



## *I. The First Awakening*

Blinding light!

His vulnerable pupils narrowed, and the eyelids he had just prised apart snapped shut again involuntarily. The blanket of reddish fog through which he experienced the sensations of his young life was back in an instant. He was aware of a sweet-smelling warmth, of being hungry and replete again, and of impatient kicking and shoving next to him, which he reciprocated unthinkingly. He could hear the deep, calming, throbbing sound that had been there since the first dawn of his consciousness, and he could feel something raspy and moist run over his head. Sighing, he poked his nose into the fragrant warmth again and drew in the smells of his tiny world greedily, sensing the promise of nourishment and protection offered by the bulky presence of his mother.

They were inseparably joined, one... A violent blow, accompanied by indignant squealing, struck him, and he opened his eyes a second time. With his head inclined to one side, he seemed ready to retreat into the familiar darkness. A golden shadow came down, white whiskers tickled his nose, and a damp, pink tongue moistened his face. Expanses of gold hove into view, and he saw a white area which was good to look at – not at all like the harsh glare that had terrified him earlier. Dark, irregularly-spaced stripes stretched over the the gold and white areas; spots of light, brightly-colored arrows and circles flitted and danced over them. He traced their path with his eyes, then lowered his gaze and saw gold and white fur again, interrupted by black lines, but smaller this time, part of a being with four stumpy appendages that were flailing and kicking in all directions. An unconscious impulse reached his small paws. They stretched out. He issued a command; and five pads splayed out, five delicate blades unsheathed themselves. The mother's head leaned over him once more. Her rough tongue caressed his neck and chest. He stretched out languorously on his back and, looking into her eyes, saw himself against a brown background: a little Bengal tiger with round ears, a broad nose and the unknowing, still-blue eyes of a newborn. His gaze roamed over the dancing spirals of light, further and further, until it suddenly found itself in new terrain. Shades of green and gray were mixed through the yellow background here and formed a tangle of lines and circles, light and shadow, that gradually flowed into an expanse of brilliant blue far above. Marveling at what he saw, the little tiger followed the blue color – and his eyes met the awful glittering brightness once more! A hefty blow, and the fivefold scratch which came with it, distracted him before he could become aware of his eyes hurting. He looked to his side and saw the culprit, who was kicking out frantically to the right and to the left, all the while with his tiny mouth attached firmly to the maternal milk source. Another blow struck home. But he wasn't the target! The indignation of the little warrior was aimed, rather, at a third shape on his right that had

slithered and come to lie half on top of him, hindering his search for nourishment. ere was a rumbling noise above and the huge head leaned over the fighters once more. Lips opened, and the the little tiger perceived two mighty daggers on the side facing him. The mother caught hold of the wriggling hind quarters of the delinquent and pushed them gently out of the way. A quick grooming, a soothing purring, and she leaned back again, relaxed and watchful at the same time.

So this was what the world was like, bigger and more colorful than he could have imagined.

At the beginning, he found the range of colors confusing. Then he would close his eyes, the better to let the familiar sounds wash over him. A chorus of different voices could be heard from the canopy of leaves above him, and they built up to a frantic, dissonant cacophony whenever the mother tiger rose to her feet and moved a few steps away. Usually she just stretched, threw open her gaping mouth with the long fangs, and let out a deep hoarse rumbling sound. The cubs shambled after her, following the maternal odor of milk and saliva. The rhythmic beating of her heart rekindled a memory that was almost gone: the state of unconscious dreaming, lacking for nothing, from which they had been plucked by an elemental force that had pitched them, one after the other, into a terrifyingly narrow channel before catapulting them out violently... The little tiger sniffed longingly, drawing in the scent of his mother, his world.

Sometimes the scent seemed laden with hidden promise, part of a language he did not yet understand. His bigger brother, the impetuous warrior of the first awakening, did not smell like that. The milk sister was different. Maybe that was why the brothers knocked her over again and again, snapping playfully as they strove to reach her unprotected flank, while she growled in protest and thrashed about with her limbs to defend herself. She could not know that it was the whiff of an unknown temptation that attracted her brothers. Later on, they noticed a new, spicy tang that their mother brought back from her forays. She would lick herself extensively and clean her red snout before she turned to the cubs to suckle them, play with them and protect

them faithfully. They depended on her and trusted her absolutely. When she went away, the cubs remained still and observed their surroundings alertly, just as she had taught them. Once they saw a spotted, four-legged creature with a long tail slip past. It was smaller than their mother, but they sensed danger. Their stripy bodies froze, merging with the ground. Colorful flying creatures landed nearby and croaked provocatively, as if they knew the cubs presented no danger. Sometimes time dragged. The light would start to decline, and they would still be lying there quietly, waiting for their mother. They never waited in vain: sure signs of her return were always manifest before the dark closed in. The sounds of the jungle would change, a sense of unease would become palpable, and the warning cries of the many denizens of the forest would fluid

black and golden shadow, calm and gentle purring above them, and the raspy tongue would run over their fur again. This was happiness...



## *IX. Business Interrupted*

No, this couldn't be happening! He had been observing the strange bipeds for a long time now, following them as a golden shadow, gliding invisibly past them through the thick brush, not two tiger-lengths away as they edged forward on their clumsy hind legs, and freezing immobile whenever one of them turned around and listened to the jungle sounds. No, it was impossible for them not to notice him, impossible that they had neither seen nor heard him. And yet it was so. When he did not want them to see him, they were unaware of his presence. All his encounters with them up to now had shown that the two-legged creatures moved heedlessly and communicated with each other noisily, as if they were half

deaf and had no enemies to fear. That their second skin was sometimes barely distinguishable from the color of the grass scarcely made much difference. The jungle had registered their presence, observed them from under cover, breathed in their strange smell – and remained silent.

They turned up in groups, sitting on the back of the gray giants that his mother had always respected, squinting through black tubes and gesticulating to indicate plants and animals that seemed deserving of their attention, and all the while the massive gray animals trod impassively through the knee-high grass. Or they climbed out of their noisy, smelly auto-mobiles and risked taking a few steps with their own legs, sticking to each other closely as if they feared an ambush. Their skin and hair shone in a whole range of colors, although most of them tried to camouflage themselves to look like grass or bushes. Once, an entire herd of identical creatures had appeared. To his untutored eyes, they had been almost indistinguishable: uniform head coverings over black hair, broad brims shading their eyes, the same pale skin, the same grass-colored second skin – they had been identical right down to their footwear. All of them had carried small boxes around their necks. They stared through these again and again, and he thought he had heard whirring and clicking noises emanating from them. Soon, he had noticed that the different groups all came for the same reason: They wanted to pay a visit to the creatures of the jungle. They took their cues from their leader, looked down at the tracks he pointed out on the ground or up into the branches of the trees, remained rigid and still when he issued his warning calls and moved off again when they heard his calls of encouragement. Soon, he knew that more than anything else, they were looking for him. Why this was so puzzled him; they did not want to eat him, after all. Their behavior when they saw him rather reminded him of his first encounter with the noisy auto-mobile. They seemed content, even joyous, when he broke cover and revealed himself to them, and they bewailed his disappearance. They appeared reliably in the same spot when the sun had

reached a given height, left their vehicle only briefly and generally remained close to it, as if they wanted to be able to retreat to it if danger suddenly arose.

He began to test them, making himself visible and disappearing, then appearing and disappearing once more. The results were unambiguous and predictable: he could control their behavior. He opened his mouth wide and turned to the group with a hoarse growl. Enthusiastic cries. He extended his routine, stretching his front paws forwards with his rear end high in the air, expanding his footpads and unfurling all his claws. "Encore!" He sharpened his claws against a tree, the full length of his body stretched out against the trunk: an impressive demonstration of courage and strength. A tall male in the group began to bring his front paws together rhythmically in response, and the others joined in noisily before their leader calmed them. At moments like this he bemoaned the fact that his mother and the other two cubs avoided the groups of strangers. They disapproved of his solo expeditions and demanded that he rejoin the family. He disobeyed, abandoned the others to prowl back to the place where he encountered the bipeds, curious to see these strangers with their high entertainment value. He had become used to their regular appearances. Although they did not come each time the sun traversed the sky, when they did make an appearance, it had always been in the same place and when the sun had reached a particular height in the sky. That had always been the case up to now.

But not today. Today was different. They had appeared at an unusual time; it was already late afternoon. A small group, no larger than his family. He had not expected to see them; he was already ambling back to his family when a sound reached his ears and made him reverse his tracks: the noisy, stinking automobile! A short distance away from where it usually stopped, it went silent and was abandoned while the rest of the party followed a narrow trail, laden with all sorts of equipment. The leaf-eaters had trampled out the path, and his family also made use of it from time to time. He followed them cautiously through the brush, remaining one

tiger-leap away from them. The bipeds noticed nothing, although they were unusually quiet. Only their breathing was clearly audible as they strained under the loads they carried on their backs. No, they hadn't seen him, nor had they heard him or picked up his smell. How hopelessly underdeveloped their senses were!

The path ended at a hidden waterhole. Water trickled out of the earth and collected between large boulders in a shallow basin, just before a rise in the ground upon which a few trees grew. It was enough to slake one's thirst and rest in the heat of midday. Was that what they wanted to do? Apparently not. They remained only briefly at the water's edge, scanning the earth for tracks, before climbing the small hill. With a sigh of relief they dropped their burdens, surveyed the hidden water hole and the surrounding jungle, looked up at the largest tree with its overhanging branches and large leaves and nodded to each

other. The young tiger followed their gaze and stared, taken aback: the shadow-giving tree!

Something had happened to it since the last time he had rested here with his mother and the others cubs. A wooden scaffold was wound around the tree trunk. It was at least two tiger-lengths above the ground, and it was supported only by a fork in the trunk where branches diverged, and a roughly-twisted liana. The two-legged creatures must have erected it in secret while his family rested at the still water, and now they had come back to take possession of the shadow-giving tree once and for all. A tree trunk with evenly-spaced notches leaned against the front of the structure. He did not know what it was for until one of the bipeds shouldered some of the gear they had brought with them and used it to climb up to the platform. Another followed by the same route. They deposited their loads, unfolded things to sit on, opened containers and finally attached a long rope with several knots to the strongest branch.

The two who had stayed on the ground also remained busy. They cleared the area, collected thorny scrub and spread it evenly in a ring around the tree, leaving only a narrow entrance which they used to gain access to the wooden gangway and the platform.

There, they unfolded various dappled awnings, connected them with cords and sticks, and suddenly they were invisible: where the platform, the bipeds and all their paraphernalia had been, now only shades of mottled brown and green could be seen. He saw their paws reaching out for branches and linking them; then the dense layers of large leaves covered even the tarpaulins. He was amazed. Had he not been able to hear their strident voices and noisy trampling behind the protective barrier, he would never have believed that there were bipeds there. They left their hiding place, one by one, via the notched piece of wood. Apart from one of them. He grasped the rope and swung himself over the edge of the platform, emitting a long-drawn out, high-pitched scream. He swung back and forth a few times before landing on the ground with a thud and a grunt. The others gave him a clap on the back, then picked up a few small pieces of luggage – one of them had a fire stick with him – and went back down to the water hole. They waved once more to him from below and called out a greeting to him. He responded with the same sounds – it sounded like "Good Luck" – and then they were gone, swallowed up by the jungle.

The tiger looked at the new inhabitant of the forest curiously. The latter looked at the fiery sun, whose day's work would soon be done, and then at the horizon. Suddenly, he tore off his grass-colored headgear and waved it with his outstretched arms, revealing a flaming red pelt over his pale face. The tiger was surprised to see the burning fur. But the stranger put the fire out with his cap, turned his attention to his new accommodation, and climbed up to the wooden structure after he had laboriously blocked off the entrance below with thorns. The tiger could hear him making a racket up there for some time. Then all fell quiet. The sun set the horizon alight as it prepared to depart; the jungle awoke

to new life, and various small inhabitants of the forest took their places down at the water. Noticing his thirst and hunger, the tiger decided to rejoin his family. Time for whatever remained of the carcass his mother had hunted down the previous evening.

The family accompanied him to the water hole the following morning. It was deserted, as was the space under the tree. They hesitated briefly, then settled down next to the water to wash themselves, play and dose. The shadow-giving tree behind the ring of thorns was inaccessible to the four tigers. They avoided thorns; they had had enough painful experiences with them.

The young tiger listened intently, his ears cocked towards the tree. Nothing. He sniffed the air carefully. Nothing.

The others had come to the same conclusion much earlier and were content to eat, play and rest. When they departed, he was last and turned around for one last look before disappearing into the low bushes. In the mottled wall over the trunk, he saw a flash of bright red, a light spot below it and two eyes looking into his; then the image disappeared behind a carpet of leaves and the tree was as mysterious as before. The face of the red-haired stranger had disappeared. The young tiger hurried to catch up with the others, but suddenly he hesitated, slowed his pace, remained still – and turned back. From a safe distance, yet close enough to see and hear everything, he looked across at the shadow-giving tree and waited. He waited only for a short time before the face appeared and moved carefully from one side to the other – and then the biped stepped out through an opening in the dappled awning, opened his mouth wide and stretched his arms as he had done the previous evening. Then he gripped the false liana and swung down from the tree, less dexterously than the first time, and far more clumsily than the nimble tree-jumpers. If he wanted to live in a tree, this biped still had a lot to learn. He created a gap in the thorny barrier and marched through it. What was he planning? Did he want to go down to the water, bathe and still his thirst? That must be it. After taking another look around, the stranger took a few steps towards the water, but then stopped half way down and, standing before a slightly smaller tree, fumbled at his

second, grass-colored skin and moved his lower body forwards slightly. The pale yellow jet arced, dampened the grass, rose higher and hit the trunk. There could be no doubt about it: the male was marking his territory.

And not satisfied with that, he took a few more steps, dropped part of his second skin and squatted down in a small hollow. The young tiger involuntarily broke his cover, the better to take in the sights and smells. He sniffed the air, wrinkled his nose, smelled and saw that to which nature has damned her children, and looked discreetly to one side – straight into the eyes of his mother. She was crouching between bamboo shoots, ready to leap; she must have become suspicious and returned to the water together with his brother and his sister. Both wanted to bound over to him, but hesitated at the sight of

the stranger. The latter was about to stand up and had already drawn his second skin back up over his hips when he heard an animal noise and spun around instantly to find himself facing the young tiger, two more young animals down by the water – and their mother, about to leap. His protective shelter was only a few meters away, but he would never make it that far; the mother tiger would reach him before he reached the wall of thorns, her mighty paw would knock him over and her bite in his neck would kill him: Food for the youngsters, the fantastic film of a peaceful tiger family his legacy... He would never make it to the sanctuary of the tree with the hide. But the second tree, barely a step away, not quite so big and strong, had branches that would support his weight, branches that he could pull himself up by until he reached one where he could sit, out of the reach of the furious mother tiger. A jump, a handhold, another one, he pulled his legs up behind him, and climbed, higher and higher, his unbuttoned trousers flapping around his hips and threatening to slide off altogether. He hauled himself, gasping, onto the branch which promised refuge. He was safe! The young tigers were amazed by the skill and speed with which the biped could suddenly climb, escaping their incensed mother by a hair's breadth. She dug her claws into the trunk in vain, tried to reach him with her paws and her teeth, circled the tree growling and finally settled down right underneath the stranger.

She sensed that he was not in his element so high above the ground. The branch bent ominously under his weight, and the twigs underneath promised him even less hold. If the branch broke, her victim would drop at her feet like a ripe fruit, as the cheeky treejumper once had. Only when he raised a thin shiny object to his lips and startled the four with shrill whistles did they retreat a short distance.

They continued to watch his every movement, ready to jump forward at any time; they saw him cling to the trunk with one front paw and grope for something with the other, saw his broad grimace as he pulled a dark object out of his grass-colored skin. Holding it in a trembling, twitching paw, he tried to press various buttons at the same time. They smelled the fear of this isolated creature clearly – the fear which prised the shiny object out of his hands, causing it to fall and roll until it landed at the feet of the young tiger's brother, who flinched, startled, before stretching out a paw and flicking the object playfully towards his sister. Both of them sniffed at the black object, carefully at first, but then more and more fearlessly, unperturbed by the screaming of the tree's odd occupant – until their mother took it off them, gripped it with her teeth – and bit down on it. A bang, a scream, an acrid smell they recoiled from. The mother tiger dropped the box-like object, and shook her head, growling and hissing, blood running from her tongue, dribbling. And the two-legged creature in the tree? He had covered his face with a front paw when the mother held the shiny object between her teeth, and what he had called out sounded like "Oh... No!" Now the object that had attacked the mother so treacherously lay unmoving in the grass, and none of them dared touch it. The

mother tiger's tongue hung far out of her mouth, and she spat bloody red bubbles.

The young tiger's thoughts drifted automatically back to the attack from which he had fled in panic. The day he stretched out his paw curiously to touch a stranger, he had received a painful shock, and, who knows, perhaps the mute, rigid creature would also have bitten him in the tongue if he had not drawn back and turned tail so quickly.



Time moved only slowly for the waiting tigers. It grew twilight and then night. The gray dawn was followed by the sun rising and embarking on its traverse of the skies.

They had spent the night under the tree – asleep but instantly alert at every sign of movement above. The tree dweller had made another attempt to climb up to a higher branch, but had desisted when it creaked uneasily. They were woken repeatedly by a piercing whistle, which he unleashed again: ... --- ... and again ... --- ... His cry for help went unanswered.

The midday heat of the following day lowered itself over the creatures of the jungle, drove the four tigers down to the water and tortured the solitary tree dweller. After he had whistled for a long time and then sat unmoving, leaning against the trunk, he suddenly began to exhibit signs of heightened activity. He seemed to be interested in the fruit of the tree. He broke an overhanging branch off and, using it as a tool, crept along along the thin branch and fished for the twigs which bore fruit. The tigers registered his exertion, heard heavy breathing and a cry of triumph as he broke off the first piece of fruit and brought it towards his snout. He ate greedily; juice dripped down his chops on both sides of his snout. He mopped sweat from his face and reached out for the next twig, growing increasingly dexterous and redoubling his efforts after every success. He had eaten the first fruit greedily, but now he was taking his time, and he stowed the last piece of fruit away in his second skin with a satisfied grunting sound. Now, for the first time in a long time, he turned his attention back to the four, who had monitored his efforts suspiciously, and spoke to them imploringly, pointing to the water hole and then to the horizon before closing his speech with a wave, as if he wanted to shoo them away. He sank abruptly into a dreamy state, his head leaning against the trunk of the tree. His breathing became regular, and his head dropped to one side; it seemed as if he were about to fall. Waking rudely, he clung more tightly to the trunk and reached for his signal whistle once more. The piercing tone sounded again and again. The four tigers ignored it. A few smaller animals down by the water listened for a moment and then lowered their heads once

more and continued to still their thirst. When they had first heard the sound, they had dispersed wildly in panic, but now the jungle was familiar with the new sound and had added it to its catalog of the manifestations of life.

Later, the moon rose over the horizon and cast its light on four sated tigers next to what remained of a leaf-eater which the mother had been able to kill during the hours of darkness. They were woken by a dry, long-drawn out sound. They lifted their heads as one and looked up to see the stranger tearing parts of his second skin into strips, tying these together and winding them around the middle of his body and then around the tree. He tugged at the knots and let himself sink back into the relaxed position from which he had arisen so

suddenly. Soon, his head sank once more to the side, and his gentle, even breathing showed that he had fallen asleep. He slept fast amid the lights of the sky, and was still asleep when the sun rose above the horizon and the buzzing of a motor could be heard in the distance, then close by. He heard neither the voices of the approaching bipeds nor the crackling of twigs under their heavy boots. When the men reached the clearing, it lay empty and abandoned, as if there had never been any tiger family, and they had to wake the photographer before they could free him from his unfortunate predicament. They gave him water, and while he drank in deep drafts, they let their eyes wander, shook their heads and looked back at the exhausted tree dweller. Far and wide, nothing suspicious could be seen, nothing commanded their attention.

The four tigers observed the strangers from their hiding place, saw them climb up into the shadow tree and fetch their equipment from the platform before they all set off on their return journey. A little later, they heard the noisy, smelly auto-mobile roar into life and move off. This time, no biped had stayed behind. Once more, they had smelled nothing, seen nothing, and heard nothing. Their senses were dull.



