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A Tiger in the House

- * Grandfather finds a tiny tiger-cub in the forest and brings him home.
- * Grandmother calls him Timothy and brings him up like a human child.
- * Timothy is playful and naughty. His companions are Toto, the monkey, a puppy and other members of the household.

TIMOTHY, the tiger-cub, was discovered by Grandfather in the Terai jungle near Dehra.

One day, when Grandfather was strolling down the forest path at some distance from the rest of the party, he discovered a little tiger about eighteen inches long, hiding among the intricate roots of a banyan tree. Grandfather picked him up, and brought him home. He had the distinction of being the only member of the party to have bagged any game, dead or alive.

At first the tiger-cub, who was named Timothy by Grandmother, was brought up entirely on milk given to him in a feeding-bottle by our cook, Mahmoud. But the milk proved too rich for him, and he was put on a diet of raw mutton and cod-liver oil, to be followed later by a more tempting diet of pigeons and rabbits.

Timothy was provided with two companions—Toto, the monkey, who was bold enough to pull the young tiger by the



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tail, and then climb up the curtains if Timothy lost his temper; and a small mongrel puppy, found on the road by Grandfather.

At first Timothy appeared to be quite afraid of the puppy, and darted back with a spring if it came too near. He would make absurd dashes at it with his large forepaws, and then retreat to a ridiculously safe distance. Finally, he allowed the puppy to crawl on his back and rest there!

One of Timothy's favourite amusements was to stalk anyone who would play with him, and so, when I came to live with Grandfather, I became one of the tiger's favourites. With a crafty look in his glittering eyes, and his body crouching, he would creep closer and closer to me, suddenly making a dash for my feet, rolling over on his back and kicking with delight, and pretending to bite my ankles.

He was by this time the size of a full-grown retriever, and when I took him out for walks, people on the road would give us a wide berth. When he pulled hard on his chain, I had difficulty in keeping up with him. His favourite place in the house was the drawing-room, and he would make himself



darted: moved or rushed suddenly **retreat:** go back **stalk:** move stealthily towards **crafty:** cunning **retriever:** a breed of dog (trained to retrieve game in hunting) **give us a wide berth:** keep a safe distance from us

comfortable on the long sofa, reclining there with great dignity, and snarling at anybody who tried to get him off.

Timothy had clean habits, and would scrub his face with his paws exactly like a cat. He slept at night in the cook's quarters, and was always delighted at being let out by him in the morning.

Comprehension Check

1. "He had the distinction of being the only member of the party *to have bagged any game...*"

The phrase in italics means

- (i) Grandfather was the most distinguished member of the party.
- (ii) Grandfather was the only sportsperson in the party.
- (iii) Grandfather was the only successful member of the hunting party.

Mark the right answer.

2. Complete the following sentences.

(i) Toto climbed up the curtains when _____

(ii) _____, I became one of the tiger's favourites.

(iii) Timothy had clean habits, _____

* As Timothy grows up, he becomes less friendly and rather dangerous.

* Grandfather decides to transfer him to the zoo.

* Six months later, Grandfather pays Timothy a visit. Timothy is happy to see Grandfather. Or is he?

"One of these days," declared Grandmother in her prophetic manner, "we are going to find Timothy sitting on Mahmoud's bed, and no sign of the cook except his clothes and shoes!"



Of course, it never came to that, but when Timothy was about six months old a change came over him; he grew steadily less friendly. When out for a walk with me, he would try to steal away to stalk a cat or someone's pet dog. Sometimes at night we would hear frenzied cackling from the poultry house, and in the morning there would be feathers lying all over the verandah. Timothy had to be chained up more often. And finally, when he began to stalk Mahmoud about the house with what looked like villainous intent, Grandfather decided it was time to transfer him to a zoo.

Reserving a first class compartment for himself and Timothy—no one would share a compartment with them—Grandfather took him to Lucknow where the zoo authorities were only too glad to receive as a gift a well-fed and fairly civilised tiger.

About six months later, when my grandparents were visiting relatives in Lucknow, Grandfather took the opportunity of calling at the zoo to see how Timothy was getting on. I was not there to accompany him but I heard all about it when I returned to Dehra.

Arriving at the zoo, Grandfather made straight for the particular cage in which Timothy had been interned. The tiger was there, crouched in a corner, full-grown and with a magnificent striped coat.

"Hello Timothy!" said Grandfather and put his arm through the bars of the cage.

The tiger approached the bars, and allowed Grandfather to put both hands around his head. Grandfather stroked the tiger's forehead and tickled his ears, and, whenever he growled, smacked him across the mouth, which was his old way of keeping him quiet.

frenzied: loud and frantic **cackling:** noise (made by hens) **villainous**
intent: wicked and dangerous plan or idea **interned:** kept **smacked:** hit lightly



He licked Grandfather's hands and only sprang away when a leopard in the next cage snarled at him. Grandfather 'shooed' the leopard away, and the tiger returned to lick his hands; but every now and then the leopard would rush at the bars, and he would slink back to his corner.

A number of people had gathered to watch the reunion when a keeper pushed his way through the crowd and asked Grandfather what he was doing.

"I'm talking to Timothy," said Grandfather. "Weren't you here when I gave him to the zoo six months ago?"

"I haven't been here very long," said the surprised keeper. "Please continue your conversation. But I have never been able to touch him myself, he is always very bad tempered."

"Why don't you put him somewhere else?" suggested Grandfather. "That leopard keeps frightening him. I'll go and see the Superintendent about it."

slink: move noiselessly



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Grandfather went in search of the Superintendent of the zoo, but found that he had gone home early; and so, after wandering about the zoo for a little while, he returned to Timothy's cage to say good-bye. It was beginning to get dark.

He had been stroking and slapping Timothy for about five minutes when he found another keeper observing him with some alarm. Grandfather recognised him as the keeper who had been there when Timothy had first come to the zoo.

"You remember me," said Grandfather. "Now why don't you transfer Timothy to another cage, away from this stupid leopard?"

"But—sir—" stammered the keeper, "it is not your tiger."

"I know, I know," said Grandfather. "I realise he is no longer mine. But you might at least take a suggestion or two from me."

"I remember your tiger very well," said the keeper. "He died two months ago."

"Died!" exclaimed Grandfather.

"Yes sir, of pneumonia. This tiger was trapped in the hills only last month, and he is very dangerous!"

Grandfather could think of nothing to say. The tiger was still licking his arm, with increasing relish. Grandfather took what seemed to him an age to withdraw his hand from the cage.

With his face near the tiger's he mumbled, "Goodnight, Timothy," and giving the keeper a scornful look, walked briskly out of the zoo.

RUSKIN BOND
(slightly abridged)



Comprehension Check

1. Grandmother's prophecy was that the tiger
 - (i) would prefer Mahmoud's bed to sleep in.
 - (ii) and the cook would disappear together from the house.
 - (iii) would one day make a meal of Mahmoud.Mark the right answer.
2. When Timothy was about six months old, *a change came over him*.
The phrase in italics means that
 - (i) Timothy had grown to his full size.
 - (ii) Timothy grew more friendly.
 - (iii) Timothy grew less friendly, in fact more dangerous
3. Write 'True' or 'False' against each of the following statements.
 - (i) Timothy and Grandfather went to Lucknow in a special compartment. _____
 - (ii) The compartment in which Grandfather and Timothy travelled had no other passenger. _____
 - (iii) Timothy and Grandfather travelled in a first class compartment. _____
 - (vi) All passengers in the compartment thought that Timothy was a well-fed and civilised tiger. _____
4. Grandfather suggested that Timothy should be put in another cage.
The reason was that
 - (i) the tiger had become very bad tempered.
 - (ii) a leopard in the next cage would constantly rush at Timothy.
 - (iii) the cage was too small for a full grown tiger.
5. The tiger was still licking his arm, *with increasing relish*. The phrase in italics suggests that Timothy
 - (i) was good natured.
 - (ii) recognised an old friend.
 - (iii) smelt fresh food.



Exercises

Answer the following questions.

1. Where was the tiger cub hiding when Grandfather found him?
2. (i) What did Toto do to entertain Timothy?
(ii) What did he do when Timothy lost his temper?
3. "I became one of the tiger's favourites". Who is 'I' in the statement? Why did he think so?
4. Where was Timothy most comfortable during the day? Where was he during the night?
5. What was Grandmother's prophecy about the cook? Did it come true?
6. What made Grandfather decide to transfer Timothy to the zoo?
7. Why did Grandfather want Timothy to be put in another enclosure?
8. What shocked Grandfather in the end?

Discuss the following topics in groups.

1. Shoot animals with a camera, not with a gun.
2. Keeping pets helps us become more loving and tolerant. It also helps us respect life in any form. Do you agree?
3. Have you heard of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA)? What do they do?

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The Competition

"Where's Bill today, Belinda?" asked the teacher.

"In bed, Miss," replied Belinda.

"Is he ill, then? What is the matter with him?" asked the teacher.

"We were having a competition," explained Belinda, "to see who could lean out of the window farthest—and Bill won."