walks and looked eagerly forward to the new trails that lay before me.

However, Jack was a little concerned about me walking alone in a strange country, not knowing the language or area. Our neighbors warned us about a pack of wild dogs had been spotted several miles from where we lived.

Jack promised to join me, but we both knew this would never happen. He liked to sleep late; I was a morning person.

“Jack,” I whispered, “I’m going for a walk today. Care to join me?”

“Mummm, Nmmmm, ahhhh,” he mumbled and pulled the pillow over his head.

“I take that for a ‘no’,” I said, and reached for my sneakers.

Although the sun wasn’t up yet, the birds chirped loudly, determined to wake up the entire neighborhood. How Jack could sleep through that I’ll never know. Surely, the feathers in the pillow couldn’t soundproof all that chatter.

I dressed, grabbed the house keys, and opened the front door. Tommy, the community dog, was asleep on our front porch. They gave the title, ‘community dog,’ because everyone fed him. I was also puzzled about his name, a Turkish dog in a Turkish village, with the name, Tommy?

When we first arrived in Turkey, Tommy was in our neighbor’s driveway with a large gash on his neck. The

local vet said he had lost a lot of blood and the neighbors were afraid he wouldn't make it. No one knew for sure what had happened.

He was about the size of a Great Dane, only more powerfully built with an enormous square head, short white fur, and dark-brown eyes that looked soft as velvet. He was a Kalgon, a breed native to the mountains of Turkey.

I knelt down and patted Tommy's head, careful not to get close to the wound. He sniffed my hand then laid his head back into his crossed paws.

I locked the door, walked down the driveway, turning only once, to see Tommy settling back into a restful sleep.

There are few sidewalks in Turkey, so everyone walks along the side of the road, dodging cars, donkey carts, motorcycles, and bicycles, which makes an interesting walk.

The smell of pine trees on each side of the road was

intoxicating. The clean scent cleansed my lungs and cleared my head. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply, holding in the rich fragrance for as long as I could. A gentle wind blew through the pine trees and made a soft rustling sound that calmed my nerves and soothed my spirit.

When I opened my eyes, I noticed an ancient donkey cart, with wobbly wooden wheels coming down the narrow dirt road, painted in rich, bright colors. There were blue cornflowers, orange pumpkins, yellow corn, and bright red peppers painted on the cart. The Turks love color. The brighter the color, the happier the spirit, they claimed. A tiny donkey, with long pointed ears, pulled the huge load of fresh vegetables. I knew only a few Turkish words, but I smiled and said, “Metabaw,” which meant hello. He tipped his flat brown hat, smiled, and displayed one gleaming gold tooth, so prized by the older Turks.

So-o-o, I knew I had just met a man of some means.

As I passed a herd of wide-eyed cows, I laughed at myself when I heard, “Good morning,” come from my lips. Sheep ran to the fence to check out this strange American woman wearing shorts and thick white sneakers, pumping her arms wildly through the air.

A few dogs barked but settled back into a lazy sleep once again.

The natural beauty of the countryside overwhelmed me. The silver-leafed Olive trees that grew to be a thousand years old stood magnificently on each side of the road and the ancient fig trees, with their dark twisted trunks, had just begun bearing small purple fruit. Their huge leaves looked like tiny green kites flying high in the sky. They twisted and turned in a sudden gust of wind that brought a delicate scent of oregano that drifted down from the distant mountains.

I gazed at the fields of cornflowers, somehow it gave me a strange sense of freedom. On this silent little road in Turkey, I was definitely in another world. I passed an antiquated stone and wood lean-to covered with magnificent blue morning glories. But nothing I had ever seen, could surpass the fields of wild poppies, it took my breath away. They seemed to dance, nodding and tossing their vibrant heads in rhythm with the warm, gentle breeze.

I became so absorbed in the grandeur that I hadn't heard Tommy come up the road. But, there he was, right beside me. I touched his head. How had he found me? I had walked quite a distance.

We stood there for . . . I don't know how long, soaking up the natural beauty of the countryside. I looked into Tommy's dark brown eyes and said, "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore." Tommy cocked his head. He didn't think we were in Kansas either, I thought.

I looked at my watch. I'd been walking for over an hour. Tommy either knew a short cut or had followed me closely since I began my walk.

"Let's go home boy. Jack will be worried about both of us." I turned around and started the long journey back, stopping only a short time to pick a small bouquet of the beautiful poppies.

After I rounded the bend, fifteen or twenty feet ahead, I saw the pack of wild dogs that we'd been warned about, rummaging through an overturned garbage can. I instinctively, dropped my arms from the running position and held them close to my body. Someone had once advised me never look a dog in the eyes, for this is a sign of aggression.

Tommy moved between me and the pack of eight, or ten dogs. I held my gaze straight ahead, and continued to walk at normal speed. It was too late to go back, or take a different route. Somehow, I knew I had to show no fear, but my heart pounded loudly enough to awaken the entire town. I knew that running would be the worse thing I could do. I felt the warmth of Tommy's body as he brushed against my leg.

One dog in the pack growled and bared his sharp, pointed teeth, alerting the others. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the hair along his back raise up into a straight line.

The other dogs followed suit and began to growl deep within their throats. They moved slowly in our direction. Their matted fur formed a line of spikes that trailed down their backs onto their tails. It took every bit of courage I had to stop myself from breaking away from Tommy and run.

Tommy left my side for only a few seconds, lashing out at them, growling, barking and barring his sharp teeth. The pack backed away.

Tommy came closer, pushing me to the other side of the road. We both looked straight ahead, and walked at a normal pace.

The leader of the pack, a grubby, matted-hair mutt, suddenly broke into a run and headed straight for us. His powerful jaws aimed at Tommy's legs. Tommy barked and snarled until the wild dog backed away.

I picked up speed, not running, but walking faster. If only I could get to the stone house up ahead, we would be safe.

Quickly, I looked back at Tommy. He had the wild dogs in retreat. Although they still barked and snarled, they made no attempt to follow.

When I reached the small stone house, no one was there. It probably belonged to farmers already at work in the fields. I sat down on a small wooden bench and raised my hand to my face. I was dripping wet. I could still hear the dogs bark, and for the first time, I began to tremble. What would have happened if Tommy hadn't been there?

The barking slowly tapered off, then silence.

I laid my head in my arms and tried to control my breathing. I felt hot breath on my bare legs. It was Tommy.

Tears formed in my eyes as I reached out to touch his head. “You saved my life,” I whispered softly.

“Tommy,” I whispered, “You’re not a dog at all, are you? You’re my guardian angel.” The tears I was holding back flooded my face.

I hugged his neck, being careful not to touch the spot where the stitches still matted with dried blood.

I never told Jack about the encounter with the wild dogs. Although I never walked in that direction again, I felt secure where ever I went, if Tommy was by my side.

Tommy and I walked together for the next two months, on small twisting roads, picked flowers and enjoyed the brilliant sunshine that flooded fields of corn, cotton and tobacco.

By now, the other dogs along the road followed wherever we roamed. I felt like the Pied Piper of Turkey.

One day, a small red rooster followed us for a short distance. What a sight we must have been! My walks in Florida were never this exciting. When the entourage grew too crowded, Tommy ran ahead, then disappeared, only to surprise me by coming from behind, his tail wagging.

We knew every poppy field in Alacati, and because poppies last only one day, I picked a fresh bouquet each morning.

Tommy watched and waited as I roamed farther and farther into the fields, in search of the largest poppies I could find.

As the days slipped by, I grew more and more attached to Tommy. Of course, it was out of the question that I’d to take him back to America. He was not a housedog and would be miserable in our small apartment in Florida. I never mentioned it to Jack, but he knew how

close Tommy and I had become.

Tommy slept at my feet each night when we sat out in the garden and enjoyed the warm evenings. We drank strong, sweet Turkish tea, and ate the sinfully delicious Baklava that our neighbor made to perfection.

Our days in Turkey slipped by much too quickly. Jack had completed his assignment with glorious under water photos of the city that lay safely hidden from the turbulent world at the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea. One, of the many photos Jack took revealed the head of a gold colored dolphin, partially hidden by two huge broken stone pillars, guarding it from the eyes of a world it no longer lived in. Since no one in the tiny village knew the name of the ancient underwater city, Jack christened it, 'Castle of the Golden Dolphin', and the crew agreed.

The night before our departure, while packing for the long trip back, I heard a commotion from the porch. Jack was speaking to someone on the front porch. His voice was loud and anxious.

"Kate," Jack shouted from the bottom of the stairs, "Tommy's been hurt."

I dropped the clothes I was packing and ran down the stairs.

"What happened?" I asked, trying to catch my breath.

"Tommy was attacked by a pack of wild dogs. For some reason they turned on him and reopened the wound on his neck. He's lost a lot of blood. The neighbor's called the vet; he'll be here soon."

"I want to go to him," I cried, fighting back tears.

"No, you stay here. You're much too emotionally involved with Tommy. You can see him

after the vet leaves.”

I knew he was right.

After we finished our supper, Jack went to see what he could find out. I washed the dishes and turned the living room lights on. The front door opened and closed.

“Jack,” I shouted, “how’s Tommy?”

“Well, the vet said he’s got a fifty-fifty chance.”

“He’s going to make it Jack. I’m sure of it.”

“Sure, honey.” Jack took me in his arms. “Tommy’s resting now. The vet said Tommy would sleep through the night. He’ll be back tomorrow to check on him.”

“I’m going out to him Jack,” I whispered.

“Shall I come with you?”

“No.”

I walked out into the hot sticky night. The air was heavy with the fragrance of Jasmine that surrounded the garden.

The neighbors kept a light on for Tommy. I knelt down and touched his motionless body. He was unconscious. The bitter taste of fear formed in my mouth, as tears streamed down my face. Deep within me came a soft whimper, like a small child.

I noticed Tommy’s legs twitch, as if he were running. I remembered our long morning walks, when we gathered the beautiful poppies. I could almost see his head gesture, as if to say, ‘this way, there’s lots more poppies over here.’

“Tommy I’m leaving tomorrow,” I whispered, wiping tears from my eyes, “But I’ll be back. When you see the poppies in the fields, look for me, I’ll be back . . . I promise . . . I promise.”

The next morning Tommy was still asleep when we left, but we had already said our good-byes.

The trip home was long and dreary. Thoughts of Tommy clouded my mind, and I prayed he would survive.

When we arrived home, I called to find out how Tommy was. My heart sank when I learned Tommy had died. Sobbing softly, I laid my head on the desk, knocking several books to the floor. When the tears began to fade, I looked down at the books scattered on the floor beside me. I saw a red, dried, poppy, caught between the pages of the book I had brought back from Turkey. Then I knew . . . Tommy wasn't dead . . . because . . . angels don't die. And someday, somewhere, I am sure, we will meet again.

The End