A TIGER’S TALE

BASED ON THE JUNGLE OMNIBUS BY RUSKIN BOND

My home was a large one consisting of tall trees with

thick, broad leaves. The leaves provided a good amount

of shade for the villagers who lived on the fringe of the

forest. The forest held a mystery of animals. Sometimes

you could hear the cry of a jackal or the synchronized

choir of crickets or if you listened closely, when the stars

gleamed their brightest overhead, a mighty roar of the

tiger.

I remember when there used to be loads of tigers

but they were all beheaded to take as trophies or tamed

and taught to entertain the petty minds of humans. I was

the only tiger that remained and the whole jungle fell

silent whenever I had walked through those trees. My

coat had black stripes and the rest was the color of

the setting sun: orange with a bit of yellow mixed in here

and there. I had razor sharp ears, which could pick up

any sound, even the soft, sweet music of a flute, which

belonged to one of the village boys Ramu, a small skinny

boys with brilliant blue eyes like the wavering ocean. He

was bringing in his herd of buffaloes to the jheel.

One day while the buffaloes basked in the cold waters of the jheel

Ramu collected some hard-shelled nuts and proceeded to

the mahua trees. The pale blue flowers were edible by

humans and beast alike. With great agility he climbed the

tree. After picking about five or six flowers he heard a

soft scuttling noise and saw a hideous brown bear with a

large ugly snout, come out among the trees.

Ramu, although he wasn’t scared, stood very still for he knew

the mother might be in vicinity. As the baby bear was

passed Ramu’s tree the nuts slipped from his sweaty

palms and with a dull crack hit the bear’s skull. The bear

gave a howl of pain and several things happened at once.

First the mother bear came charging into clearing and

made straight for Ramu but then I jumped out of

nowhere and roared. Both the bears fled for their lives. I

slowly looked up at Ramu, who looked like a corpse. He

whispered, terrified, “ thank you”. I nodded, turned and

leapt gracefully into the cover of trees.

About a week after I saved Ramu I was just dozing under a tree

when I heard the strangled cry of a barking deer and, as I raised

my head, I saw why it was afraid. There spreading

everywhere with the speed of light was a raging wildfire.

Its red, yellow and orange flames danced and mocked the

petrified animals. I wasn’t scared since I knew the

humans depended on the forest and its inhabitants. So I

watched, just as I anticipated, the humans threw bucket

after bucket of water from the jheel.

After the fire had completely died down and I took a walk through the

ashes and ruins of the forest and thought with a

sickening feeling that I have no more food to eat. After

about ten day I was on the point of starvation when

Ramu came with his herd of buffaloes. Ramu was

careless and one of the buffaloes wandered off and I

killed it. I couldn’t help it. I ate to the fullest and ran off.

The next day I did the same and that’s when the villagers

got angry. They planned to hunt me down just like all

those before me. They got drums, torches, spears and all

other sort of violent weapons and started their hunt.

Soon I was fleeing for my life and ran in every direction. I

could not have taken on thirty humans and made it out

alive. When I reached the banks of the Ganga I was

expecting to find peace but instead I found Ramu holding

a long knife. He dropped the knife and ran towards me

and spoke in an urgent whisper “ listen the flow of the Ganga

leads to another island with many tigers, go or

they will kill you. You saved my life now I am saving

yours” and with that he took off. I could hear the beating

of the drums. So I took Ramu’s word for it and sprang

into the flowing waters of the Ganga and started

pedaling. After hours in which I nearly died I reached a

luxurious island with short palm trees. I grinned and

roared my mightiest roar and heard one back. The roar of

a tigress.