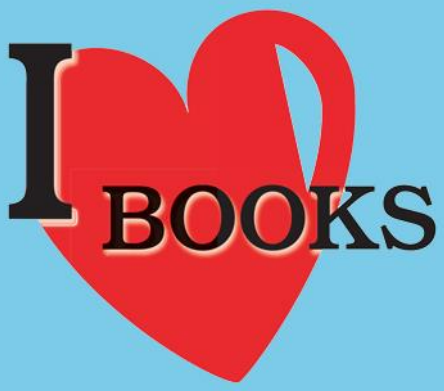


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Opening extract from

The Troublesome Tiger

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The Troublesome Tiger

Zoe couldn't help exchanging a worried look with Oliver. She really hoped she could find something that Tindu the tiger loved – she hated seeing him so unhappy. If Tindu couldn't be tempted out of his pen, it might even mean that they would have to find him a new home. And without Tindu, there'd be no reason to bring in Koko, the female tiger. Tanglewood might end up with no terrific tigers at all!

For Taz, my very own tiny Tindu.



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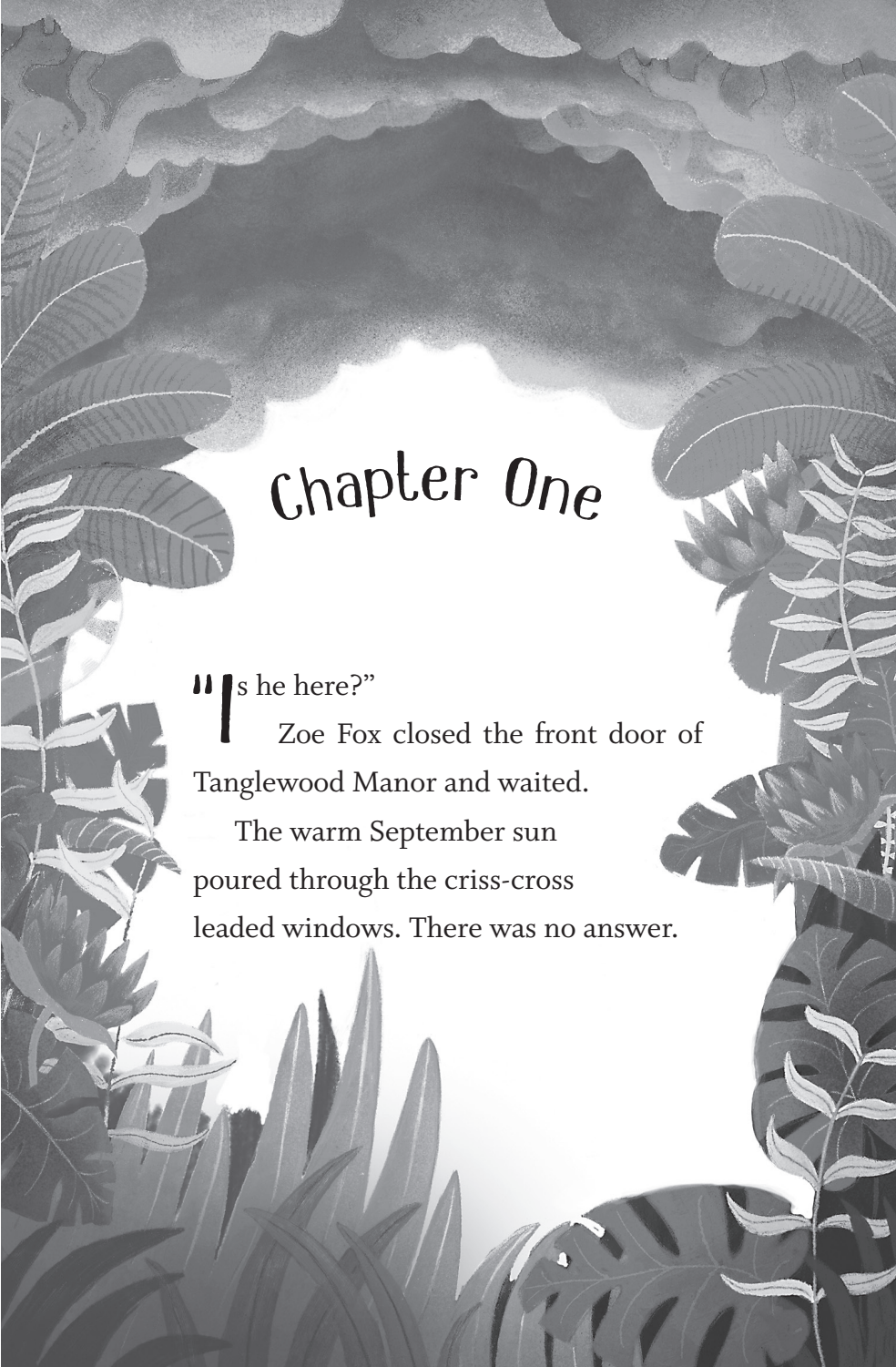
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Chapter One

"Is he here?"

Zoe Fox closed the front door of Tanglewood Manor and waited.

The warm September sun poured through the criss-cross leaded windows. There was no answer.

Breathless with excitement, she dumped her school bag in the grand, wooden-panelled hall and hurried straight into the kitchen in search of her mother. Normally, the first thing Zoe did when she got home from school was dash up the sweeping staircase to her room, to swap her sticky uniform for shorts and a Team Tanglewood polo shirt. Then she'd head into the animal park that surrounded her home and wander from enclosure to enclosure, saying hello to her favourite furry friends. But today was different. Today, she was desperate to hear about their newest arrival: Tindu the tiger, who was coming from a zoo in Berlin.

"Mum," she said, skidding to a halt in front of the kitchen table. "Is Tindu here?"

Mrs Fox smiled as she looked up from the animal book she was reading with Rory, Zoe's four-year-old little brother. "Yes, he's here."

Zoe felt a thrill of excitement wriggle through her. She'd seen Sumatran tigers at other zoos and she couldn't wait to meet Tindu.

"Don't get too excited," Mum went on. "We need to have a little chat before you go racing off."

There was a guarded note in her voice that made Zoe's heart sink. She'd been distracted at school all day, wondering whether the tiger had arrived safely or whether he'd been held up on his way to Tanglewood. Transporting any animal could be tricky – they had no way of understanding what was happening, or why, and could easily get upset – but Zoe knew both her parents had been especially worried about Tindu's move. Sumatran tigers were critically endangered, hunted by poachers and chased from their homes by humans; every single animal was important to make sure the species survived. It was vital that Tindu arrived at Tanglewood happy and healthy, ready to get to know his new home.

"Is everything okay?" she asked, trying to squash a sudden burst of worry.

Mum gave her a sympathetic look. "He's fine. But you can't see him – not yet. Dad and the big cat

keepers want to keep the area around his enclosure as quiet as possible."

Zoe nodded, trying to hide her disappointment. She knew how important it was for Tindu to get used to his brand-new, eco-friendly enclosure without too many distractions, so that he wasn't frightened or nervous. Then, once everyone was sure he'd settled in, her parents and the Tanglewood keepers would introduce him to Koko, a female tiger who was due to move from Chester Zoo. If everything went well, they planned to hold a Terrific Tigers weekend in October to help raise awareness of the dangers faced by all tigers. Tindu and Koko would be the star attractions.

But that wasn't the only reason Zoe's parents were hoping Tindu would settle into his new home fast. With only four hundred Sumatran tigers in the wild, it was more important than ever to make sure there were plenty in zoos around the world. Wild tigers might prefer to live on their own, but in zoos they were often kept in pairs or trios. There wasn't room to give each one an enclosure of their own, and

having another tiger around helped to make zoo life more fun. And if Tindu and Koko liked each other enough, there might even be the pitter-patter of tiny tiger paws around Tanglewood in the future. Zoe couldn't think of anything cuter. Ever since she'd been lucky enough to see the birth of baby zebra Flash at Tanglewood, she'd been hoping for more zoo-borns. Little tiger cubs would be amazing…

"How was Tindu's journey?" Zoe asked.

"Okay, I think," Mum said. "He's a bit wary and confused, as you'd expect. He has no idea what's happening, after all. It must be scary for him."

Zoe thought back to when her family had moved from London to Tanglewood in the summer; she'd been excited but a little bit nervous too, even though *she'd* known what was happening.

Tindu had been shut inside a crate during his move, unable to see what was going on; although he'd been perfectly safe, Zoe could understand why he'd be upset.

Mum seemed to sense she was disappointed.

"There's an observation camera in Tindu's den. Why don't you pop along to the control room and watch the live feed from there?"

Zoe felt her spirits lift a bit. She might not be able to see Tindu in the fur but a video stream in Tanglewood HQ was the next best thing. Grabbing a bag of crisps from the cupboard, she dashed out of the kitchen. "Thanks, Mum!"

Tanglewood HQ was in another wing of the old manor house, away from the part Zoe and her family lived in. It was the control room for the park's security team. All the video feeds from the cameras around the zoo were shown on a wall of screens. It was like watching lots of televisions at once. Zoe had spent several fascinated hours there, watching the action around the zoo and chatting to the different security guards. They didn't know as much about animals as the keepers, but they spent so much time keeping an eye on things that Zoe found they were full of interesting stories.

She tapped on the door and waited for it to open.

To her surprise, the lemur keeper, Mizbah, let her in. It wasn't unusual to find a keeper inside Tanglewood HQ – they often observed their animals from a distance – but Mizbah usually liked to be out in the park, being hands-on with her lemurs. Zoe didn't blame her; the ring-tailed lemurs were her absolute favourite animals too. She'd hang out with them every day if she had the chance.

"Hi, Zoe," Mizbah said, smiling. "I bet you've come to spy on our latest arrival as well."

Mizbah was curious about Tindu too, Zoe realized with a grin.

"That's right," she said, waving to the security guard. "Hey, Hans."

Hans waved back. "Good afternoon, Zoe. I think you want screen six."

Zoe gazed at the panel of screens until she found the right one, trained on the tiger den. "Have you been watching long? How is Tindu doing?"

"I finished my shift about half an hour ago and have been here ever since," Mizbah said, sighing.

"Poor Tindu, he's not very happy. In fact, he's still inside his crate at the moment."

She pointed at the corner of the screen. The camera was focused on the tiger's den – a wide concrete room, split into three living spaces by metal bars. The spaces were connected by hatches, which could be opened or closed, and each one also had a low door leading to the outside habitat so that the tigers could choose whether they were inside or out. The den had a public viewing area, although visitors were separated from the tigers by two sets of bars and a large gap. Only keepers were allowed to stand in the gap between the bars, and it was absolutely forbidden for anyone to go inside the den with a tiger. Strict rules were in place to make sure everyone stayed safe.

One of the spaces had a large pile of straw in the corner – Zoe guessed that was for sleeping – and what looked like a tasty meat treat nearby. At the edge of the picture, outside the bars, Zoe could just make out the shadow of a person – her dad, maybe,

or Cassie, the senior big-cat keeper. There was no sign of Tindu, though. None at all.

Mizbah pointed at the furthest den wall.

"He's in there, hiding in the crate on the other side of that hatch," she said. "Eventually, he'll get hungry and come out."

He probably feels safe in the crate, Zoe thought. She knew his previous keepers at the Berlin zoo had spent a long time making sure he was comfortable in it ahead of his long journey to Tanglewood. She also knew that a scared, unsure tiger was a dangerous one – another reason Zoe hoped he'd travelled well. She hated the thought of any animal being unhappy.

"What if he doesn't come out?" Zoe asked, her voice small. "What if he stays in there or doesn't like it here?"

"Let's give him a chance," Mizbah said. "He's only been here a few hours after all."

They watched for a while as shadows flitted around the edge of the screen but there was no sign of Tindu.

"Why not pop back in the morning?" Mizbah suggested. "He might be feeling braver by then."

Reluctantly, Zoe agreed. She knew it would take time for Tindu to get used to his new surroundings, but she'd hoped to catch a glimpse of him at least. Sighing, she said goodbye to Mizbah and Hans and made her way upstairs to change out of her school uniform.

Zoe decided that she'd go and visit Flash once she'd changed. The zebra foal was so cute it was impossible to feel anything other than happy around him. She'd caught the bus home from school with Oliver and he'd mentioned he'd be there. As the son of Tanglewood's Chief Vet he had responsibilities around the park, just like Zoe, and one of his jobs was to help look after the zebras. Maybe Zoe would be able to give him a hand.

Oliver lived in one of Tanglewood Manor's old servant cottages. He and Zoe had just started at the same school too, although they were in different classes. *He's almost as animal-crazy as I am*, Zoe

thought. *I bet he's itching to find out what's happening with Tindu too.*

Zoe felt better as soon she walked into the park. It was getting near to closing time – any visiting schoolchildren were long gone and there was a sense of calm that Zoe knew wouldn't be there at the weekend. She loved seeing the park full of visitors, peering in at the animals with happy, amazed faces, but she liked it more once the gates had closed and she had Tanglewood almost to herself.

A loud roar shattered the peace, rumbling over the park like ferocious thunder. Zoe grinned – that would be Sinbad, Tanglewood's majestic African lion. He lived with four females over at Big Cat Mountain and he loved letting everyone know who was boss. His roar carried for miles – sometimes, it was the first thing Zoe heard when she woke up. Now he was probably hungry – the big-cat keepers would be preparing the lions' feed and it sounded as though Sinbad couldn't wait.

Zoe took the long way round to the zebra paddock,

circling up past the red pandas to loop under the high wooden walkways of Snowy Point. This was where Tanglewood's snow leopards lived in the amazing enclosure Zoe's mum had designed for them. Zoe paused for a moment to watch Minty and Tara as they padded along the logs that hung from the ceiling, admiring their silvery grey fur. Dragging herself away, she headed once more for the zebras.

There was still a small crowd gathered there and Zoe soon understood why – Flash was going for cute overload. He was frisking all over the paddock, tossing his stubby black mane and kicking up his heels while his mother, Candy, looked on.

"He's so adorable," one woman said, snapping photo after photo on her phone.

A little girl with her face painted like a butterfly tugged on the woman's hand. "Can we get a baby zebra, Mummy? Please?"

Zoe leaned on the fence, grinning. She remembered asking her own mother almost exactly

the same question when she was four, except she'd wanted to take an elephant home with her.

"I don't think a zebra would get on with our rabbit," the woman said. "And I think they might bite."

Flash looked up and saw Zoe. He came trotting over, whinnying in hello, and she reached over the fence to gently pat his neck.

"That girl is touching him!" the child said, her eyes widening.

"That's because I work here and Flash knows me," Zoe explained. "Zebras can bite and kick, especially if they're scared."

Flash nuzzled at her pockets, his black-tipped ears flicking back and forth as he looked for treats. It was difficult to imagine a less dangerous-looking animal, Zoe thought with a smile, but they could really fight back when they felt threatened. Luckily, the Tanglewood zebras were fairly tame.

"See?" the woman said, flashing Zoe a grateful smile. "We can't have a pet zebra, no matter how cute they are. Now come on, you. Time to go home."

They walked away, just as Jenna the zebra keeper arrived, with Oliver behind her.

"Hi, Zoe," she said. "Want to help us with the grooming?"

Zoe smiled. "I was hoping you'd say that."

Oliver handed her a wooden dandy brush. "The more the merrier," he said with a grin. "Grooming makes my arms ache after a while."

Jenna pulled a bunch of keys from her pocket and undid the padlock and the safety lock on the gate of the enclosure. Zoe followed her inside and Flash came trotting towards her.

"I don't have any snacks for you today," she told the zebra foal, laughing. "Sorry."

Oliver held up a carrot. "Look what I brought. But you can't have it until later."

Zoe and Oliver got to work brushing the dust from the black-and-white striped coats. Most of the zebras stood patiently while they were being groomed, making gentle nicker sounds as their stripes began to shine. It was amazing to think that

each pattern was unique. Tanglewood had eight zebras in total and the keepers had kept Candy and Flash separate from the other zebras when he was first born, partly to make sure Flash was safe but also to give him time to learn and recognize his mother's stripes. Zebras might look the same to the untrained eye but their patterns were just like fingerprints.

Once the grooming was done and the mucking out was finished, Zoe and Oliver said goodbye to Jenna and walked back towards the manor house. Tall wooden fences hid the tiger enclosure from view as they passed. Zoe's mother had spent weeks working on the new habitat, ready for Tindu to move in. It used the same eco-friendly materials and techniques as Snowy Point, harvesting rainwater from the roof to water the plants inside and top up the waterfall. There was even a swimming pool, with heated rocks dotted around so that Tindu could keep warm in the colder months, and plenty of places for Tanglewood's visitors to admire him from behind the toughened safety glass windows. *All we need now*

is for Tindu to settle in, Zoe thought, tempted to peek through a gap between the fencing.

"Have you seen him yet?" Oliver asked.

Zoe shook her head. "I haven't been to the enclosure. I went to see if I could see him on the security cameras, but he was still in his crate."

"Dad says we have to give him time."

Zoe bit her lip. Poor Tindu – she wished there was some way to make him feel more at home.

The sun was starting to dip as they slipped through the gate from the park into the manor gardens. The gravel crunched noisily under their feet and Zoe's eye was caught by a sudden flash of orange across the grass. She stopped walking and Oliver stopped too.

"What?" he said.

"Look!" she said in surprise, pointing towards the trees. "There's a cat." A ginger tabby was watching them with wary eyes. "I wonder who it belongs to?"

Oliver frowned. "There aren't any houses for miles around here."

Zoe nodded. "Exactly – so where has it come from?"

"Maybe it's a stray," he suggested. "Or a feral cat – you know, a wild one."

Zoe felt her heart sink a little. If it was a stray then that meant someone was missing it. It was probably hungry too. She took a few steps towards it, holding out one hand. "Here, puss. Are you friendly?"

The cat turned tail and ran.

"I guess that answers your question," Oliver said, starting to walk across the grass towards his own home. "See you tomorrow."

Zoe stared at the trees where the ginger tabby had vanished.

"Yeah, see you," she said in a distracted tone.

"Don't worry," he called. "It'll probably have found its way home by the morning."

But Zoe *was* worried. She couldn't just pretend she hadn't seen the cat – what if it was lost, far from home and all alone in the woods? Thinking fast, she hurried into the house and opened up a tin of tuna.

She spooned some on to an old plate and left it outside the back door. There was every chance the fish would be gone by the morning, eaten by a passing fox from the woods, but it made her feel a little bit better to think that maybe the ginger tabby might find it first.

"Be lucky, puss," she whispered, as she closed the back door.