When The Tiger Was King
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Editor's Foreword

Before the tiger vanishes forever from the land which was once synonymous with tigers, let us at least celebrate its former majesty with stories that pay tribute to its fierce splendour and terrible beauty.

'How can there be an India without tigers?' asked ten year old Gautam the other day, and I confess that I did not have an answer. In the past, great leaders were compared to tigers and their kind – Tippu Sultan, the tiger of Mysore; Ranjit Singh, the lion of the Punjab; Subhas Chandra Bose, the 'sponging tiger' of Bengal. Such comparisons may not be possible in future, if tigers are only to be found in zoos.

Twenty years from now a child might look at a picture of the goddess Durga riding her favourite steed, and ask his (or her) mother, 'But what is that strange creature the Devi rides? Oh, a tiger! And were there tigers in India once?'

Indeed, there were once many thousands of tigers throughout the land, as these stories will testify. Now only a few remain. The tiger is a creature of wide open spaces and extensive forests, and in an age when space is at a premium and the forests are disappearing, the tiger is at a disadvantage.

Although man and tiger were often in conflict, the tiger has always played an important part in the folklore of Asia, and I have included a couple of charming folktales along with more realistic face. Younger readers might like to read my story, Tiger my Friend, also published by Rupa.

Ruskin Bond
1 August 2010
Tiger Facts

The tiger is the largest living member of the cat family. Like all the other cats, it is a carnivore (a meat-eater). You can find tigers scattered over Asia – India in the west, Siberia in the north, Sumatra in the east.

The tiger's back is tawny yellow with blackish stripes, and its belly is white. The stripes look like the shadows of branches or tall grasses, so they provide excellent camouflage when the animal is stalking its prey.

Male tigers grow to about 2.5 metres long and weigh up to 227 kilograms. Females are smaller and fiercer than males. When they give birth, they usually have at least two cubs, and not more than six.

The cubs are born fully striped and about the size of a house cat. When they are five months old, their mother kills small game for them – mouse deer, jungle fowl, pig, peacock. ... The cubs play with their food and learn to eat meat. When they are a year old, the tigress no longer kills for them; she cripples the prey and teaches her cubs how to stalk and kill it for themselves. At eighteen months, the young tigers start making their own kills, and learn how to hunt silently, using foliage as cover.

Some tigers can jump 5.5 metres straight up, and leap 4 metres across a gorge.

Tigers are feared for their speed, strength, ferocity and cunning. They appear suddenly, and hunt swiftly. A tiger can kill a large animal such as a water buffalo by leaping on its back and tearing it with claws and teeth. Thousands of people have been killed by tigers over the years, but scientists say that they do not naturally hunt humans, except in self-defence or by mistake. For example, tigers seldom attack people riding on elephants or in jeeps or walking upright on forest roads. But when people bend over to cut grass or sugar cane, or collect firewood, to a tiger's eye they look like deer. Then a tiger will attack, thinking that it has found its prey.

As tigers attack from behind, fishermen in boats on jungle rivers are in danger. They wear face masks on the back of their heads for protection!
**Tiger Talk**

Tigers live in language as well as in the jungles of Asia. A tigerish person is cruel, bloodthirsty, fierce and relentless.

A tiger for punishment is a person who works, plays or fights with great energy and enthusiasm, and won't give in.

A paper tiger is a person who appears to be strong, but in fact has no power at all.

The word 'tiger' describes many different flora and fauna – some striped and some spotted. Why aren't the spotted ones named after the leopard? The tiger was described in a Bestiary (book of beasts) in the thirteenth century as 'a beast with colourful spots'. Perhaps that is why some spotted flora and fauna have tiger names.

- **Tiger-eye** is a plant with large purple, yellow or white spotted flowers.
- **Tiger-grass** is a palm of western India and Iran.
- **Tiger-lily** has bell-like orange flowers marked with black or purplish spots.
- The **tiger-moth** is a large scarlet and brown moth spotted and streaked with white.
- **Tiger-beetle, tiger-bird, tiger-bittern** and **tiger shark** are other flora and fauna you might have heard of.

Even wood, stone or water can be named after a tiger. **Tiger-wood**, streaked black and brown, is used for making furniture. **Tiger-eye** is a yellowish-brown quartz with a dark 'eye'. It is often cut into gemstones, polished and set into jewellery such as rings and pendants. It is said that the **River Tigris** was named after the tiger because it is the swiftest of all rivers.
When Grandfather Tickled a Tiger

Timothy, our tiger cub, was found by my grandfather on a hunting expedition in the Terai jungles, in northern India. Because my grandfather lived nearby and knew the jungles well, he was persuaded to accompany the hunting party.

When grandfather strolled down a forest path some distance from the main party, he discovered a lost tiger cub, only eighteen inches long, hidden among the roots of a banyan tree. After the expedition ended he took the tiger home to Dehra, where grandmother named him Timothy.

Timothy's favourite place in the house was the living room. He would snuggle down comfortably on the sofa, reclining there with serene dignity and snarling only when anyone tried to take his place. One of his chief amusements was to stalk whoever was playing with him and so, when I went to live with my grandparents, I became one of the tiger's pets. With a crafty look in his eyes and his body in a deep crouch, he would creep closer and closer to me, suddenly making a dash for my feet. Then, rolling on his back and kicking with delight, he would pretend to bite my ankles.

By this time he was the size of a full-grown golden retriever. When I took him for walks in Dehra, people on the road would give us a wide berth. At night he slept in the quarters of our cook, Mahmoud. 'One of these days,' grandmother declared, 'we are going to find Timothy sitting on Mahmoud's bed and there was no sign of Mahmoud!'

When Timothy was about six months old, his stalking became more serious and he had to be chained up more often. Even the household started to mistrust him and, when he began to trail Mahmoud around the house with what looked like villainous intent, grandfather decided it was time to take Timothy to a zoo.

The nearest zoo was at Lucknow, some two hundred miles away. Grandfather reserved a first-class compartment on the train for himself and Timothy, then they set forth. The Lucknow zoo authorities were only too pleased to receive a well-fed and fairly civilised tiger.

Grandfather had no chance to see how Timothy was getting on in his new home until about six months later, when he and grandmother visited relatives in Lucknow. Grandfather went to the zoo and directly to Timothy's cage. The tiger was there,
crouched in a corner, full-grown, his magnificent striped coat gleaming with health.

'Hello, Timothy,' said grandfather.

Climbing the railing, he put his arms through the bars of the cage. Timothy approached, and allowed grandfather to put both arms about his head. Grandfather stroked the tiger's forehead and tickled his ears. Each time Timothy growled, grandfather gave him a smack across the mouth, which had been his sway of keeping the tiger quiet when he lived with us.

Timothy licked grandfather's hands and showed nervousness, springing away when a leopard in the next cage snarled at him. Grandfather shooed the leopard off and Timothy returned to licking his hands. Every now and then the leopard would rush at the bars, and Timothy would again slink into a 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. I have never been able to touch that tiger myself. I find him very bad-tempered.'

Grandfather had been stroking and slapping Timothy for about five minutes when he noticed another keeper observing him with some alarm. Grandfather recognised him as the keeper who had been there when he had delivered Timothy to the zoo. 'You remember me,' grandfather said. 'Why don't you transfer Timothy to a different cage, away from this stupid leopard?'

'But—sir,' stammered the keeper. 'It is not your tiger.'

'I realise that he is no longer mine,' said grandfather testily. 'But at least consider my suggestion.'

'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!'

The tiger was still licking grandfather's arm and apparently enjoying it more all the time. Grandfather withdrew his hands from the cage in a motion that seemed to take an age. With his face near the tiger's he mumbled, 'Goodnight, Timothy.' Then, giving the keeper a scornful look, grandfather walked briskly out of the zoo.

Ruskin Bond
Gond Tiger Fable of Singbaba

It is interesting to note that the leading idea of Rudyard Kipling's fascinating 'Jungle Book' of which the scene is laid in Seoni appears to be taken from the translation of a Gond fable given in Sterndale's 'Seoni', though of course stories of children being brought up by she-wolves have been reported from various parts of India.

In view of the interest attaching to the fable it may be reproduced in full here.

THE SONG OF SANDSUMJEE

Sandsumjee married six wives but had no heir. So he married a seventh and departed on a journey. During his absence, after his relatives had sacrificed to god, the seventh wife bore a son, Singbaba. The 'small wife was sleeping, the other six were there.' They took the babe and threw it into the buffalo's stable, placing a puppy by her side, and said, 'Lo! a puppy is born.'

But the buffaloes took care of Singbaba and poured milk into his mouth.

When the six wives went to look for him, they found Singbaba playing.

Thence they took him and threw him to the cows, but the cows said, 'Let no one hurt him,' and poured milk into his mouth. When the six wives went to look again whether he was alive or dead, lo! Singbaba was playing.

Thence they took him and threw him into a well, but on the third day when they went to enquire, they found Singbaba still playing. So they took him and threw him on the tiger's path, and they heard his cries as they left him. But the tigress felt compassion, and said, 'It is my child'. So saying she took him to her den, and having weaned her cubs fed Singbaba with milk, and he grew up with the cubs. To her one day Singbaba said, 'I am naked; I want clothes.' The tigress went and sat by the market road till muslin and cloth makers came along; on seeing her run at them they dropped their bundles and fled, which she took up and brought to Singbaba, who clothed himself and kissed her feet.

Another day he said, 'Give me a bow.' She again went and waited till a sepoy armed with a bow passed by. She roared and rushed at him, on which he dropped the bow and fled, and she picked it up and brought it to Singbaba who shot birds with it.
for his little tiger brothers.

In the meantime Sandsumjee returned home and said: 'Is anyone inspired? Has god entered into anyone? If so, let him arise.'

Then Singbaba received inspiration, and went with his big and little brothers. In the midst of the assembly was a Brahman whom Singbaba asked to get up; but he refused, whereupon the big brother (tiger) got angry and ate him up. All asked Singbaba: 'Who are you?'

'Ask the buffaloes,' he replied, telling his little brother to go and call his mother. She came, and the three species were assembled before the people. 'Question them,' said Singbaba. So they asked, 'Who is he?' First the buffaloes answered, 'Sandsumjee's son', and they described his history.

Then the cows told how he stayed with them for two days and then was thrown into the well; from thence they knew not where he went.

'Ask my mother,' said Singbaba.

The tigress told how she weaned her cubs and nourished him, on which all embraced her feet and established her as a goddess, giving her the six wicked wives. So Singbaba became illustrious, and the tigress was worshipped.

_Sandsumjee Babana'id saka and_,
Of Sandsumjee Baba this song is,
_Bhirri bans bhirrita saka and._
Of Bhirri bamboo jungle Bhirri this song is.

_From Central Provinces District Gazetteers, Seoni District,_
_ edited by R.V. Russel, I.C.S., 1907_
The Tiger in the Tunnel

Tembu, the boy, opened his eyes in the dark and wondered if his father was ready to leave the hut on his nightly errand.

There was no moon that night, and the deathly stillness of the surrounding jungle was broken only occasionally by the shrill cry of a cicada. Sometimes from far-off came the hollow hammering of a woodpecker, carried along on the faint breeze or the grunt of a wild boar could be heard as he dug up a favourite root. But these sounds were rare, and the silence of the forest always returned to swallow them up.

Baldeo, the watchman, was awake. He stretched himself, slowly unwinding the heavy shawl that covered him like a shroud. It was close to midnight and the chill air made him shiver. The station, a small shack backed by heavy jungle, was a station only by the name; for trains only stopped there, if at all, for a few seconds before entering the deep cutting that led to the tunnel. Most trains merely slowed down before taking the sharp curve before the cutting.

Baldeo was responsible for signalling whether or not the tunnel was clear of obstruction, and his hand-worked signal stood before the entrance. At night it was his duty to see that the lamp was burning, and that the overland mail passed through safely.

'Shall I come too, father?' asked Tembu sleepily, still lying huddled in a corner of the hut.

'No, it is cold tonight. Do not get up.'

Tembu, who was twelve, did not always sleep with his father at the station, for he had to help in the home too, where his mother and small sister were usually alone. They lived in a small tribal village on the outskirts of the forest, about three miles from the station. Their small rice fields did not provide them with more than a bare living, and Baldeo considered himself lucky to have got the job of Khalasi at this small wayside signal-stop.

Still drowsy, Baldeo groped for his lamp in the darkness, then fumbled about in search of matches. When he had produced a light, he left the hut, closed the door behind him, and set off along the permanent way. Tembu had fallen asleep again.

Baldeo wondered whether the lamp on the signal-post was still alight. Gathering
his shawl closer about him, he stumbled on, sometimes along the rails, sometimes along the ballast. He longed to get back to his warm corner in the hut.

The eeriness of the place was increased by the neighbouring hills which overhung the main line threateningly. On entering the cutting with its sheer rock walls towering high above the rails, Baldeo could not help thinking about the wild animals he might encounter. He had heard many tales of the famous tunnel tiger, a man-eater, who was supposed to frequent this spot; but he hardly believed these stories for, since his arrival at this place a month ago, he had not seen or even heard a tiger.

There had, of course, been panthers, and only a few days back the villagers had killed one with their spears and axes. Baldeo had occasionally heard the roaring of a panther calling to its mate, but they had not come near the tunnel or shed.

Baldeo walked confidently for, being a tribal himself, he was used to the jungle and its ways. Like his forefathers, he carried a small axe, fragile to look at, but deadly when in use. With it, in three or four swift strokes, he could cut down a tree as neatly as if it had been sawn; and he prided himself on his skill in wielding it against wild animals. He had killed a young boar with it once, and the family had feasted on the flesh for three days. The axe-head of pure steel, thin but ringing true like a bell, had been made by his father over a charcoal fire. This axe was part of himself, and wherever he went, be it to the local market seven miles away, or to a tribal dance, the axe was always in his hand. Occasionally, an official who had come to the station had offered him good money for the weapon; but Baldeo had no intention of parting with it.

The cutting curved sharply, and in the darkness the black entrance to the tunnel loomed up menacingly. The signal-light was out. Baldeo set to work to haul the lamp down by its chain. If the oil had finished, he would have to return to the hut for more. The mail train was due in five minutes.

Once more he fumbled for his matches. Then suddenly he stood still and listened. The frightened cry of a barking deer, followed by a crashing sound in the undergrowth, made Baldeo hurry. There was still a little oil in the lamp, and after an instant's hesitation he lit the lamp again and hoisted it back into position. Having done this, he walked quickly down the tunnel, swinging his own lamp, so that the shadows leapt up and down the soot-stained walls, and having made sure that the line was clear, he returned to the entrance and sat down to wait for the mail train.

The train was late. Sitting huddled up, almost dozing, he soon forgot his surroundings and began to nod.

Back in the hut, the trembling of the ground indicated the approach of the train, and a low, distant rumble awoke the boy, who sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

'Father, it's time to light the lamp,' he mumbled, and then, realising that his father
had been gone some time, he lay down again; but he was wide awake now, waiting for the train to pass, waiting for his father's returning footsteps.

A low grunt resounded from the top of the cutting. In a second Baldeo was awake, all his senses alert. Only a tiger could emit such a sound.

There was no shelter for Baldeo, but he grasped his axe firmly and tensed his body, trying to make out the direction from which the animal was approaching. For some time there was only silence, even the usual jungle noises seemed to have ceased altogether. Then a thump and the rattle of small stones announced that the tiger had sprung into the cutting.

Baldeo, listening as he had never listened before, wondered if it was making for the tunnel or the opposite direction – the direction of the hut, in which Tembu would be lying unprotected. He did not have to wonder for long. Before a minute had passed, he made out the huge body of the tiger trotting steadily towards him. Its eyes shone a brilliant green in the light from the signal lamp. Flight was useless, for in the dark the tiger would be more sure-footed than Baldeo and would soon be upon him from behind. Baldeo stood with his back to the signal-post, motionless, staring at the great brute moving rapidly towards him. The tiger, used to the ways of men, for it had been preying on them for years, came on fearlessly, and with a quick run and a snarl, struck out with its right paw, expecting to bowl over this puny man who dared stand in the way.

Baldeo, however, was ready. With a marvellously agile leap he avoided the paw and brought his axe down on the animal's shoulder. The tiger gave a roar and attempted to close in. Again, Baldeo drove his axe with true aim; but, to his horror, the beast swerved, and the axe caught the tiger on the shoulder, almost severing the leg. To make matters worse, the axe remained stuck in the bone, and Baldeo was left without a weapon.

The tiger, roaring with pain, now sprang upon Baldeo, bringing him down and then tearing his broken body. It was all over in a few minutes. Baldeo was conscious only of a sealing pain down his back, and then there was blackness and the night closed in on him for ever.

The tiger drew off and sat down licking his wounded leg, roaring every now and then with agony. He did not notice the faint rumble that shook the earth, followed by the distant puffing of an engine steadily climbing. The overland mail was approaching. Through the trees beyond the cutting, as the train advanced, the glow of the furnace could be seen; and showers of sparks fell like Diwali lights over the forest.

As the train entered the cutting, the engine whistled once, loud and piercingly. The tiger raised his head, then slowly got to his feet. He found himself trapped like the man. Flight along the cutting was impossible. He entered the tunnel, running as fast as his wounded leg would carry him. And then, with a roar and a shower of
sparks, the train entered the yawning tunnel. The noise in the confined space was deafening; but, when the train came out into the open, on the other side, silence returned once more to the forest and the tunnel.

At the next station, the driver slowed down and stopped his train to water the engine. He got down to stretch his legs and decided to examine the headlamps. He received the surprise of his life; for just above the cowcatcher lay the major portion of the tiger, cut in half by the engine.

There was considerable excitement and conjecture at the station, but back at the cutting there was no sound except for the sobs of the boy as he sat beside the body of his father. He sat there a long time, unafraid of the darkness, guarding the body from jackals and hyenas, until the first faint light of dawn brought with it the arrival of the relief-watchman.

Tembu, his sister and his mother were plunged in grief for two whole days; but life had to go on, and a living had to be made, and all the responsibility now fell on Tembu. Three nights later, he was at the cutting, lighting the signal-lamp for the overland mail.

He sat down in the darkness waiting for the train, and sang softly to himself. There was nothing to be afraid of – his father had killed the tiger, the forest gods were pleased; and besides, he had the axe with him, his father's axe, and he knew how to use it.

*Ruskin Bond*
The Life of a Tiger

As time went on the solitude which at first had been so marked a feature in the tiger's domain was broken by the ever-increasing number of human beings who found occupation or amusement therein. Formerly, only herds of cattle and their attendants roamed the forest, paying no attention to the jungle-folk, and were hardly noticed by them; later on came those who felled timber and cut bamboos, their camps were numerous all over the area; and last of all came the hunting parties of varying size, from the solitary sportsman who wandered afoot amongst the wild animals, to the large company, well organised to slay, who boasted of the number of their victims, and were proud of their stud of elephants and of their army of trackers and huntsmen. Not only peace but safety had departed, for though the graziers might not tell of the tiger's whereabouts, there were others, cartmen, sawyers and carpenters, who for the sake of a small reward, indeed often as a remedy for their own fears, would report all that they saw or heard to those who were able to make use of the information.

The tiger, now well experienced and cautious, gifted moreover with a most intimate acquaintance with the forest, yet found difficulty in evading all of these human beings, and their repeated invasions so seriously reduced the head of game in his hunting grounds, and forced the remainder to be so constantly on the alert that he lived in a perpetual state of anxiety, and was often put to great trouble before he could obtain a meal. Even when he had succeeded in capturing his prey, he feared to return to the kill lest during his absence some ambush should have been laid; so that, unless he could drag his victim close to some water supply, he derived but one day's food from even the largest animal. For tigers must drink after a heavy meal of flesh, and particularly in the hot weather when hunting parties were abroad, he suffered torments if forced to remain thirsty for many hours.

He dreaded the approach of human beings and the loud reports of the weapons they carried; and so while eager to slink away if this were possible, yet, if by chance his retreat was cut off, his natural courage asserted itself, and was indeed fortified by his hatred of his persecutors. He had seen others fall victims to the dangers he had so far escaped; the stag with mortal wound rushing blindly through the forest only to fall dead when breasting the stony slopes; or the panther lying harmless
after hours of agony; he had followed the trail of others, doomed to a lingering death but for his swift interference; and the increasing difficulties of his existence rendered him more cautious and also more morose. For to live always in fear of death results in a change of habits and characteristics, and induces a strain of unaccustomed cruelty. He had been driven by gangs of beaters, and had learned that the less risk lay in escaping through the advancing line; for, though there might be guns there, yet, in the confusion of his onslaught, these had hitherto been ineffective; while the very caution necessary to steal away through the hidden sportsmen in front afforded to these an easy shot from their posts of vantage. He had been fired at from 'machans,' and now was reluctant to take the risk of appropriating the baits of young buffaloes which he frequently came across; and, whereas formerly he expected no danger to lurk in the trees above him, now the need for circumspection was doubled by the possibility of a hunter being hidden in any leafy tree.

The tiger lay one night on the borders of a jungle clearing where the unfertile soil was covered with a growth of thorny bushes, which assumed strange shapes in the transparent gloom of the night. He had come for miles through the darker forest, moving slowly with the greatest circumspection; at each footstep the soft-padded paws seemed to feel the earth before any weight was allowed to bear on them; mechanically in their descent they pushed softly aside any dry leaf or twig which might, by their crackling, give notice of movement in the jungle, and now, tired from the constant nervous strain, he was resting before resuming his solitary way. A movement in the fantastic outlines of the bushes caught his attention, and he shrank still further into the friendly earth, all his fears at once aroused. A family of sloth-bears were feeding on the wild berries, embracing the bushes with shaggy arms, tearing off the fruit, intermingled with leaves and twigs, in the rough manner common to these beasts.

The tiger was glad even of this companionship, for it suffered him to relax his attention, for bears have the keenest power of scent, relying on this rather than on hearing or sight, so that timely warning of any intruder would be given.

The bears roamed round the little clearing, leaving no bush till despoiled of the fruit it bore, then commenced digging for roots and snuffing at the anthills to discover whether or not these were in occupation. The male bear soon found one to his liking, and commenced digging with his powerful claws to force an entry to the main passage, while the mother and her cubs sat around regarding the proceedings, though they could not possibly expect any share in the spoils. By dint of hard labour the bear had dug some three feet below the surface of the soil, and now inserting his muzzle in the tunnel drew deep inhalations which dragged with them crowds of unwilling insects into the moist mouth which was ready to receive them. The bear presented a ludicrous sight with his head buried in the earth and his hindquarters
raised high towards the sky, and the noise of his breathing sounded loud through the still forest. After a time he commenced again to dig till he reached the nest, with its paper-like combs full of helpless maggots, and this he devoured in great mouthfuls. Then, while enjoying this selfish meal, he suddenly caught the scent of the tiger in the night air, and as quickly turned to fly. In his clumsy way he stumbled against the she-bear, and she, with the prompt retaliation of her tribe, at once struck and bit at her mate. Immediately the forest re-echoed with loud discordant cries, and the whole family disappeared into the forest, biting and scratching, in the belief that some enemy was amongst them seeking their lives.

The tiger wandered onwards through the jungle. He was now a different animal to what he had been in the days of his youth, when food was plentiful and danger not incessant. Now, for no fault of his own, he was proscribed; a price was set on his head, he was fired at on sight, and the very scarcity of food was used as a means to lure him to destruction. He was forced to satisfy his hunger by means he had formerly despised. He would lie by the drinking pools in the hot weather and ambush the jungle tribes while they were quenching an intolerable thirst; he would follow the females encumbered by the care of their young and profit by their maternal instincts to slay them; and would drive less powerful animals off their 'kills' and appropriate the spoil. Domestic cattle he killed without mercy, so that he was known and dreaded throughout the countryside; he was always fierce and morose because he was at war with mankind, who had robbed him of his hunting grounds and with them of his means of living and of his contentment.

It was in these unhappy circumstances that his second courtship began, but on this occasion he forced a fight on his rival; for in the first place he was more savage than of old, and in the second it could not be tolerated that another should hunt in a forest where food was already but too scarce. Thus, ill-temper and fear of dispossession urged him more than passion and in result there was a combat unique in its ferocity. There was no interruption from human beings, as these had mostly left the forest at the commencement of the malarial season, and the few foresters who remained were careful not to approach the spot whence the sound of the struggle proceeded.

The opponents were well matched, for what the stranger yielded in weight he gained in agility, and any deficiency in experience was outweighed by his impetuosity. The two rushed furiously at each other, meeting with a shock that seemed to compel them to stand upright, and in that position each tried to grip the other's throat and was repulsed by the powerful claws which scratched deep into the flesh. They retreated breathless, again and again to renew the attack after lengthening intervals; meanwhile the earth was trodden down and became slippery with moisture, though scored by the sharp claws of the hind-feet of the combatants. It was after many rounds had been fought, without marked advantage to either side,
though both had received painful wounds, that the tiger slipped as he was repelling a specially violent onslaught by the stranger, and, over-borne, was hurled on to his back. In an instant the other rushed into end the fray with teeth buried in the chest or throat of his foe; and here he made the mistake which cost him his life. He should have waited for the defenceless moment when the other was attempting to rise, instead of attacking him when in a position assumed by all the cat-tribe in moments of difficulty. And so it was that, before a grip could be secured, the stranger’s head and neck were seized in a vice and at the same time his belly was ripped open by the hind-claws of his prostrate foe. His only wish was to be free of this deadly embrace, and at last he was allowed to stagger away mortally wounded. The crushing blow which followed seemed to drive the life out of him, and he had no feeling for the fangs which penetrated heart and lungs. The tiger lay long by his defeated rival; he was marked with scars which lasted to his dying day, he was sore with bruises and bites, and weak in everything but ill-temper and ferocity. It might have been better for him if he had ended his life at this time, if he had assumed no fresh domestic responsibilities, for the future was to bring even more bitterness than the past.

From The Life of a Tiger by S. Eardley-Wilmot, C.I.E., 1911
Man-Eater

Frank Buck spent a great many years collecting live wild animals for zoos, circuses, and dealers. He was famous for his early 'Bring 'em Back Alive' documentary films. In the following story he tells of the capture of a huge tiger at Johore, for an American zoo.

In 1926, I was again in Singapore putting the finishing touches to a splendid collection. My compound was fairly bursting with fine specimens. I had brought back from Siam a fine assortment of argus pheasants, fireback pheasants, and many small cage birds. Out of Borneo I had come with a goodly gang of man-like orang-utans and other apes. From Sumatra I had emerged with some fat pythons and a nice group of porcupines, binturongs, and civet cats. Celebes had yielded an imposing array of parrots, cockatoos, lories (brush-tongued parrots of a gorgeous colourings) – one of the biggest shipments of these birds I had ever made. My trip to Burmah was represented by a couple of black leopards (more familiarly known as panthers), several gibbons, and a sizeable army of small rhesus monkeys. In addition, I had a number of other specimens picked up along the line.

I was to sail for San Francisco in a couple of weeks. This meant I would have to make a thorough inspection of my crates and cages to make sure they were all in shape to stand the rigours of a thirty-five or forty-day trip across the Pacific.

With Hin Mong, the Chinese carpenter who had served me for years, I made the rounds of the various boxes, and he made the notes of new cages and crates that were needed.

His cleverness knows no bounds. Working with a homemade saw, crude chisel made out of a scrap of iron shaped and sharpened on a grind-stone, and a few other primitive tools, he does carpentry that is as finished as if it came out of an up-to-date shop equipped with the finest of tools. Some of it, in fact, is finer than any carpenter work I have ever seen done anywhere. With a couple of chow-boys (apprentices) to assist him, Hin Mong would pitch into any task to which I assigned him and when it was done it was a piece of work to be proud of.

The owner of the house in Katong where I usually lived when in Singapore had sold it, making it necessary for me to move out, although I still maintained my
compound there. After the sale of the house I invariably stayed at the Raffles Hotel in Singapore. I had just returned to my room there after an early morning session with Hin Mong, in the course of which we made a final inspection of the crates and cages, when I was informed that the Sultan of Johore was on the telephone and wished to speak to me at once. Whenever the Sultan telephoned, the information that he was on the wire was passed on to me with much ceremony, sometimes my good friend Aratoon, one of the owners of the hotel, announcing the news in person.

As the morning was still young I was puzzled, for it was most unusual for H.H. to telephone so early. It was a very serious H.H. that spoke to me. He got to his business without any loss of time. Did I still want a man-eating tiger? Well, here was my chance. Breathlessly he told me that a coolie on a rubber plantation twenty-five miles north of Johore Bahru had been seized by a tiger while at work and killed. The animal, a man-eater, had devoured part of the body. Work, of course, was at a standstill on the plantation. The natives were in a state of terror. He (the Sultan) was sending an officer and eight soldiers to fight on the killer. It was necessary to show some action at once to ease the minds of his frightened subjects. If I thought I could catch the man-eater alive he would be glad to place the officer and soldiers under my command, with instructions to do my bidding. If, after looking over the situation, it became apparent that in trying to capture the killer alive, we were taking a chance of losing him, he expected me to have the beast immediately shot. He wanted no effort spared in locating the animal. There would be no peace in the minds and hearts of his subjects in the district where the outrage was committed until the cause was removed. In a series of crisp sentences the Sultan got the story off his chest. This was an interesting transition from his lighter manner, the vein in which I most frequently saw him.

Needless to say I leaped at the opportunity to try for a man-eater. H.H. asked me to join him at the fort over in Johore Bahru, which I agreed to do without delay.

At the fort, which is the military headquarters for the State to Johore, the Sultan introduced me to the officer he had selected to assist me, a major with a good record as a soldier and a hunter. He was a quiet little chap, so well-mannered that his courtesy almost seemed exaggerated. (The Malays, by the way, are the best-mannered people in Asia.) His soldiers were a likely looking contingent. It was obvious that H.H. had picked good men to help me with the job.

The major was not in uniform. He was dressed in ordinary rough clothes of European cut. I was interested in the rifle he carried. It was a Savage .303, which most hunters consider too small a gun for tiger-shooting. This capable Malay, however, had killed several tigers with this weapon, the Sultan told me.

The major's command were dressed in khaki shirts and 'shorts' affected by Malay soldiers. They wore heavy stockings that resembled golf hose. If not for the little black Mohammedan caps on their heads and their weapons – (each was armed with a
big sword-like knife and a Malayan military rifle) – they might have been taken for a group of boy scouts. A cartridge-belt around each man's waist topped off the war-like note.

The major bowed two or three times and announced in his fairly good English that he was ready to start. We departed, the officer and his men piling into a small motor lorry, Ali and I following in my car. The asphalt roads of Johore are excellent – many of them were the work of American road-builders who did a wonderful job of converting stretches of wilderness into fine highways – and we were able to motor to within three miles of the killing. The rest of the journey we made on foot over a jungle trail.

I had requested the Sultan to order that the body of the slain coolie left where it was when the killer had finished his work. When we arrived we found a group of excited natives standing around the mangled remains. One leg had been eaten off to the thigh. The animal had also consumed the better part of one shoulder, and to give the job an added touch of thoroughness had gouged deeply into the back of the neck.

Other groups of natives were standing around not far from the body, some of them hysterically jabbering away, some making weird moaning noises, others staring down at the ground in silence. One has to have a good comprehension of the wild world-old superstitions of these natives to appreciate fully what happens inside them when a man-eating tiger appears. All the fanaticism that goes with their belief in strange devils and ogres finds release when a tiger, their enemy of enemies, kills a member of their ranks. They act like a people who consider themselves doomed. Going into a delirium of fear that leaves them weak and spiritless, they become as helpless as little children. Under a strong leadership that suggests a grand unconcern about man-eating tigers, they can be rallied to work against the striped foe; but, until there are definite signs of a possible victory, this work is purely mechanical. The most casual glance reveals that each member of the terrified crew is staring hard at the jungle as he perfunctorily goes through the motions of doing whatever it is you assign him to.

An investigation revealed that the victim of the tiger had been working on a rubber tree when attacked. His tapping knife and latex cup (in which he caught the latex, or sap) were just where they had dropped from his hands when the poor devil was surprised, mute evidence of the suddenness of the assault. Then he had been dragged fifteen or twenty yards into some nearby brush.

Bordering along the jungle wall – as dense and black a stretch of jungle, incidentally, as I have ever seen – was a small pineapple plantation. This was not a commercial grove, but a modest affair cultivated by the estate coolies for their own use. An examination of the ground there revealed marks in the dirt that unmistakably were tiger tracks. The tiger's spoor led to a fence made by the natives to keep out wild pigs, whose fondness for pineapples had spelled the ruin of more than one
plantation. Through a hole in this fence – which could have easily been made by the
tiger or might have been there when he arrived, the work of some other animal – the
killer’s movements could, without the exercise of much ingenuity, be traced in the
soft earth across the pineapple grove into the coal-black jungle some fifty yards
away.

It is no news that a tiger, after gorging himself on his kill, will return to devour
the unfinished remains of his feast. If there is no heavy brush within convenient
reach he will camouflage those remains with leaves and anything else that is handy
for his purpose and go off to his lair. Confident that he has covered his left-over
skillfully enough to fool even the smartest of the vultures, jackals, hyenas, and wild
dogs, he curls up and enjoys one of those wonderful long sleeps that always follow
a good bellyful and which I have always believed to be as much a part of the joy of
making a good kill as the actual devouring of it.

I felt, as I studied the situation, that when the tiger returned for the rest of his kill
– assuming that this creature would follow regulation lines and re-visit the scene of
the slaughter – he would again make use of that hole in the fence. It was a perfectly
simple conclusion. Either the animal would not return at all or if he returned, he
would re-travel his former route.

‘Changkuls! Changkuls! Changkuls!’ I yelled as soon as I decided on a course of
action. A changkul is a native implement that is widely used on the rubber
plantations. It is a combination of shovel and hoe. With the assistance of the major I
managed to make it clear to the natives what it was I wanted them to do.

My plan was to dig a hole barely within the borders of the pineapple plantation,
so close to the hole in the fence through which the tiger had travelled on his first
visit that if he returned and used the same route he would go tumbling down a pit
from which there was no return – except in a cage.

I specified a hole four feet by four feet at the surface. This was to be dug fourteen
or fifteen feet deep, the opening widening abruptly at about the half-way mark until
at the very bottom it was to be a subterranean room ten feet across.

Soon we had a sizable gang of natives working away with the changkuls. The
helpful major, to whom I had given instructions for the pit that was now being dug,
bowed a sporting acquiescence to my plan when I knew well that this accomplished
shikari who had brought down many tigers was aching to go forth into the jungle in
quest of the man-eater.

The digging of the pit finished, we covered the top with nipa palms. Then we
made away with the pile of dirt we had excavated, scattering it at a distance so that
the tiger, if he returned, would see no signs of fresh soil. The body was left where it
was.

Ali then returned with me to Johore Bahru where I planned to stay overnight at
the rest-house adjoining the United Service Club. Before leaving, I placed the
soldiers on guard at the coolie lines with instructions to keep the natives within those lines.

The coolie lines on a rubber plantation correspond to the headquarters of a big ranch in this country. There is a row of shacks in which the natives live, a store where they buy their provisions, etc. My idea was to give the tiger every possible chance to return. Too much activity near the stretch of ground where the body lay might have made him overcautious.

Early the next morning the soldiers were to examine the pit. If luck was with us and the tiger was a prisoner, a Chinese boy on the estate who owned a bicycle that he had learned to ride at a merry clip was to head for the nearest military post – (there is a whole series of them, very few jungle crossroads in Johore being without one) – and notify the authorities who in turn would immediately communicate with the fort at Johore Bahru.

In the next morning no word had been received at the fort. At noon I drove back to the rubber plantation to see if there was anything I could do. The situation was unchanged. There was no signs of the tiger. No one had seen him, not even the most imaginative native with a capacity for seeing much that was not visible to the normal eye.

In the body of the mangled native was decomposing. Though I did not like to alter my original plan, I acquiesced when the natives appealed to me to let them give their fallen comrade a Mohammedan burial (the Malay version thereof). They put the body in a box and carried it off for interment.

The major did not conceal his desire to go off into the jungle with his men to seek the killer there. He was characteristically courteous, bowing politely as he spoke, and assuring me that he had nothing but respect for my plan. Yes, the luan's idea was a good one – doubtless, it might prove successful under different circumstances – but it was not meeting with any luck, and would I consider him too bold if he suggested beating about the nearby jungle with his men in an effort to trace the eater of the coolie?

What could I say? My plan had not accomplished anything and we were no closer to catching our man-eater than when we first got to work. I readily assented, stipulating only that the pit remained as it was, covered with nipa palms and ready for a victim – though if the animal returned after the number of hours that had elapsed, it would be performing freakishly.

There was no point in my staying there. So, when the major went off into the jungle with his men, I left the scene, returning to Singapore with Ali. I still had considerable work to do before the big collection of animals and birds in my compound would be ready for shipment to America.

I felt upset all the way back to Singapore. Here was the first chance I had ever had to take a man-eating tiger and I had failed. Perhaps I was not at fault – after all, the
business of capturing animals is not an exact science – but just the same I was returning without my man-eater and I was bitterly disappointed. Ali did his best to cheer me up, but all he succeeded in doing was to remind me over and over again that I had failed. Using words sparingly and gestures freely, he tried to communicate the idea that after all a man could worry through life without a man-eating tiger. In an effort to change the expression on my face he grinned like an ape and made movements with his hands designed, I am sure, to convey the idea of gaiety. He was not helping a bit. Feeling that I was too strongly resisting his efforts to buck me up, he grew peeved and resorted to his old trick of wrinkling up his nose. This drew from me the first laugh I had had in several days. Seeing me laugh, Ali broke into a laugh too, wrinkling up his nose a few times more by way of giving me a thoroughly good time.

When we returned to Singapore I kept in touch with the situation by telephone, the fort reporting that though the major and his men had combed every inch of the jungle for some distance around, they found no trace of the killer. The major opined that the beast had undoubtedly left the district and that further search would accomplish nothing.

'Well, that's that,' I said to myself as I prepared to busy myself in the compound with the many tasks that were waiting for me there.

The third day, very early in the morning, just as I was beginning to dismiss from my mind the events that had taken place on that rubber plantation, I received a telegram from the Sultan of Johore which, with dramatic suddenness, announced that the tiger had fallen into the pit! No one knew exactly when. 'Some time last night.' Would I hurry to the plantation with all possible haste? He had tried to reach me by phone but failed, so he had sent a fast telegram.

Would I? What a question! Perhaps it is unnecessary for me to say how delighted I was over the prospect of returning to the plantation to get my man-eating tiger. Ali ran me a close second, the old boy's joy (much of it traceable to my own, no doubt, for Ali was usually happy when I was) being wonderful to behold.

We climbed into the car and set out for the plantation at a terrific clip. At least half the way we travelled at the rate of seventy miles an hour, very good work for the battered bus I was driving.

When we arrived, the natives were packed deep around the sides of the pit. Never have I witnessed such a change in morale. There was no suggestion of rejoicing – for the natives endow tigers with supernatural powers and they do not consider themselves safe in the presence of one unless he is dead or inside a cage – but they were again quick in their movements. A determined looking crew, they could now be depended upon for real assistance.

In addition to the crowd of coolies, the group near the pit included the major and his soldiers and a white man and his wife from a nearby plantation. The woman,
camera in hand, was trying to take a picture. Even in the wilds of Johore one is not safe from invasion by those terrible amateurs to whom nothing means anything but the occasion for taking another picture. I distinctly recall that one of my first impulses on arriving on the scene was to heave the lady to the tiger and then toss in her chatterbox of a husband for good measure. This no doubt established a barbarous strain in me.

I ploughed my way through the crowd to the mouth of the pit. The natives had rolled heavy logs over the opening, driven heavy stakes and lashed the cover down with rattan.

'Apa ini?' I inquired. 'Apa ini?' [What is this?]

'Oh, tuan! Harimu besar!' came the chorused reply, the gist of it being that our catch was a 'great, big, enormous tiger.' I loosened a couple of the logs, making an opening through which I could peer down into the pit. Stretching out on my stomach, I took a look at the prisoner below, withdrawing without the loss of much time when the animal, an enormous creature, made a terrific lunge upward, missing my face with his paw by not more than a foot.

This was all I needed to convince me that the natives had shown intelligence in covering the mouth of the pit with those heavy logs. I did not believe that the beast could have escaped if the covering was not there; yet he was of such a tremendous size that it was barely possible he could pull himself out by sinking his claws into the side of the pit after taking one of those well-nigh incredible leaps.

The business of getting that tiger out of the pit presented a real problem. This was due to his size. I had not calculated on a monster like this, a great cat that could leap upward to within a foot of the mouth of the pit.

Ordinarily it is not much of a job to get a tiger out of a pit. After baiting it with a couple of fresh killed chickens, a cage with a perpendicular slide door is lowered. An assistant holds a rope which when released drops the door and makes the tiger a captive as soon as he decides to enter the cage for the tempting morsels within, which he will do when he becomes sufficiently hungry. A variation on this procedure, though not as frequently used, is to lower a box without a bottom over the tiger. This is arduous labour, requiring plenty of patience, but it is a method that can be employed successfully when the circumstances are right. When you have the box over the tiger and it is safely weighted down, you drop into the pit, slip a sliding bottom under the box and yell to the boys overhead to haul away at the ropes.

It was obvious that neither of these methods would do in this case. I simply could not get around the fact that I had underestimated the size of the man-eater and had not ordered a deep enough pit. Our catch was so big that if we lowered a box he could scramble to the top of it in one well-aimed leap and jump out of the hole in another. Ordinary methods would not do. They were too dangerous.

I finally hit upon a plan, and, as a good part of the morning was still ahead of us,
I decided to tear back to Singapore for the supplies I needed and race back post-haste and get that striped nuisance out of the pit that day. I could not afford to spend much more time on the plantation. I had so much work waiting for me in connection with that big shipment I was taking to the United States.

My first move on arriving in Singapore was to get hold of Hin Mong and put him and his chow-boys to work at once on a special long, narrow box with a slide door at one end. When I left for my next stop, Mong and his boys had cast aside all other tasks and were excitedly yanking out lumber for my emergency order. Knowing this Chinese carpenter's fondness for needless little fancy touches, I assailed his ears before departing with a few emphatic words to the effect that this was to be a plain job and that he was not to waste any time on the frills so dear to his heart.

Leaving Mong I headed for the bazaars, where I bought three or four hundred feet of strong native rope made of jungle fibres. Next I went to the Harbour Works and borrowed a heavy block-and-tackle. Then I hired a motor truck.

When I added to this collection an ordinary Western lasso, which I learned to use as a boy in Texas, I was ready to return to the rubber plantation for my tiger. While on the subject of that lasso, it might be appropriate to point out that the public gave Buffalo Jones one long horse laugh when he announced his intention of going to Africa and roping big game, and that not long afterwards the laugh was on the public, for Buffalo serenely proceeded to do exactly what he said he would. I have never gone in for that sort of thing, but my rope, which is always kept handy, has been useful many times, even a crane, a valuable specimen, having been lassoed on the wing as it sailed out over the ship's side after a careless boy had left its shipping box open.

When the box was made – and though Hin Mong and his chow-boys threw it together hastily, it was a good strong piece of work – I loaded it and the coil of rope and the block-and-tackle on to the truck and sent this freight on its way to the rubber plantation, putting it in charge of Ali's nephew, who was then acting as his uncle's assistant at the compound. I gave him a driver and two other boys and sent them on their journey after Ali had given his nephew instructions on how to reach the rubber plantation. Four boys were needed to carry the supplies, three miles from the end of the road through the jungle trail to the plantation.

My own car, which had carried Ali and me on so many other important trips, carried us again. Our only baggage was my lasso, which I had dropped on the floor of this speedy but badly mutilated conveyance of mine that for want of a better name I called an automobile.

As I had not seen the Sultan since the day he turned his major and those eight soldiers over to me, I decided to drop in on him on the way to the rubber plantation.

Having learned he was at the fort, I headed for these glorified barracks, where
H.H. greeted me effusively. He came out of the fort as we pulled up, leaning over the side of the car. He congratulated me a couple of times on my success in getting the tiger into the pit. Then, very solemnly – and for half a second I did not realise that he had reverted to his bantering manner – he said, 'Glad you stop here before you go to take the tiger from the pit. I would never forgive you if you do not say goodbye before the tiger eat you.'

Laughing, I told H.H., whose eyes were resting on the lasso at the bottom of the car, 'You don't seem very confident, do you?'

'Confident?' came the reply. 'Sure! You are going to catch the tiger with a rope like cowboy, no? Very simple, this method, no? Very simple. Why don't you try catch elephant this way too? Very simple.' Then the Sultan broke into one of those hearty roars of his, slapping his thighs as he doubled up with laughter.

'Don't you think I can do it, H.H.?' I asked.

Tactfully, he declined to answer with a yes or a no. All he said was, 'This is a tiger, not an American cow.' This was more eloquent than a dozen noes.

'I'll tell you what, H.H.,' I said. 'I'll make a little bet with you, just for the fun of it. I'll bet you a bottle of champagne that I'll have that tiger alive in Johore Bahru before the sun goes down.' H.H. never could be induced to make a wager for money with a friend; that's why I stipulated wine.

'I bet you,' he grinned. 'But how can I collect if the tiger eats you?' (Turning to Ali with mock sternness.) 'Ali, you do not forget that your tuan owes me a bottle champagne if he does not come back!' Then he exploded into another one of his body-shaking laughs.

We were off in a few minutes. Clouds were gathering overhead and it looked as if it was going to rain. I wanted to get my job over with before the storm broke. Stepping on the gas, I waved a good-bye to H.H., and we were on our way.

I was worried by the overcast skies, but I did not regard the impending storm as a serious obstacle. It looked like a 'Sumatra,' a heavy rain and wind-storm of short duration, followed by bright sunshine that always seems freakish to those who do not know the East. The chief difficulty imposed by the storm, in the event that it broke, would be the slippery footing that would result. A secondary problem would be the stiffening of the ropes. Rope, when it has been well exposed to rain, hardens somewhat, although it can be handled. If it rained, my job would be so much tougher.

We tore along at maximum speed, my engine heralding our approach all along the line with a mighty roar. Considering the terrific racket, I had a right to expect the speedometer to indicate a new speed record instead of a mere seventy an hour. My bus always got noisy when I opened her up, reminding me of a terrier trying to bark like a St. Bernard.

The skies grew darker as we raced along and when we were a short distance
from the point where it was necessary to complete the journey on foot, a light rain started to fall. By the time we were half-way to the plantation it was raining hard and Ali and I were nicely drenched when we arrived.

The rain had driven many of the coolies to cover, but at least a score of them were still standing around when we pulled up. The major and his soldiers, soaked to the skin, stood by faithfulness, the major even taking advantage of this inopportune moment to congratulate me again – he had done it before – on my trapping of the man-eater. I appreciated this sporting attitude after the failure of his search in the jungle. However, I did not feel very triumphant. The tough part of the job was ahead of me. Getting a tiger out of a pit into a cage in a driving rainstorm is dangerous, strenuous work.

I got busy at once. Taking out my knife, I began cutting my coil of native rope into extra nooses. Then I knocked aside some of the stakes that secured the pit's cover, rolled away some of the logs, and, stretching out flat with my head and shoulders extending out over the hole, began to make passes at the roaring enemy below with my lasso rope. One advantage of the rain was that it weakened the tiger's footing, making it impossible for him to repeat the tremendous leap upward he had made earlier in the day when I took my first look down the pit. As I heard him sloshing around in the mud and water at the bottom of his prison, I felt reassured. If the rain put me at a disadvantage, it did the same to the enemy also.

With the major standing by, rifle ready for action, I continued to fish for the tiger with my rope; the black skies giving me bad light by which to work. Once I got the lay of the land, I managed to drop the rope over the animal's head, but before I could pull up the slack – the rain had made the rope 'slow' – he flicked it off with a quick movement of the paw. A second time I got it over his head, but this time his problem was even easier for the forepart of the stiffening slack landed close enough to his mouth to enable him to bite the rope into two with one snap. Making a new loop in the lasso I tried over and over but he either eluded my throw or fought free of the noose with lightning-fast movements in which teeth and claws worked together in perfect coordination as he snarled his contempt for my efforts. The rain continued to come down in torrents. When it rains in Johore, it rains – an ordinary Occidental rain-storm being a mere sprinkle compared to an honest-to-goodness 'Sumatra.'

By now I was so thoroughly drenched that I no longer minded the rain on my body; it was only when the water dripped down into my eyes then I found myself growing irritated.

After working in this fashion for an hour till my shoulders ached from the awkward position I was in, I succeeded in looping a noose over the animal's head and through his mouth, using a fairly dry fresh rope that responded when I gave it a quick jerk. This accomplished my purpose, which was to draw the corners of his
mouth inward so that his lips were stretched taut over his teeth, making it impossible for him to bite through the rope without biting through his lips. I yelled to the coolies who were standing by ready for action to tug away at the rope, which they did, pulling the crouching animal's head and forequarters clear of the bottom of the pit. This was the first good look at the foe I had had. The eyes hit me the hardest. Small for the enormous head, they glared an implacable hatred.

Quickly bringing another rope into play, I ran a second hitch around the struggling demon's neck, another group of coolies (also working under Ali's direction) pulling away at this rope from the side of the pit opposite the first ropehold. It was no trouble, with two groups of boys holding the animal's head and shoulders up, to loop a third noose under the forelegs and a fourth under the body. Working with feverish haste, I soon had eight different holds on the man-eater of Johore. With coolies tugging away at each line, we pulled the monster up nearly even with the top of the pit and held him there. His mouth, distorted with rage plus what the first rope was doing to it, was a hideous sight. With hind legs he was thrashing away furiously, also doing his frantic best to get his roped forelegs into action.

I was about to order the lowering of the box when one of the coolies let out a piercing scream. He was the number one boy on the first rope. Looking around I saw that he had lost his footing in the slippery mud, and, in his frenzied efforts to save himself, was sliding head first for the mouth of the pit. I was in a position where I could grab him, but I went at it so hard that I lost my own footing and the two of us would have rolled over into the pit if Ali, who was following me around with an armful of extra nooses, hadn't quickly grabbed me and slipped one of these ropes between my fingers. With a quick tug, he and one of the soldiers pulled us out of danger.

The real menace, if the coolie and I had rolled over into the pit was that the other coolies would probably have lost their heads and let go the ropes. With them holding on there was no serious danger, for the tiger was firmly lashed.

I've wondered more than once what would have occurred if the native and I had gone splashing to the bottom of that hole. Every time I think of it, it gives me the creeps; for though the coolies at the ropes were dependable enough when their tuan was around to give them orders, they might easily have gone to pieces, as I've frequently seen happen, had they suddenly decided that they were leaderless. It wouldn't have been much fun at the bottom of the pit with this brute of a tiger.

The coolies shrieked but they held. The rain continued to come down in sheets and the ooze around the pit grew worse and worse. Self-conscious now about the slipperiness, the boys were finding it harder than ever to keep their feet.

The box would have to be lowered at once. With the tiger's head still almost even with the surface of the pit, we let the box down lengthwise, slide door end up.
Unable to get too close, we had to manipulate the box with long poles. The hind legs had sufficient play to enable the animal to strike out with them, and time after time, after we painstakingly manoeuvred the cage into position with the open slide door directly under him, our enraged captive would kick it away. In the process the ropes gave a few inches, indicating that the strain was beginning to be too much for the boys. If we were forced to let the animal drop back after getting him to this point, it was a question if we'd ever be able to get him out alive.

Quickly I went over the situation with Ali. I was growing desperate. With the aid of the major and three of his soldiers we got the box firmly in place, the tired boys at the ropes responding to a command to tug away that lifted the animal a few inches above the point where his thrashing hind legs interfered with keeping it erect. I assigned the three soldiers to keep the box steady with poles which they braced against it. If we shifted the box again in the ooze we might lose our grip on it, so I cautioned them to hold it as it was.

'Major, I'm now leaving matters in your hands,' I said. 'See that the boys hold on and keep your rifle ready.' Before he had a chance to reply I let myself down into the pit, dodging the flying back feet. Covered with mud from head to foot as a result of my dropping into the slime, I grabbed the tiger by his tail, swung him directly over the opening of the box and fairly roared: 'Let go!' Let go they did, with me leaning on the box to help steady it.

The man-eater of Johore dropped with a bang to the bottom of Hin Mong's plainest box. I slid the door with a slam, leaned against it and bellowed for hammer and nails. I could feel the imprisoned beast pounding against the sides of his cell as he strove to free himself from the tangle of ropes around him. His drop, of necessity, had folded up his hind legs and I didn't see how he could right himself sufficiently in that narrow box for a lunge against the door at the top; but the brute weighed at least three hundred pounds, and if his weight shifted over against me he might, in my tired condition, knock me over and...

'Get the hammer and nails!' I screamed. 'Damn it, hurry up!' I leaned against the box with all my strength, pressing it against one side of the pit to hold the sliding door firmly closed.

No hammer! No nails!

Plastered with mud, my strength rapidly ebbing, I was in a fury over the delay.

'Kasi pacoo! [Bring nails!]' I shrieked in Malay, in case my English was not understood. 'Nails! Pacco! Nails' I cried. 'And a hammer, you helpless swine!' There weren't any swine present but that's what I called every one at the moment. I felt the tiger's weight shifting against me and I was mad with desperation.

The major yelled down that no one could find the nails. The can had been kicked over and the nails were buried in the mud. They had the hammer. . . . Here it goes! I caught it. . . . What the hell good is a hammer without nails?
'Give me nails, damn it, or I'll murder the pack of you!' It was Ali who finally located the nails, buried in the mud, after what seemed like a week and was probably a couple of minutes. Over the side of the pit he scrambled to join me in a splash of mud. With a crazy feverishness I wielded the hammer while Ali held the nails in place, and at last Johore's coolie-killer was nailed down fast. Muffled snarls and growls of rage came through the crevices, left for breathing space. 

Then I recall complaining to Ali that the storm must be getting worse. It was getting blacker. The tuan was wrong. The storm was letting up. Perhaps I mistook the mud that splashed over me as I fell to the floor of the pit, too weak to stand up, for extra heavy raindrops.

Ali lifted me to my feet and my brain cleared. I suddenly realised that the job was all done, that the man-eater of Johore was in that nailed-down box. I was overjoyed. Only a man in my field can fully realise the thrill I experienced over the capture of this man-eating tiger – the first, to my knowledge, ever brought to the United States.

Ropes were fastened around the box – (no one feared entering the pit now) – and with the aid of the block-and-tackle, our freight was hauled out of the hole.

Eight coolies were needed to get our capture back through the slime that was once a dry jungle trail to the highway leading to Johore Bahru. More than once they almost dropped their load, which they bore on carrying poles, as they skidded around in the three miles of sticky muck between the rubber plantation and the asphalt road which now reflected the sunlight, wistfully reappearing in regulation fashion after the rain and wind of the 'Sumatra.' There we loaded the box on to the waiting lorry, which followed Ali and me in my car.

About forty minutes later as the sun bathed the channel in the reddish glow of its vanishing rays, I planted the man-eater under the nose of the Sultan in front of the United Service Club in Johore Bahru.

With more mud on me than any one that ever stood at the U.S.C.'s bar, I collected my bet, the hardest-earned champagne I ever tasted.

The Sultan was so respectful after I won this wager that once or twice I almost wished I hadn't caught his damned man-eater. H.H. is much more fun when he's not respectful. I enjoyed his pop-eyed felicitations but not nearly so much as some of the playful digs he has taken at me.

The man-eater of Johore, by the way, eventually wound up in the Longfellow Zoological Park, in Minneapolis, Minn.

Frank Buck with Edward Anthony
was hunting in the Deccan, in the neighbourhood of Mulkapore, when I heard that a man-eating tiger, which I had been after for some days, had been seen skulking near the outskirts of the village of Botta Singarum. I had on a former occasion tracked this cunning brute to one of his lairs, where the remains of several of his victims were discovered, and had twice beaten all his usual haunts in the jungle; but up to this time had never been able to get a shot at him. Sending my gang of trackers on before I mounted my horse, and guided by the villager who brought the news, I made my way to the place where the marauder had been seen the evening before, where I found unmistakable signs that the information I had received was true, as his fresh pugs were plainly visible.

I sent my horse back to the village, and accompanied by the gang, followed his track through a narrow ravine densely wooded tract. Here the trail became exceedingly difficult to follow, as the brute had evidently been walking about backwards and forwards in the bed and along the banks of a dry nullah, and we could not distinguish his last trail. I caused the band to separate, and for half an hour or so we were wandering about as if in a maze, for the cunning brute had been describing circles, and often by following the trail, we arrived at the place we started from.

Whilst we were all at a loss, suddenly I heard a low 'coo' twice repeated, and I knew that Googooloo, who was seldom at fault, was now on warm scent, and from his call I was as certain that the game was afoot as any master of hounds would have been, while breaking cover, to hear his favourite dog give tongue. The gang closed up, and guided by the sound, we made our way through thick bush to where Googooloo was standing by a pool of water in the bed of the nullah.

Here were unmistakable marks of his having quenched his thirst quite lately, for when we came up the water was still flowing into the deeply-imprinted pugs of his fore feet, which were close to the edge of the pool, and I noticed that the water had still the appearance of having been disturbed and troubled. After having drunk, the brute made his way to some very thick jungle, much overgrown with creepers, through which we could not follow without the aid of our axes. Thus stalking with any hope of success was out of the question, so I held a solemn consultation with
Kistimah, Chineah, Googooloo, and the dhoby, as to the best means of proceeding.

I felt convinced that the brute was still lurking somewhere near at hand in the jungle, for, besides the very recent trail we were on, I fancied I heard the velling of a swarm of monkeys, which I attributed to their having been frightened by his appearance; besides, this was just the kind of place where a tiger would be likely to remain in during the heat of the day, as it afforded cool shade from the sun, and water. All the gang were of my opinion, and Kistimah observed that, on two different occasions, after a post-runner had been carried off, he had remarked that the trail of the tiger led from this part of the jungle to a bend in the road, where he had been known frequently to lie in wait for his prey. 'These man-eaters,' he added, 'are great devils and very cunning, and I should not at all wonder if even now he was watching us from some dark thicket.' As he said this I carefully examined the caps of my rifle, and I observed some of the gang close up with a strange shudder, for this brute had inspired them all with a wholesome fear, and prevented their straggling. Two or three spoke almost in whispers, as if they were afraid of his really being sufficiently near to hear them conspiring for his destruction.

At length Kistimah said that he had been thinking of a plan which, though dangerous in the execution, might be attended with success. It was for me to go, with a man dressed as a runner, down the main road at sunset, being the time the tiger generally carried off his victims, and to run the chance of getting a shot. At this proposition sundry interjectional expressions, such as 'Abah!' 'Arrez!' 'Toba!' 'Toba!' escaped from the lips of the bystanders, and from sundry shaking of heads and other unmistakable signs, I could see that it had not found much favour in their eyes. Chineah, the dhoby, and one or two of the gang, however, approved of the plan, and Kistimah offered to accompany me as the post-runner. This, however, I objected for I thought I should have a better chance of meeting the tiger if I went alone than in company; besides, I preferred having only myself to look after. The plan of action once settled, I returned to the village and obtained from the Patēl the bamboo on which the tappal-runners sling the mailbags over their shoulders. To the end of this is an iron ring with a number of small pieces of metal attached, making a jingling noise as the man runs, which gives warning of the coming of the post to any crowd that might be obstructing the path, allowing them time to get out of his way. Having broken off the ring, I fastened it to my belt, so as to allow it to jingle as I walked, and arming myself with a short double rifle by Westley Richards, a brace of pistols, and a huge shekar knife, I made Kistimah lead the way down the road towards the place where the man-eater was said to lurk.

About a mile from the village I made the gang and the villagers who accompanied me halt, and went on with Kistimah, Chineah, and Googooloo to reconnoitre the ground. The road was intersected by a narrow valley or ravine, along the bottom of which was a dry, sandy watercourse, the banks of which were
overgrown with high rank grass and reeds, intermixed with low scrubby thorn-bushes. To the left was a low rocky hill, in some place bare and in others covered with thick jungle, with wild date or custard-apple clumps here and there. Kistimah pointed me out a clump of rather thick jungle to the right of the road, where, he said, the tiger often lurked whilst on the look-out for his prey, and here we saw two or three old trails. He also showed me a rock, from behind which the brute had sprung upon a post-runner some weeks before; but we saw no signs of his having been there lately. It was, however, quite what an Indian sportsman would term a 'tigerish-looking spot', for bold, scarped rocks, and naked, fantastic peaks rose in every direction from amongst the dense foliage of the surrounding jungle, whilst here and there noble forest trees lowered like giant patriarchs above the lower verdure of every shade and colour.

Not a breath of air was stirring nor a leaf moving, and as the sun was still high up, without a cloud visible to intercept his rays, the heat was most oppressive, and even respiration become difficult on account of a peculiar closeness arising from the decayed vegetation underfoot, and the overpowering perfume of the blossoms of certain jungle plants.

Having reconnoitred the ground round about, I felt rather overcome with lassitude, and returned to the rest of the gang whom I found sleeping in a clump of deep jungle a little off the roadside. Here I lay down to rest, protected from the piercing rays of the sun by the shade of a natural bower formed by two trees, which were bent down with the weight of an immense mass of parasitical plants in addition to their own foliage. I must have slept several hours, for when I awoke I found the sun sinking low in the horizon; however, I got up considerably refreshed by my nap, and giving myself a shake, prepared for the task I had undertaken. I carefully examined my arms, and having ascertained that nothing had been seen by any of my gang, some of whom had kept a look-out, I told my people that if they heard the sound of my gun they might come up, otherwise they were to remain quiet where they were until my return. I ordered Chineah, Kistimah, Googooloo, and the dhoby, to accompany me down the road with spare guns in case I might want them; and when I arrived at a spot which commanded a view of the ravine which was supposed to be the haunt of the man-eater, I sent them to climb different trees.

Kistimah begged hard to be allowed to accompany me, as he said this tiger never attacked a man in front, but always from behind; but I would not permit him, as I thought that two people would perhaps scare the animal, and his footsteps might prevent me from hearing any sound intimating his approach.

The sun had almost set as I proceeded slowly down the road, and although I was perfectly cool and as steady as possible, I felt cold drops of perspiration start from my forehead as I approached the spot where so many victims had been sacrificed. I passed the rock, keeping well on the look-out, listening carefully for the slightest
sound, and I remember feeling considerably annoyed by the chirping made by a couple of little bulbuls, that were fighting in a bush close to the roadside. Partridges were calling loudly all around, and as I passed the watercourse I saw a jackal skulking along its bed. I stopped, shook my jingling affair, and listened several times as I went along, but to no purpose.

Whilst ascending the opposite side of the ravine I heard a slight noise like the crackling of a dry leaf. I paused, and turning to the left fronted the spot from whence I thought the noise proceeded. I distinctly saw a movement or waving in the high grass, as if something was making its way towards me; then I heard a loud purring sound, and saw something twitching backwards and forwards behind a clump of low bush and long grass, about eight or ten paces from me, and a little in the rear. It was a ticklish moment, but I felt prepared. I stepped back a couple of paces in order to get a better view, which probably saved my life, for immediately the brute sprang into the middle of the road, alighting about 6 feet from the place where I was standing. I fired a hurried shot ere he could gather himself up for another spring, and when the smoke cleared away I saw him rolling over and over in the dusty road, writhing in his death agony, for my shot had entered the neck and gone downwards into his chest. I stepped on one side and gave him my second barrel behind the ear, when dark blood rushed from his nostrils, a slight tremor passed over all his limbs, and all was still. The man-eater was dead, and his victims avenged.

My gang, attracted by the sound of my shots, came rushing up almost breathless, and long and loud were the rejoicings when the tiger was recognised by Kistimah as the cunning man-eater who had been the scourge of the country for months. He was covered with mange, and but had little hair left on his skin, which was of a reddish brown colour, and not worth taking.

I have killed many tigers both before and since, but I never met with such a determined enemy to mankind, for he was supposed to have carried off more than a hundred individuals. He fully exemplified an old Indian saying: 'When a tiger has once tasted human blood he will never follow other game, men proving an easier prey.' On the spot where the tiger was killed a large mausoleum now stands, caused by the passers-by each throwing a stone until a large heap is formed. Since that day many a traveller who passed that way have been entertained by the old pensioned sepoy, who is in charge of the travellers' bungalow, with an account of the terrible man-eater of Botta Singarum.

This account on the death of a man-eater in Botta Singarum (a village near Malkapur in the Telangana region), is taken from Henry Astbury Leveson's famous book, Sport in Many Lands. His other well known books are: The Hunting Grounds of the Old World (1860) and The Forest and the Field (1867). Henry Astbury Leveson (1828–75) was considered among the foremost of big game hunters.
Henry Astbury Leveson, the Old Shekarrey 1877
The Langra Tigress

Whenever I look back on the incident now, I wonder what might have happened if I had fired at the Langra Tigress the first time I saw her. Certainly she gave me the chance: the sort of chance that sportsmen often dream about yet so seldom get in reality. And I ought to have been ready and waiting to take it; for there had been plain warning that she was about. Even so, I was taken by surprise. Yet if I had been ready, I think it is very doubtful if I should have been able to write this story.

On the evening that this first encounter took place, I had gone out after a wild pig. For we are farmers, and our estate is situated in what were the old Central Provinces of India. That year we were planting a crop of groundnut over about a hundred acres of land which had just been cleared of thick jungle. It was something of an emergency measure. Coming Land Reforms threatened to take this area away from us unless it was put under cultivation. And since a considerable block of our forests had already been ceded to the government, we were trying to save the rest of the estate by complying quickly with the new regulations. But everything had been very hurried: so much so, that for this crop there would be no fences round the fields.

That was the trouble. Wild boars and their sows love groundnuts. So, just before planting-time, I hoped to spread enough alarm and despondency among these pests to keep them away from the new fields until the seeds were in and had germinated. For if the swine are given the chance, they will run their iron-like snouts down the fresh drill-lines the night the seeds are put in; sucking up the nuts as they go along like mobile vacuum cleaners. Once the crop is above ground, it is fairly safe until half-ripe. Then the pigs again become an unmitigated nuisance.

It was a stifling, hot-weather evening when I prepared to go out. The rains were due to break at any moment, most probably early that night; for even as I was leaving the house, angry black clouds were building up rapidly above the distant, shimmering blue hills.

Just before I set off, the call of peafowl, coming from the direction in which I was going, had decided me to take a twelve-bore shot gun – for the larder was low. And as the area for which I was bound was thick scrub jungle, buck-shot would be
the most effective ammunition to sling against any pig I put up.

Through this ground there runs a small, twisting nullah, about ten feet wide and six deep. I dropped down to the sandy bed. The banks are lined with many kinds of jungle tree: some were already in full leaf, while others were performing that yearly miracle of producing delicate little green leaves and buds when it seemed impossible that there could be any moisture in that rock-like soil.

Peafows are very difficult to surprise: but a stalk along that soft, sandy bed could be made in absolute silence; and this place was a favourite haunt of these gallinaceous birds. Slowly I began to creep forward – and I had only been going about ten minutes when, cautiously rounding a sharp bend, I was suddenly stopped dead.

Just in front of me, apparently asleep under a patch of shade, was a large leopard stretched out on the sand. But a closer look showed that something was wrong: its attitude was most unnatural; the head was twisted, and one forepaw was slightly bent and held drunkenly in the air. The animal was dead.

Moving swiftly up to it, my nose told me that it was very dead indeed. A swarm of blue flies buzzed up at my approach, wafting the sickly sweet smell of death more strongly to my nostrils. Some animal had eaten a small part of the hindquarters, and all round the sand was wildly churned up – but it was too soft to show any tracks. I began to look about me.

At once I spotted something else. A little farther down the nullah, and pulled in right under the bank, were the remains of what had once been a young *chital* stag. All that was left of it was the head, a few pieces of skin and splintered bone, and two almost whole ribs.

Both animals had been dead for about two days, and I began to wonder just what had happened. Then, looking round again for some definite clue, I saw that a small flame-of-the-forest tree had fallen across the bed of the nullah, and was blocking the view in that direction. I went up to it and looked across. Immediately something black caught my eye, lying almost at my feet, but on the other side of the tree: it was the dead body of a huge wild boar.

I climbed over and began to examine it. The mask was set in the most hideous snarl, and the one large tush I could see was not white, but stained brown with congealed blood. The remains were fresh, the meat hardly tainted; but some part of the hindquarters had been eaten, and the rest of the boar had been horribly ripped and torn. This was undoubtedly the work of a tiger, and by the look of things, he had not had it all his own way.

Then a very sinister fact penetrated to my mind. There was a complete absence of vultures or crows about any of the kills, and the jungle was ominously silent. Somewhere, close at hand, that tiger was lying up: it *must* be, or the nearby trees and the ground would have been thick with these revolting scavengers.
It was now just six o’clock, and a little darker than usual; for the black clouds had crept up overhead, and muffled thunder was vibrating in the hot, stifling air. This was a very likely time for the tiger to return for a feed, and the bed of that nullah was a very unhealthy spot. Rather hastily I climbed the bank and stood beside a small clump of saplings. The scrub jungle was very thick; for the previous year it had been cut over, and now, with the amazing rapidity with which the forests revive, the old stumps had sent up shoots to a height of several feet, and visibility was reduced to a few yards in any direction. Once up on the higher ground, I began to listen – complete silence. At the same time I was looking around for a suitable tree, covering the nullah, in which I might sit. For I felt sure that the tiger would return; most probably very soon.

But had it already seen or heard me?

There was not a rustle, or any other warning sound from the jungle; only the awakening evening insects broke the silence. And while I listened, I tried to put together the pieces of the story of that small nullah. That a tiger had killed the boar, I knew – but what of the leopard and the young chital stag? It was the most fascinating little mystery that I had ever come across.

Then, without a sound, the tiger suddenly appeared about five yards in front of me.

It was, rather, a tigress; and she came from behind a small cluster of teak like a conjurer's illusion. At first instance she did not see me, for she was moving obliquely away. But I must have made some slight movement of surprise, for suddenly she turned her head and looked straight at me. Yet it seemed that she did not notice me at all: her eyes looked quite vacant, and in the calmest manner she continued on her way and passed out of sight behind some cover. As she went, I saw she was plastered with dried mud, along her left flank ran a long, bloody gash, and she was walking with a decided limp.

To this day I cannot understand why that tigress’s sudden arrival was such a surprise to me. She so obviously had to be somewhere close. Yet, when she came, I was caught completely off my guard and made no effort to bring her down. An easier target could hardly have been imagined; but had I fired instinctively, it might well have been, for two reasons, the last trigger I ever squeezed.

The moment after that mud-stained body had disappeared from sight, I recovered my wits as there was still a good chance of collecting her. After the blistering heat of the day, and the pain of the wound, she would be making for water. Certainly she was headed in the right direction; for there was a pool, about fifty yards away, on the bed of another and larger nullah. If I could come upon her there, she would be a sitting shot from the high bank above.

I gave her a minute's start, then followed softly. About twenty yards to my front was a little clearing among the trees; on the farther side the ground rose steeply, and
was covered with young saplings. Coming into the open space, I stopped and looked around: there was nothing in sight.

I was about to go on when a sudden, startling thought made me pause. I had been acting like a lunatic ever since I found that butcher’s shop in the small nullah; for I had completely forgotten that I was carrying a shotgun, loaded, at that moment, with number six in the right barrel and buckshot in the choke. In mitigation, I can only plead that almost invariably I carry a .375 when out in the jungles, and the recent, unusual events were filling my mind to the exclusion of all else.

It was a mistake easily rectified. I had one lethal ball cartridge with me; so breaking the gun, I took out the number six and fished about in my pocket until I found the case I wanted.

Then, without any warning at all, everything happened at once. There was a shattering roar from the high ground a little to my right, and I heard the tigress crashing towards me through rough teak-leaves under the cover of the trees. The next second she came into view, and, with one mighty bound, landed in the clearing about thirty paces in front of me.

The shock was so complete that I was temporarily paralysed, and the ball cartridge dropped from my fingers as I was putting it in the chamber. This folly, I believe now, undoubtedly saved my life; for if the gun had been properly loaded, I am sure I should have used it in the next few confused minutes.

Because, for a second or two, I failed to appreciate the situation: then, when I did, it came as another, stunning shock. The animal before me now was not the tigress – but a very large and most aggressive tiger! And he was obviously bent on mischief: there was little doubt about that; for as soon as he landed on his feet, he whipped about to face me – and then began weaving quickly from side to side across my front. At the same time he threw up his head and rent the air with a series of shaking, bellowing roars. More alarming still were the lightning-quick, feint attacks he began to make – all at once crouching low to the ground, hindquarters slightly raised, and ears laid back hard against his head, the lips mouthing a vicious snarl that rumbled out between gleaming fangs. Then, confidently, like a cat with a mouse in its power, he broke off his pantomime with a great sideways leap, to frisk off again – weaving and roaring.

At any second that tiger could come in: each time he threatened, my eyes were focussed on the end of his tail. The moment that flickered – he would spring.

All this time I had been creeping slowly backwards, fascinated by that prancing striped yellow body. The shotgun still hung open over my left arm. Should I suddenly snap it shut and try for his head with the buckshot in the choke barrel? It might come off – but it was a very long shot indeed.

Then I saw something that ruled this idea right out. From the corner of my eye I suddenly spotted the tigress. She was sitting up like a big domestic cat before a fire,
just a few yards to my right, under a small kakra tree. And she was watching the scene before her with a pleased, gentle smile on her face.

When I saw her, I realised that the situation was well-nigh hopeless; everything became unpleasantly clear – these two were mating. That explained her extraordinary behaviour when she had seemed to ignore my presence, so near the kills, a little while earlier. For it is not uncommon, when the female is in season, to find her going about in a kind of dazed, ecstatic trance.

There was no hint of any ecstatic trance about the male! He undoubtedly meant business – if anything, he was getting more excited. For this encounter was just what he wanted: it was giving him an excellent opportunity to show-off before his sweetheart; and if that charnel house in the nullah was anything to go by, this tiger had put in quite a lot of practice.

I was still moving slowly backwards, but the tiger had decreased the distance between us. Suddenly I came up against a small tree, so I began to edge round the slender trunk; at last I had reached the limits of that little clearing. But this could not go on: something must happened soon; indeed, it was surprising that the tiger had already waited so long.

Help came from the most unexpected quarter. A thin tongue of lightning flickered down in a brilliant, violet flash, and this was followed almost instantaneously by a mighty crash of thunder right overhead. It stopped the tiger dead in his tracks; then he looked about him, seemingly puzzled. The rain came hard on the thunder: first, a few large drops spattered against my hat and bare arms; then, only a moment later, the deluge roared and hissed down with the noise of an express train.

A solid sheet of water was cascading before my eyes, and soon it was splashing up from the ground in a thin mist. Hastily taking advantage of this heaven-sent diversion, I moved farther behind the shelter of my tree. I could still see the tiger; but now it seemed as if all the ardour had been soaked right out of him as the rain rattled and bounced off his streaming back. Watching him closely, I put another buckshot cartridge in the right barrel and slowly closed the gun; then I slipped forward the safety catch.

But he had given up. With a great shake of his rain-soaked body he wheeled abruptly and trotted away. Almost at once the tigress joined him, and together they went bounding off towards some broken land to find shelter.

With that first downpour, the monsoon set in without the usual break. There followed for me a very busy period: all the planting had to be done, and there was less time to think about tigers. In any case, it was hardly likely that those two would hang about, for during the rains these animals seldom stay long in one spot. But I did, at odd times, think of the carnage in that nullah: I had never come across anything like it before. I believed that both tigers had surprised the leopard soon
after he killed the stag. And spots (for some leopards are very bold indeed) may have refused to give way over his own kill. Then the tiger may have gone for him: not so much for possession of the carcass as to show-off to his mate. The tiger had attacked the boar too; and, I think, found him a worthy antagonist as soon as the fight began. So the tigress may have waded in to help him, and got, for her trouble, that long gash on her side. But that is all supposition: there are many other possible solutions. Sometimes I picture the scene of what might have happened if I had shot the tigress as soon as I saw her. It is not unlikely that the tiger would have appeared, to see what all the noise was about, when I was bending over the dead body of his lady love, quite unsuspicous of any further developments. Then, no thunderstorm in this world would have kept him off.

But the tigers did not move on. Almost immediately there broke out an orgy of cattle-killing all around us. And it seemed a senseless slaughter: few of the animals taken were eaten, and the tigers never went back to a kill after the first feed.

Then, one day – about four miles away – a man was attacked and done to death. Certainly his demise was caused by a tiger, or tigers, but the body was found intact; no part of it had been eaten. Nevertheless, almost immediately after, the dread cry began to ring through the forests: Adam Khor! A man-eater stalks abroad!

The news spread with amazing rapidity. But I did not believe that this was the work of a man-eating tiger. It seemed, on the evidence, more likely to have been the result of a sudden, chance encounter such as had befallen me; but this time the victim had been unlucky. And I think I was right: there were no further human kills – at least for a considerable time. So, as the cattle slaughter stopped too, the scare gradually died down.

All this time at least one tiger was still about, and remaining very much on the same beat. For very often during the nights there came the sure signs that some carnivore was patrolling the jungles; and on two occasions I came across recent kills. Several times also I found the fresh tracks of a tiger.

These were very interesting; for they showed that it was dragging its left hindleg. So it was reasonable to suppose that this was the tigress that had been wounded by the boar. It was on account of this limp that she eventually acquired the name 'Langra'.

She gave us no trouble: her behaviour was exemplary. In fact, I was quite glad of her presence; for as the months went by, the ripening groundnuts began to attract the attention of the wild pigs. A good watchful tigress, with a known taste for pork, was of decided value; much more so, in some ways, than the night-watchmen we were employing. For these men just sat on high wooden platforms in the fields and drove away the marauding sounders with an occasional shout – if they happened to be awake.

One night, however, the Langra Tigress disgraced herself. On the other side of
the river she dragged a man down from his platform; killed him, carried him off, and then ate some of his body. Or so went the report that came in to us.

In actual fact, she did nothing of this: she only got the blame for it. When rumour and panic had been sifted from the truth, there was no real evidence against her. Admittedly, I was late on the scene: the dead man was not one of our own people but lived in a village some distance away; and he was not found for a whole day and night, for nobody made any serious effort to look for him. Then, when he was eventually discovered in some thick jungle, heavy rains had washed away any clues there might once have been. The body had been so thoroughly savaged that it was very obviously not the work of a tiger; for that animal is a clean killer. It looked much more like the mess that a large, solitary wild boar leaves after a mad, berserk attack. But in this opinion I was definitely alone. Once again the cry of 'man-eater' rang through the jungles; and this time it went on ringing.

All our night-watchmen struck work, leaving the groundnut crop wide open to the invading sounders of pig. Nor would any arguments of mine make them change their minds. No others for a considerable distance around, they earnestly assured me, were now watching on their land after dark. Moreover, they also pointed out, all of them were family men.

Some other arrangement to guard the fields had to be made at once: they could not be left unwatched for even a single hour after dark. At such short notice the lot must inevitably fall on me; for only my sister and myself live on the estate besides the servants. Each night I would have to go round the groundnuts on foot and keep the pests away as best as I could, until some other solution was found. It was not a pleasant prospect; and the first night gave me a nasty taste of what I was in for. Indeed, I liked it so little that I had another go at the watchmen the following morning: but again I failed to shift them, they stubbornly refused all the inducements I held before their eyes. So I resolved to beat for the tigress – and made matters far worse than they already were. For the monsoon is no time for this kind of sport; the jungle is too thick, and gives the animals every chance to slip out of the drive and get away in the dense cover quite unseen.

I was grasping at straws; there was no certainty that the tigress was lying up anywhere near us. But on the second day we got her moving. I heard the excited shout go up as she was discovered. Then came an alarming medley of frightened screams and yells as she broke back, swiping one man out of the way, and treeing the rest like a lot of gibbering monkeys.

Now, that going back on her part was very strange; for she was being driven gently in the direction which all her natural instincts must have told her was the safest one – yet she deliberately chose the hard way out. But after that, beating was stopped, and I had no alternative except to settle down to the nightly patrols around the fields in earnest.
'Do not be so foolish, sahib!' warned old Sama, the head watchman. 'All the others round us have given up their crops to the care of god – no one is going abroad after dark. And your land is particularly dangerous.'

Unfortunately the old man was only too right: all the fields in which the groundnuts had been planted were the ones we had recently hacked out of the jungles. And to make matters more difficult, they were not yet consolidated, but scattered haphazardly throughout the forests wherever the soil had been good. So it meant a walk of nearly two hours – mostly through jungle – to visit each field in turn. This was distinctly uninviting; for, apart from tigers, the estate holds leopards and bears, and the chances of disturbing these about their lawful occasions are much greater at night than during the day.

The scare lasted for three months. All that time the tigress was seldom away for long. And during this period I had to keep going after those pigs during darkness, just as soon as the sun had set. Nearly every night I learnt something new; for moving through a pitch-black jungle alone is very different from a daytime walk over the same ground. In the dark, although at first it may not be realised, the sportsman is almost entirely protected from danger by his sense of hearing. The number of small, insignificant sounds that will stop a man dead after dark would be disregarded during the day or, more likely, not even noticed.

The pigs were extraordinarily troublesome. One lone boar in particular was bad-tempered and very aggressive. He resented interference with his meals so much that on one occasion he charged me from the rear, and in the ensuing fracas removed my shorts. But I got the pigs under control and pursued them relentlessly throughout the nights from field to field, never allowing them to settle down for long.

After some weeks of this night stalking I began to have much more confidence in myself. I was quickly learning to ignore dozens of little sounds by finding out just what they were. And my shooting after dark improved too. In the early stages, I had wasted a great deal of ammunition on the pigs; now I was hitting them more often. Nearly every shot had to be taken off-hand, quickly, and at an animal (probably moving) that was illuminated only by the light of a torch mounted on the weapon. In practice I found that the maximum effective range, under these conditions, was not more than forty yards for a dead certain kill. Beyond this distance the torch showed little except the staring eyes of the animal looking into the beam; usually the body was quite invisible.

Tigers were never long absent from my thoughts: nearly every night the jungle told of some carnivore on the prowl. Whenever one was near, the night would be charged with an electric tension; as if the whole forest waited with bated breath. Then, at intervals, would come the sure and certain warnings. The sharp, grating rasp of the sambur, the high-pitched 'Wow-ou! – Wow-ou!' of the terrified spotted-deer; and if the monkeys started to send up their coughing and sneezing alarm from
the tree-tops, some large cat was certain to be passing beneath them. On one occasion – it was so near that it froze me to the spot for a full half-hour – there came the sudden, bloodcurdling scream of the lone jackal. And he, nearly always, precedes a prowling tiger.

After a time I realised that the nights of alarm were rather too many to be normal. For one thing, we have not as many tigers as all that and, secondly, the rains were still on. Even if a tiger should choose to stay for long in one place, he generally works round some regular beat which may take him ten days or so to complete. Yet the Langra Tigress – and I felt certain it was she – was remaining almost static on the estate. Was she now so lame that she could hardly get about? If this was so, what the devil was she eating? Certainly she was not addicted to human flesh; for, apart from that one very doubtful incident, there had been no further kills. Neither was she worrying cattle any more, so, somehow, she must be hunting her natural food – the jungle game.

The answer was simple, when I knew it, and I should have thought of it much sooner; for I had held all the clues from the start. But had I known the truth earlier I should have been much more worried than I already was; for I liked to believe that the tigress haunting the land was a sporting one, and would never dreamt of interfering with the absurd, two-legged creature who made such a noise moving about her jungles.

The night on which I finally learnt the truth about the Langra Tigress was a dreary one of high winds and stinging, driving rain. It was difficult to hear anything above the howling of the storm; and without my hearing I was feeling completely lost, and moving about very slowly. At three o’clock in the morning the wind suddenly dropped and the dark clouds overhead began to break up, leaving clear patches of sky through which the stars shone down. Wet through and miserable, I was making my way across one of the regular fields of the farm which was down to *tili* – a valuable oil-seed crop. This too needed watching: sambur stags and their hinds relish it, nibbling off the juicy green pods, and at this time of the morning I was quite likely to find some of these animals near the edges of the field.

I was to be disappointed; for just then, the tigress, too, was taking an interest in those samburs. Suddenly, from the direction of the river, came the sharp, clear alarm call of a hind. She seemed to be about four hundred yards from where I was standing. Soon it became apparent that something unusual was going on; because the sambur continued to call for much longer than was ever normal, and all the while she was moving very slowly nearer to where I stood. Never have I heard such a long alarm – it lasted for a full fifteen minutes. Then, suddenly, her cries redoubled, carrying with them a pitiful, almost pleading note. Shortly came the end of that hind’s agony.

From a patch of teak forest, away across the field, rose a sudden crash as though
some heavy body had been hurled down upon yielding, leafy cover. A strangled cry went up, immediately stifled in the throat, then complete silence. But not for long – soon there was a heavy scuffling and rustling among the crisp, dripping undergrowth, and then something moved off, making a great scraping noise as it passed through the big, rough teak leaves; a large animal was carrying away some heavy burden. I continued to listen as the sounds died away – there was no doubt in my mind that I had just heard the Langra Tigress killing her prey. Slowly I moved across to find the scene of the tragedy. It was not difficult to discover: the torch lighted upon a large patch of trampled ground, in the midst of which were two wrecked teak saplings.

Then I saw the tracks. That sambur hind had been defeated from her very first alarm call; for she had been up against not one tiger – but three!

Or so she must have thought. Because in the soft earth of a game-path the pug-marks of the Langra Tigress were very clear; and now it was obvious why she had remained for so long. She was accompanied by two small cubs, and they were just at an age to be taught how to kill. With the death of that hind, they had recently completed another night's lesson. And somewhere, probably among the hills up in the north corner of the estate, the tigress must have found a snug retreat.

With this new-found knowledge I was even more careful than before on the night rounds; for now there was real danger of a sudden attack. It would be enough just to place myself, however innocently, between the mother and her cubs to invite trouble. No longer was it possible to believe that I was being helped with the pigs by a tigress with sporting instincts. About the only instincts the Langra Tigress possessed now were maternal – perhaps the most dangerous of all. From that time I always carried a twelve-bore as being the handiest weapon, with a ball cartridge in the right barrel and buckshot in the left.

Six more weeks went by and still our paths had not crossed – as far as I knew. Soon the groundnuts would be ripe, and then I would be free to resume a normal life. Nor would I be sorry: these night vigils had been something of a strain; and now, although the rains were over, bitter cold weather had set in which did nothing to make the patrols more pleasant.

I met the Langra Tigress again just before harvest time.

It was a brisk, frosty night, and very dark with a fine Scotch mist rising off the river. The pigs, as usual, had been troublesome, and I had a mile to go before reaching home. My way led through what we called 'Whistling Wood', a small patch of mixed jungle, in the middle of which stood an enormous pipal tree. Many years previously, one of the great limbs of this forest giant had been struck by lightning, and it stood out, just a charred and withered member, pointing barrenly up to the sky. Time and termites had hollowed it out, and in some peculiar way it had become endowed with a remarkable characteristic.
When the wind from a certain direction had built up to a proper strength, a low melodious note suddenly boomed out, sounding not unlike the opening bars of *Ave Maria* played on an organ. During the hours of darkness it was an eerie and rather frightening sound, if you did not happen to know just what it was. Even so, none of our jungle folk would go near the place after nightfall. And not only for this reason; for there lay in that little patch of jungle the ashes of a great hunter, whose last wish was to rest among the forests and animals he had loved so well. Local superstition had it that a shadowy figure was generally to be seen stalking through the trees, with a rifle at the ready. Certainly the animals were there to keep him company: that little spot was a veritable Piccadilly Circus of game-tracks and, at night, about the most dangerous place along my route.

On this night, as I came into Whistling Wood, an intermittent, fresh morning breeze was springing up from the river, and all around me the young saplings were dancing and bobbing to the soft music of the pipal tree. Quickly I passed through without hearing or seeing anything. On the far side of the wood, and almost backing on to it, was a field of groundnuts. Coming out into the open, I saw the hurricane lanterns among the crop winking through the thinning mist. I stopped to listen. Suddenly – and I did not see the direction from which they came – two jackals darted into the feeble circle of light thrown by the lantern nearest to me, about twenty-five yards off. Now jackals are another pest which attacks groundnuts, tearing up the nuts with their paws and eating them, and this field was, for some reason, more open to their visitations than any of the others.

For a moment I watched them idly. They were gambolling about round the edge of the feeble circle of light, and there was something very graceful about the way they played. Round and round they went – twisting and turning, rolling and wrestling; pausing, then dodging and chasing all over again. So full of life did they seem that I decided to forgive them. As I began to move off, I lit a cigarette, and as the match flickered, I thought idly that those animals played more like cats. . . .

. . . *Cats!*

And then I really looked at them. Cats they were: little yellow ones with black stripes. . . . *Tiger cubs!*

As soon as I was sure, I stood absolutely still. Where was their mother? Was she, in fact, *already* watching me? For up to that moment I had not been moving with a great deal of caution; and there was also that unfortunate cigarette. On the other hand she might not yet know of my presence – so I began to strain my ears to catch the slightest sound that might betray her. But that fresh breeze, playing with the leaves and trees, and boosting up the strains of *Ave Maria* from the wood behind me, was kicking up so much row that it must inevitably be masking any tiny sound that the tigress might make. Angry and frightened, I began to curse it heartily. But the next moment it told me where the Langra Tigress was.
The wind was blowing on to the right side of my face as I stood watching the cubs and listening. All at once – and it was but a fleeting impression – there whisked past my nostrils a distinct smell of tiger. There was no doubt about it – the scent of these animals cannot be confused with anything else on earth. Then, as if to confirm my nose, the tigress called sharply to her cubs from out of the darkness. That meant she had located me, or was, at least, very suspicious of some danger.

I raised the gun and switched on the torch. A light, I hoped, would confuse her. And being, most likely, right outside her experience, might persuade her to slink away with her precious brood without further incident.

Almost immediately I picked up her eyes in the beam of the torch. She was about thirty yards away. But the eyes were all I could see of her, because the torch batteries were becoming exhausted; they had just had a very hard night, and had not been new when I set out. The beam was just a dull yellow stab in the darkness with the eyes staring back from the end of it.

The tigress seemed to be moving very slowly: not directly towards me, but slightly and obliquely away. Without seeing her clearly, it was difficult to judge her intentions. Above all things I wanted to avoid risking a shot unless I had no other alternative. For it looked as if she was trying to make off. But I could not see her properly – if only the torch was a little brighter.

Automatically, with my left hand, I began to squeeze round the small switch which was strapped to the fore part of the gun: from past experience I knew that this treatment sometimes resulted in a brighter light, as occasionally the contacts became dirty. Still keeping the eyes in the centre of the beam, I began to squeeze harder.

I have never been able to account satisfactorily for what happened next: tensed up nerves certainly had something to do with it; that, and some unconscious sympathy shown by my right hand for what my left was doing – for, without in any way meaning to, I squeezed the right trigger.

Both recoil and report took me completely by surprise. And then, to my horror, as the noise of the explosion died away, I heard that low-velocity ball strike with a sickening smack! As it did so, the eyes vanished.

Appalled at what I had done, I stood and kept the light on the spot where the tigress had been. There was neither sound nor movement. After some time I began to think I had dropped her dead in her tracks. And this would not have been too much of a fluke; for the range was just over thirty yards, and the torch was so fixed that the shot would have passed down the middle of the beam. I waited a good ten minutes and then began to move slowly forward. But when I came near to where she ought to have been lying, there was nothing there. Nor, when I cast the light farther afield, was there any sign of her. Then I began to think I had missed, and that the shot had hit something else.

Now, by all the usual rules of tiger-shooting, it was asking for trouble to follow
her up at once. But those rules were for straight-forward, daytime hunting; the present circumstances were exceptional. It was still very dark, and the safest thing to do was to find the tigress before she recovered from the first shock of that bullet – if indeed she had been hit – and launched an attack. For there was no clue to where she was, and it was useless for me to think of running away until daylight – any direction might bring me straight on top of her. So I had little alternative but to continue the search.

Soon, I came upon the first blood, glistening in the soft glow of the torch, smeared on a few kakra leaves which had been rolled on. I set off slowly along the blood trail, which soon became very distinct. But every minute the torch was getting weaker; at times it started to flicker.

Almost without warning, I nearly stumbled right into her. Fortunately she gave herself away: there came a quick choking growl from a little way ahead, and when I whipped up the light I saw the Langra Tigress clearly for the first time that night. She was crouched, a little to my right and about seven yards away, her ears lying flat and her lips drawn back in a savage snarl. But before I had properly seen her and blinded her with the light, I knew she had seen me too. So I raised the gun quickly . . . and she sprang straight for the torch as I pulled both triggers.

Instinctively, even as I fired, I had known that this was coming: so I believe I had started to throw myself madly sideways and down as she was leaving the ground. But something, and I think it was one of her hindpaws, caught me and sent me sprawling backwards. I heard her land with a soft thud close behind me. I still cannot remember all I did, or even what went on during the next few confused seconds; but somehow I got the torch on her again, and she answered this with a choking, gasping roar which seemed to burst right in my face. Now she was on the ground with only her head and shoulders raised: obviously very badly wounded, but she was making a desperate and frantic effort to stand up – her great forepaws were clawing madly at the earth. Her hindlegs appeared to be useless; for the back part of her body was lying flat on the ground, and for all her furious attempts she was just dragging it slowly forward.

Keeping the light on her, I got quickly to my feet. All her violent, futile exertions told plainly of a broken back: a well-placed shot now would finish her. But the gun had only spent cases in the chambers. Never have I felt possessed of so many thumbs as I groped feverishly for cartridges. Right pocket, ball – left, buckshot . . . or was it the other way about . . . ? For my jacket suddenly seemed to have gone crazy – then I found it was hanging in tattered shreds about me. Somehow the ammunition was found and rammed into the breeches. By this time, in spite of the intensely cold night air, sweat was streaming down my face, because all the time I had been frantically fumbling about, the tigress, like some fantastic horror out of a nightmare, had been striving violently to get at me. Then, as I roughly snapped the gun shut and jabbed
the safety catch forward, she suddenly collapsed: her head dropped to the ground, and she began to gasp in great lungfuls of air.

She was obviously finished: but it seldom pays to be too sure of any tiger that is still breathing. So, somewhat unsteadily, I crept round to her flank and put in another shot at the base of her skull. A little shiver ran through the massive body, then the mouth opened slowly, and – after a brief moment – as slowly closed for the last time. With a slight final tremor, the great head sank more firmly onto the ground.

Up to that moment I had acted like a man going through a fantastic dream, whose subconscious mind is telling him all the time that none of it is reality. Now it was over, my knees suddenly felt so weak I had to sit down on the ground. And to steady my nerves I lit a cigarette. While I was smoking it I surveyed the damage to my zip jacket – the front had been torn right down. The thick scarf which I wore underneath had taken most of the punishment; apart from a few scratches, I was unhurt.

I did not really deserve to get away so lightly: that first shot should never have been fired; there was no proper excuse for it at all. I am quite certain now that if I had not fired, the tigress would have left me alone; for she had already called to her cubs and, as far as I could see, was making off, taking her precious brood away from that strange light beyond which she could see nothing. And who knows how many times she had seen me about before? Perhaps, after all these months, I had become quite a familiar figure to her, unknown to myself. If this were true, then she might very well have possessed all those sporting qualities with which I had once credited her.

As I finished my cigarette, dawn was just painting the eastern sky with delicate hues of pink and lemon light. And as the new day began, I reflected that the night patrols were over at last. Looking back on it all, I could not truthfully say that I had enjoyed it, although I learnt a great deal. But when I thought of the tigress, and the boar that removed my pants, I realised that as a night hunter I still had a long way to go. For the encounters had been brought about by my own carelessness; and each time I had been more lucky than I deserved. So, all things considered, I cannot recommend night-shooting on foot unless you have to do it . . . even if you avoid making the fat-headed mistakes that I made.

Hugh Allen , August 1956, Blackwood's Magazine
Walter Beresford, known to his friends as 'Sandy' because of his reddish-yellow hair, but styled by the Government of Bombay as Mr Walter Trevelyn Beresford, District Superintendent of Police, Dharwar, lay in a long chair on the verandah of the traveller's bungalow at D——, some sixty miles from Dharwar cantonment. In front of him stretched a beautiful little lake, covered here and there with masses of water-lilies; in far corners of it dab-chicks disported themselves, while a bunch or two of teal and an odd 'spotbill' sneaked about, half hidden by the reeds. 'Sandy' had an excellent dinner and felt at peace with the world; moreover, that afternoon he had bagged his seventeenth panther.

The only fly in the ointment of his happiness was that he was alone. It was the first day of the Christmas holidays and he had expected his old friend Ford Halley, the D.S.P. of Belgaum, to be at D—— with him. On his arrival that morning at the bungalow, a telegram was handed to him. He opened it and read the following words:

'Very sorry. Detained by a murder case. Joining you tomorrow.'

Beresford was thus condemned to spend the next twenty-four hours alone. Happily Ford Halley would be there for Christmas; so the two friends would eat their Christmas dinner together. On Boxing Day the real business of the camp would begin. They would drive for a man-eating tiger that had been doing a lot of damage over an area of twenty miles round D——. Ford Halley was an old shikari and had at least a dozen tigers to his credit, nor was Sandy Beresford a new hand. He had killed a couple of tigers, two or three bears and sixteen panthers.

During breakfast which Beresford, after a long ride in his car, ate with a first class appetite, his orderly, who also did duty as shikari, came in a state of suppressed excitement. 'Wagh! Sahib! Wagh!' he half-whispered, half-hissed at his master.

Beresford sprang to his feet. 'Patayat Wagh (A Tiger)? or Biblia Wagh (A Panther)悚?

'Mothe Thorile nahint. (It is not a tiger). Biblia Wagh ahe. (It is a panther).'

Beresford was at first disappointed, but on second thoughts felt a thrill of joy. If he got the panther it would make his seventeenth, only three short of twenty. Twenty
panthers were quite a respectable total for a man of only thirteen years' service. He turned to his shikari: 'Well, Dhondu,' he said, 'how far-off is it?'

'Sahib, it is only the other side of the lake. It killed a young buffalo last night and dragged the kill under a big tree. I have had the kill tied with a rope to the trunk and if the Sahib is ready to come this afternoon about four, I shall have a machan (stand) built and come and fetch the Sahib.'

'Splendid!' said Beresford. 'I shall be ready all right. You had better go back now and rig up the machan, so that all work it requires may be finished before half past three. The panther might wake up then, and if he saw you at work I should get no chance of a shot.'

The shikari salaamed and vanished.

Beresford took his rifle from its case, a .400 Jeffery cordite, that would stop a charging elephant. He glanced down the barrels and satisfied himself that they were beautifully clean; he put the rifle to his shoulder once or twice to see that it came up all right. Next he took out his shotgun which, loaded with SS, he carried always as a second weapon. These preparations finished, he lay in his long chair and smoked and dozed until tea time. A little before four his shikari appeared and the two men went off together.

The shikari had not underestimated the distance. The spot where the kill lay was only half an hour's walk from the bungalow; and when Beresford reached there, he found the man whom the shikari had left in the machan in a great state of excitement. The panther, he said, had come and had looked at the dead buffalo from a distance of fifty yards. Then it had moved away. It was somewhere close by. The Sahib should get into the machan without delay.

Beresford, recognising the soundness of the advice, climbed as quickly as possible into his hiding place. Ten minutes later he saw dimly the outline of the panther, lying in some bushes fifty yards away. It was too difficult a shot to risk; so he waited. After some five to ten minutes, during which time Beresford's heart thumped so hard that he was afraid the panther would hear it, the brute rose and came towards the kill. It was evidently not very hungry; for instead of beginning at once to tear the flesh, it stood looking at the dead buffalo, as if uncertain with which bit to start its meal. Before it came to any decision, a bullet from Beresford's .400 rendered the question academic. The panther lay dead on its dead victim, of which it would never eat another mouthful.

Beresford came back in excellent spirits, the villagers carrying his seventeenth panther, fastened by its four feet to a long bamboo pole. He tubbed, changed and ate the dinner provided for him with a Spartan's appetite, although indeed his cook had served a meal that needed no hunger sauce. Beresford was now reclining in a long chair, as I have said, in the verandah of the bungalow and a golden coloured 'peg' lay within reach of his right hand.
As he lay, he suddenly began to feel creepy. He remembered a story narrated to him, when a boy, of his grandfather General Beresford. The latter, when a young officer, had, shortly after the Mutiny, been posted to Dharwar, and had gone on a shooting trip to the very bungalow where 'Sandy' now resided. He had a horrible experience. Lying in a long chair in the verandah where his grandson now lay, he had gone asleep. By him reclined his friend, Captain Richardson, afterwards General Sir Archibald Richardson. He, too, had dropped off. General Beresford had been awakened by a sharp pain in his left arm. Looking at it, he had seen a tiger standing beside him. It had seized his arm in its mouth and was dragging at it. General Beresford had kept his head and had called to Richardson to fetch a rifle from within and shoot the brute. As the tiger was pulling at his arm, General Beresford had to go with him, for he feared that if he resisted the tiger would kill him outright. He rose and walked alongside the tiger through the compound – a via dolorosa as terrible as any in history – hoping always that Richardson would be able to put the rifle together and load it before they reached the compound wall. The idea that Richardson would show the white feather never entered his head; but General Beresford knew that on reaching the compound wall the tiger would take his body into its mouth to leap the wall. He walked step by step, as slowly as he dared. Suddenly he heard a cheery voice and the steps of his friend racing behind him. The tiger seemed utterly contemptuous of the newcomer and stopped near the wall, preparatory to gathering its victim's body within its mighty jaws. The moment's pause proved its undoing. Richardson, reaching the tiger's side, knelt down; aiming at its heart, he pulled the trigger. The brute's grip on General Beresford's arm relaxed and it rolled over amid a cloud of smoke. It was stone dead. Richardson had saved his friend's life; but General Beresford's left arm had had to be amputated; and Sandy remembered distinctly the empty sleeve that his grandfather used to wear pinned across his breast.

Sandy looked nervously around and felt very much inclined to run into his bedroom and bolt the door. Then he pulled himself together, smiled at his fears and said half aloud: 'The modern tiger has far too wholesome a respect for the Englishman to behave in that truculent fashion.' To support his statement, he drained the whisky and soda at his side, settled himself once more in his chair and a few minutes later fell fast asleep.

He had a ghastly dream. He dreamt that he had gone to bathe in the lake in front of the bungalow. As he entered the water one of his sepoys ran up and begged him not to, as it was full of 'maghars'. Beresford laughed at the warning and began swimming in the lake. Suddenly an acute pain in his left arm made him realise that the sepoy's warning was one to have been followed. An alligator had seized him by the arm and was trying to pull him under. Struggle as Sandy Beresford might, he was helpless. He cried aloud for help and in doing so woke up, the perspiration...
streaming down his face.

He gave a sigh of relief and wanted to wipe his face with his handkerchief. He found he could not move his left arm which, moreover, hurt him a good deal. Surprised, he looked and saw that a tiger was standing by his chair and had seized his left arm, just as the other tiger sixty years before had seized his grandfather's. By an involuntary trick of memory he called out 'Richardson! Richardson!' Then his blood ran cold as he realised that he was alone in the bungalow. If only Ford Halley had been there; but there was no one. Even the shikari had gone to another village to tie up for the shoot on Boxing Day. There were, it is true, the servants in their quarters; but their doors were certainly barricaded from inside and they would be far too frightened to come outside, even if they knew how to handle a rifle. Sandy Beresford's case was indeed desperate, nevertheless he called out at the top of his voice 'Qui Hai! Qui Hai!' hoping for some miracle to happen.

No one answered and the tiger, disturbed by the noise, was pulling at Beresford's left arm in a way that took no denial. Just as his grandfather had done, Sandy rose to his feet, and walked alongside the tiger down the verandah steps and across the compound towards the far wall. He continued to call at the top of his voice as he went. He knew that it was wasted breath; still, hope dies hard.

At last, when he was close to the compound wall, he realised that he was a doomed man. Nevertheless, he made a supreme effort to escape. Indeed he actually tore his arm out of the tiger's jaws; but the effort was useless. A stroke of the tiger's paw knocked him senseless to the ground. The tiger's teeth tearing through his heart and lungs effectually prevented his ever recovering consciousness. Taking Beresford's arm again into his mouth, the man-eater skilfully swung the dead man's body across its shoulders and easily clearing the compound wall disappeared into the forest.

Next morning Beresford's cook and butler opened the doors of their quarters and peered outside. Ignorant of the previous night's tragedy, the cook made his master's tea and the butler carried it inside the bungalow. The latter was surprised not to find Beresford in his bedroom and he was still more astonished to notice that his master's bed had not been slept in. He called to the cook and the sepoys. They searched everywhere but in vain. Then the butler saw drops of blood on the floor of the verandah leading into the compound. These they followed until they came to some softer earth where they could make out clearly an Englishman's footprints and a tiger's pugs. They guessed then that Beresford had fallen a victim to the very man-eater that he had come to kill.

When Ford Halley arrived about eleven, he found his friend's domestic staff in a state of utter perplexity and confusion. The shikari to whom Beresford had related what had happened to his grandfather was loudly proclaiming that the tiger was not an ordinary animal but a demon reincarnation of the beast that Richardson had shot.
It was, therefore, useless to hunt it. All that man could do was to flee from the accursed spot as quickly as possible.

Ford Halley brushed aside this fantastic theory and restored some order among the household. He organised a search for Beresford's body and found his half-eaten remains a mile from the bungalow. These he had put into an improvised coffin and sent into Dharwar, where they received a Christian burial. The rest of the holidays he spent hunting the man-eater and was able to put 'paid' to its account on the very last day, namely the second of January. In the meantime he reported his friend's death to the Bombay Government.

When His Excellency learnt the news of the tragedy he wrote a charming letter to Beresford's widowed mother, informing her – which was quite true – how much he regretted her son's death and how greatly he felt the loss of his valuable services.

From his brother officers, Beresford received the epitaph which was usual in such cases:

'Beresford killed by a tiger! By Jove, what bad luck!' After a pause, 'Damn it all! Dharwar is a splendid climate. I wonder whether the government would send me there if I applied for it.'

*Charles A. Kincaid*, *Indian Christmas Stories* (1930)
At Chao-ch'êng there lived an old woman more than seventy years of age, who had an only son. One day he went up to the hills and was eaten by a tiger, at which his mother was so overwhelmed with grief that she hardly wished to live. With tears and lamentations she ran and told her story to the magistrate of the place, who laughed and asked her how she thought the law could be brought to bear on a tiger. But the old woman would not be comforted, and at length the magistrate lost his temper and bade her begone. Of this, however, she took no notice; and then the magistrate, in compassion for her great age and unwilling to resort to extremities, promised her that he would have the tiger arrested. Even then she would not go until the warrant had been actually issued; so the magistrate, at a loss what to do, asked his attendants which of them would undertake the job. Upon this one of them, Li Nêng, who happened to be gloriously drunk, stepped forward and said that he would; whereupon the warrant was immediately issued and the old woman went away. When our friend, Li Nêng, got sober, he was sorry for what he had done; but reflecting that the whole thing was a mere trick of his master to get rid of the old woman's importunities, did not trouble himself much about it, handing the warrant as if the arrest had been made. 'Not so,' cried the magistrate, 'you said you could do this, and now I shall not let you off.' Li Nêng was at his wits' end, and begged that he might be allowed to call upon the hunters of the district. This was conceded; so collecting together these men, he proceeded to spend day and night among the hills in the hope of catching a tiger, and thus making a show of having fulfilled his duty.

A month passed away, during which he received several hundred blows with the bamboo, and at length, in despair, he betook himself to the Ch'êng-huang temple in the eastern suburb, where, falling on his knees, he prayed and wept by turns. By-and-by a tiger walked in, and Li Nêng, in a great fright, thought he was going to be eaten alive. But the tiger took no notice of anything, remaining seated in the doorway. Li Nêng then addressed the animal as follows: – 'O tiger, if thou didst slay that old woman's son, suffer me to bind thee with this cord;' and, drawing a rope from his pocket, threw it over the animal's neck. The tiger drooped its ears, and, allowing itself to be bound, followed Li Nêng to the magistrate's office. The latter then asked it, saying, 'Did you eat the old woman's son?' to which the tiger replied by nodding
its head; whereupon the magistrate rejoined, 'That murderers should suffer death has ever been the law. Besides, this old woman had but one son, and by killing him you took from her the sole support of her declining years. But if now you will be as a son to her, your crime shall be pardoned.' The tiger again nodded assent, and accordingly the magistrate gave orders that he should be released, at which the old woman was highly incensed, thinking that the tiger ought to have paid with its life for the death of her son.

Next morning, however, when she opened the door of her cottage, there lay a dead deer before it, and the old woman, by selling the flesh and skin, was able to purchase food. From that day this became a common event, and sometimes the tiger would even bring her money and valuables, so that she became quite rich, and was much better cared for than she had been even by her own son. Consequently, she became very well-disposed to the tiger, which often came and slept in the verandah, remaining for a whole day at a time, and giving no cause of fear either to man or beast. In a few years the old woman died, upon which the tiger walked in and roared its lamentations in the hall. However, with all the money she had saved, she was able to have a splendid funeral; and while her relatives were standing round the grave, out rushed a tiger, and sent them all running away in fear. But the tiger merely went up to the mound, and after roaring like a thunder-peal, disappeared again. Then the people of that place built a shrine in honour of the 'Faithful Tiger', and it remains there to this day.

Translated from the Chinese by Herbert A. Giles (1916)

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1 Constables, detectives, and others were liable to be bambooed at intervals, generally of three or five days, until the mission on which they are engaged has been successfully accomplished. In cases of theft and non-restoration of the stolen property within a given time, the detectives or constables employed may be required to make it good.
Where's the Tiger?

It is like any other evening. The brown sahib sits on the porch of his mansion overlooking the street outside. From where I stand in the living room, I can only see his shining boots and his grey trousers. Though the rest of him is hidden from me, I know he is wearing his usual white shirt, starched stiff and ironed. His slim body belies his age, and though he has no paunch he wears suspenders with his trousers. He is expecting visitors, visitors unknown to him, yet, who come here every evening and ask him, 'Where's the tiger?'

Today the visitors are all in their twenties and all wearing T-shirts with my picture on it – possibly another group that calls itself conservationists. There is one odd looking face among them; she introduces herself as Hua from China.

The sahib twirls his carefully groomed moustache as he leads his visitors into the living room, and, with an air of pride, he points in my direction. 'Look at him,' he says. 'What large teeth, the burning eyes, and what a shining coat!' People look at me with awe and at my owner with admiration.

'Wuh de ma, what a big tiger!' says the slit-eyed Hua in a strange accent. I see a kind of fear in her eyes as she shuffles some distance away from me.

'He won't bite, Hua,' assures my sahib as he runs his hand over my smooth skin and tries to dispel the fear of the girl. Soon the group is convinced that I am not that fearsome, at least not any longer, and sits around me. Even Hua, after some coaxing, snuggles into the couch next to me, though a measure of unease is still evident on her, and she rarely takes her eyes off me.

'Where did you get this one from?' asks a young man named Virendra.

The sahib always ignores that question. 'Annie, bring us some coffee, will you?' He quickly diverts the talk. Then the memsahib makes her gracious appearance. She is tall like our sahib, but unlike him she is very fair. Her name is Anita, but the sahib loves to call her Annie.

It is not always possible to avoid such a question, not if it comes from a conservationist. 'I am keen to know where you got this tiger. You know it's against the rules.' Virendra presses the sahib for an answer.

'A friend gave it to me, before he left for Australia,' retorts the sahib with a straight face. 'And I too am a conservationist, a senior member of "save our tigers"
movement.'

It was Annie memsahib and her tray loaded with coffee and snacks that come to the rescue. Not all have come here with the intention of seeing me. Some, like the plump boy sitting to the right, have come to feast on the delicacies offered by the memsahib. For now, they get busy indulging themselves with scones and muffins.

'In the good old days it was so different. Maharajas went on hunting elephants. A royal sport it used to be,' memsahib says as she pours some coffee for Virendra.

'Thanks Ma'am,' says Virendra and takes his coffee. 'Wasn't that awful? I mean the indiscriminate hunting. All those people who killed tigers for fun or for personal gain must be put behind bars.' He turns towards the sahib and adds, 'Don't you agree with me, Sir?'

At this, the sahib winces somewhat, though very imperceptibly, but I do notice the momentary wrinkle that comes on his brow. He looks the other way. 'What a glorious animal the tiger is!' he declares. 'But what a pity, people hunted it down for sport!'

You brute! It's because of you human beings, I am in such a state here. I wish these people could hear me. But it is no good, such wishes! These humans never heard another animal, much less would they hear me now.

'I too have signed in for the campaign,' adds Roma. She was so frail and so small – just a skeleton, no meat – I wondered what she could have done to save me. 'We distributed posters with pictures of the tiger, and we blogged a great deal on the Net and placed a lot of ads.'

Oh, so you blogged and turned my saviour! I pity myself. Such hogwash! This speaking up for me on the TV, placing ads, writing articles in papers, blogging, educating people, posters, T-shirts; a hogwash! I continue with my monologue, knowing well these people aren't listening one bit.

If you truly wish to conserve the tiger, all you need to do is leave us alone. First you encroach into our jungle, cut down all the trees and then make your houses, roads and factories right in the middle of our habitat. Finally, the biggest sham – you create the reserves, which happen to be the most dangerous place for a tiger. Your forest officials connive with the poachers and slaughter us right inside those protected areas.

'At the turn of the twentieth century there were 40,000 tigers in India; within just a hundred years, this number has dwindled to 1,411,' adds Virendra woefully. 'And today, how many tigers are left in the wild? I wonder if there are any! The last count was a disaster; no one ever sighted a single tiger.'

'In the last Chinese year of the tiger, that is to say, in 2010, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) counted only 45 tigers in our country,' speaks up Hua. 'The year of the tiger has come around once again, but the big cat is no longer found in China.'

They seem genuinely concerned but what use is it counting now? I know for sure
I was the last tiger roaming free in the wild.

At this point, the plump boy finishes his repast, wipes his mouth and joins in the discussion. 'My grandfather once told me, there was this man-eater that used to slink into our village at night and carry away our folks and sometimes our cattle. The news reached the king. He came with his rifle and bellowed, "Where's the tiger?" With a band of hunters he followed the trail of the animal into the jungle, waited the entire night and finally shot the beast.' He looks towards Memsahib expecting some more muffins.

There seems a certain heroism attached to killing a tiger. Tales are woven with rancour towards us and valour towards our killers. There are people who take it upon themselves to avenge the death of some gazelle. I am portrayed as a tyrannous creature that kills and devours humans as well as other docile animals. As for the first part, it is more a fantasy of the human mind. We never cross a man's path. If ever there was a scuffle, it was in the interest of self-preservation. And for the second part – our role in preying on other animals – that's our food, and that is exactly how nature ordained us to keep its balance.

'That's precisely what has led the world to such a situation. After all, the tiger needs to prey for a living,' adds the sahib, after deliberating for a while on the plump boy's account.

Well said, well said, Sahib. Go on, I am listening.

'Yes, we humans also kill for food. What's wrong? The tiger is carnivorous,' says Roma, our frail saviour.

So long as you people limit your slaughters to your need for food, there would be no cause for us to lament. You say you do it in the most humane manner; we too do it in our tigerish manner. But you also display a wanton desire to kill for pleasure, for sports, for keeping trophies and for showing off.

I know what is coming next – a photo shoot. They crowd around me as I stand among them in my usual majestic pose, powerlessly. Flashes and clicks go off everywhere. Then, each, in turn, get themselves snapped standing next to me. Even Hua picks up courage, edges up to a whisker length and places a hand on my head. More flashes and clicks go off this time and I am reminded of another kind of shoot.

Just then a little girl comes running into the room with her mother scrambling behind her. All heads turn towards the newly arrived pair.

'Where's the tiger?' cries the little girl.

'My girl wants to see a tiger,' says the mother. 'We went to the zoo. The keeper says the last tiger there died yesterday.'

'Oh!' says the memsahib. 'Gauri is gone. She was so lonely there.'

'The keeper says you have a tiger here. Where is it?'

'It's right here.' The group disperses a bit and I come face-to-face with the new visitors.
'No! It's dead. It's a stuffed tiger!' the little girl screams.

Yes, I am dead. I stand in this majestic gait here, but only as a centrepiece, a trophy, a mute artefact of a cruel game. I am dead, because the brute of this sahib shot me in my reserve, some years ago. You're right, little girl, I am dead. Not merely dead, but probably extinct!

_Surendra Mohanty_