



THE UNHAPPY TIGER

~ a fable ~



At the zoo, which in this fable we will call the Family Zoo, there were several tigers, each one secure in his cage. In their cages most of the tigers were content, more or less. Some cages in the Family Zoo were a little larger than others and some cages in the Family Zoo were a little more comfortable than others, but all of the tigers were content, more or less, except for one tiger who was very unhappy. The tigers knew that from time to time their lives would be made uncomfortable by circumstances, but they encouraged each other and so managed to get through the uncomfortable times. And the tigers knew that from time to time their lives would be made *really* uncomfortable by Nasty People and Uncaring People and Mischievous People. Although they wanted to hide themselves away, the tigers had to suffer abuse from these folk because they could not escape from their cages. The Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People would call the tigers names and say bad things, and sometimes even *do* really nasty and uncaring and mischievous things like throwing stones or poking with sticks. None of the tigers enjoyed the attention of the nasty and uncaring and mischievous people, but they tolerated it because they could not escape from their cages, and they encouraged each other and so managed to get through even the *really* uncomfortable times. They all tolerated it, except for one tiger – the Unhappy Tiger. Every time the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People called him names or said bad things or threw stones or poked him with sticks the Unhappy Tiger would fly into a rage and roar and hurl himself at the bars of his cage. But never could he reach the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People, and the other tigers watched sadly as the Unhappy Tiger limped away, battered and bruised, to lick his wounds in the farthest corner of his cage.

Of course, as time went on, the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People visiting the Family Zoo learned that it was no fun to torment the tigers who quietly tolerated the names and the bad things and the stone-throwing and the stick-poking. They would go straightaway to the cage of the Unhappy Tiger and they would call him names and say bad things and throw stones and poke him with sticks, and always the Unhappy Tiger would reward them by flying into a rage and roaring and hurling himself at the bars of his cage. And always the Unhappy Tiger would limp away, battered and bruised, to lick his wounds in the farthest corner of his cage. And always the other tigers in their cages were very sad. And always the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People went home excited and happy, looking forward to their next visit to the Family Zoo.

And so it went on, and on, and on. The Unhappy Tiger became more and more unhappy and the other tigers became more and more sad for their unhappy friend. Until one day the other tigers decided that they needed to Take Action. So they held a pow-wow (or whatever it is that tigers do when they need to meet to discuss a problem). Of course they could not actually *meet* because they were all in their own cages, but they managed to communicate in the mysterious way that tigers do. And they came up with a Plan, a Secret Plan, which they kept very close to their tiger chests. (So you and I, dear reader, will never know exactly what the other tigers decided to do, although we might suspect that the Secret Plan could involve sharing a few jars of Tiger Beer – the beer with Hidden Depths, all the way from Darkest Malaya.) However, eventually the Unhappy Tiger listened to the other tigers and understood the wisdom of their words. He promised that he would try to ignore the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People whenever they called him names or said bad things or threw stones or poked him with sticks. It was a difficult time for the Unhappy Tiger, but he tried his hardest to do as he had promised. And sure enough, things began to change. The Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People continued to visit the Family Zoo, but something had indeed changed; the tigers were no fun. Soon the Unhappy Tiger noticed a difference. The Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People still tormented him, calling him names and saying bad things and throwing stones and poking him with sticks. They hurt him; but instead of flying into a rage he just turned his back, and instead of roaring he just growled quietly, and instead of hurling himself at the bars of his cage he just took himself to a far corner of his cage, which was closest to the other tigers, and the not so Unhappy Tiger went to sleep and dreamed a dream of happy days playing with the other tigers in the distant jungle and on the high mountains and on sandy beaches in far-off places.

And so, dear reader, what do you suppose happened to the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People? Well, they very soon became bored with the tigers because they were no fun. Off they went to another part of the Family Zoo where there were different animals to be tormented, and there the Nasty People and the Uncaring People and the Mischievous People once again began calling names and saying bad things and throwing stones and poking with sticks. And then the crocodiles became very unhappy; and then they became very cross; and then... but that's another story!

