The Tigers in the Tower

A Little Princess – with tigers! Orphan and outcast Sahira Clive is a brave and plucky heroine with a brightly burning heart. I was rooting for her all the way to the end of this thrilling – and thought-provoking – adventure.

Ally Sherrick, award-winning author of *Black Powder*

A delightfully engaging global escape! Golding pulls readers into a tale of London's Tower Menagerie with the classic feel of Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. *The Tigers in the Tower* is not only a well-researched adventure for animal lovers, it is a story of hope, love, and family that will capture the heart and imagination of readers young and old.

Lauren H. Brandenburg, author of *The Books of the Gardener* series and *The Death of Mungo Blackwell*

An almost magical adventure into an exotic corner of London's history. Colourful characters and vivid imagery bring to life the remarkable story of a feisty girl. *The Tigers in the Tower* is a must read for animal lovers of all ages. Like Sahira, I'll be dreaming of tigers for days to come!

Luke Aylen, author of the *An Adventure in Presadia* series

Sahira's adventure of towers, tigers, and treachery is underpinned by deep values carried along by a story where you can never guess what will happen next.

Andrew Briggs, Professor of Nanomaterials, University of Oxford

The Tigers in the Tower is a beautifully written story that will take you on a journey from India to Victorian Britain. It tells of how one girl's courage, kindness, and love of tigers is key to getting through the highs and lows of life. This book is an adventure you won't want to miss!

Sharon Dirckx, author of *Am I Just My Brain* and Senior Tutor at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics (OCCA)

THE TIGERS IN THE TOWER



JULIA GOLDING



LION FICTION

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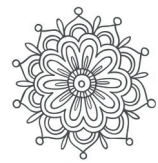
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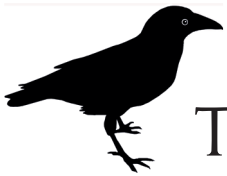
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For Dr Nigel Pearson.
For over a decade, you have always helped me with my books whenever I have a tricky medical question so I thought it past time I wrote one just for you! Thank you for your years of dedicated work as a doctor to the poorest people in the world. I hope you enjoy Sahira's story.



Part 1

London



The King's Royal Menagerie
Tower of London

This ancient edifice, built in 1465, in the reign of Edward IV, for the reception of

FOREIGN **BEASTS, BIRDS,** &c.

presented to the Kings of England, could never, since its foundation, boast a more significant and splendid VARIETY than it does at present.

First Department – A Beautiful, Majestic, Fully grown

BENGAL LION



AND HIS CONSORT, IN ONE DEN

*

YOUNG LIONS

✦

ROYAL TIGERS

*



THE STRIPED or UNTAMEABLE HYENA

✦

Leopard & her cubs

*

PAIR OF ORIENTAL PORCUPINES

✦

OCELOT, OR TIGER CAT

A Beautiful Zebra



KANGAROOS

✦

SOUTHERN OSTRICHES
Pelicans of the Wilderness

*

EAGLE of the SUN



And Golden Eagle

✦

Majestic Elk, from the East Indies



Tapir, or Hippopotamus of South America

Boa Constrictors, or Great Serpents of Java





Prologue

Last night one of the tigers escaped. Slipping free of her tether, she climbed the ladder and slunk past the sailor on watch. Sniffing his canvas trousers, whiskers twitching, she contemplated taking a bite before the scents of the shore lured her onward. The man nodded sleepily at the wheel, unaware death had passed him by.

Padding on velvet paws, she leaped to the rail and dived into the star-filled expanse of the Thames. No one noticed just one more splash in the busy Pool, the mooring place in the river where trading vessels from the Indies unloaded their cargo in the world's biggest city. There she trod water for a moment.

Should she head north or south?

The reek of Billingsgate fish market drew her to the northern bank and with powerful strokes she made short work of swimming to shore. She dragged her sodden pelt up the beach, startling the young mudlarks scavenging at low tide, and so began a new legend of the beast that crawled from the slime at night to snatch the unwary. With a rolling shrug of her shoulders, she shook free of the river water, then surveyed her new home. Odours of horse and human, cats, rats and dogs, refuse and dung assaulted her nostrils. Searching, she could find no smell of jungle or village, no bullock at the plough or cotton field, no spices in the air, no fragrant wood smoke – only coal dust.

But then she caught it: a hint of green. Using her well-honed tracking skills, she padded up the ramp from the beach, past the frightened beggar children shivering sleepless in upturned boats. They whimpered and clung to each other but tonight they were not

her prey. Paws met cobblestones. The narrow ravines between houses made the tiger's fur bristle. Any of these darkened windows could hide a hunter armed with more than claws and teeth. She had lost too many of her family to cowardly bullets. Keeping to the shadows, she wound through the mazy streets of Wapping, heading west.

Finally, just as the tiger was beginning to think that the houses would never cease, the cramped walls of brick released her onto an open plain. There, in the centre of the grassland close to the river, was a white tower. The ancient edifice stood proud, surrounded by double walls and a moat. What was it? It was much bigger than the wooden walls of the ship she had sailed in but it smelled confusingly of the jungle. She could hear the roar of lions, the chatter of monkeys, and the shriek of eagles as they scented the threat that was at their door. Intrigued, the tiger approached, coming like dawn from the east, a creature of a hot orange sun, striped by bars of black cloud.

The keeper in his bed in Lion House felt the tiger's arrival in his dreams. Mumbling to his wife, he turned on his side and pulled the covers over his head.

Chapter 1

Sahira Clive sat cross-legged in front of the iron-barred cage. Rama and Sita prowled at her back, girl and tigers watchful for the next attack. They were a little team of three against the world, braced for whatever misery it would serve up to them.

Rain flattened Sahira's dark hair against her face, soaked her clothes, and speckled her companions with diamond droplets. Their fur was so much better than cotton and wool at repelling water. Not for the first time, Sahira wished she could be one of them.

Sita sneezed.

"I know, Sita, I know," Sahira murmured. "But what can I do?" She could feel the tigress's desire for freedom pushing at her back, ordering her to lift the latch and let her and her mate roam free. But their ship was floating in the heart of London and they were waiting to disembark; getting loose would end in musket fire and an afterlife as a tiger-skin rug. Sita could only prowl unfettered in Sahira's dreams.

"What are we going to do with the girl?" The East India Company official who had met the boat huddled with the wives of the officers Sahira had travelled with from Calcutta. He held a black umbrella over his head, struggling to keep control in the stiff breeze.

Nothing about this place was as colourful as home. The bobbing motion of the umbrella reminded Sahira of the last procession she had witnessed in India as she waited for her ship to sail. A great prince had been embarking on a neighbouring vessel, bound for his education in England. His umbrellas had come in silk of many colours,

with tassels and beads, and were used to keep off the sun. Did the sun ever shine here in England, or was Sahira's nurse right? Bala had said the foreigners were so pale when they arrived in Calcutta because they were like naan dough, uncooked and pasty. Then, under the hot sun, they freckled and burned, just like the bread baked in the tandoor.

"Her parents' death was unfortunate in so many ways. I feel sorry for the girl." Mrs Tailor glanced in Sahira's direction and smiled apologetically.

Sahira looked down at her lap. There was an empty place in her chest where her heart had once beaten. Sometimes she wondered if she were still alive, because she felt like a ghost of herself, going through the motions of eating, drinking, speaking. She'd never been apart from her family; she'd always been able to reach out at any moment and touch her mother's soft fingers or her father's prickly beard. Now when she reached out there was no one there, only the tigers. Sahira felt the bitter tears gather inside but she could not shed them; it was as though the rope on the well bucket had been cut and she couldn't bring her emotions to the surface. She did not hate Mrs Tailor, not like she did the other women. Only Mrs Tailor had entered quarantine in the cabin with Sahira and helped nurse her parents when everyone else had fled the fever. As for the other British wives, Sahira had no time for them because they had none for her. In their dull brown and blue seagoing coats, they looked more like vultures gathered to peck a carcass. They could scent that Sahira was stricken – desperate. Sahira hated to appear like that to her enemies. The wild was not kind to one that became separated from the herd. Only the very tough, or those protected by others, survived.

"Can you take her, Mrs Tailor?" asked the official hopefully.

Sahira's heart lifted. Of all her options, that wouldn't be so bad. But the thought immediately followed: *what about the tigers?*

Mrs Tailor's mouth thinned, brow furrowed. "I'm afraid not, sir. It would be misunderstood by my family if I returned a widow with a native child in tow. That kind of thing will not do in Hampstead."

Sahira's brief hope flickered out. No, she and the tigers would not do in Hampstead.

"Of course not. I apologize." The man blushed. "That was insensitive of me. Did Captain Clive have family, do you know?"

"They cast him off," boomed Mrs Bingham, the largest of the vultures with a black bonnet framing her pinched face. "Marriage to the native woman was a step too far for them. She won't receive a welcome from Lord Chalmers at Fenton Park from what I hear."

Fenton Park was Sahira's father's ancestral home. Captain Clive had spoken of it with great affection, describing the fish and frogs in the clear streams, the squirrels and deer in its woods, the ancient yew tree in the churchyard. *"No better place for bird watching,"* he had told her as they sat around the campfire in the jungle. Sahira could recall the evenings of storytelling with crystal accuracy, still hear the crickets rasping in eardrums with their shrill rhythms. Nights in the jungle were punctuated by strange cries from the depths of the trees and every step had been a negotiation with death. When their journey became too hard or too frightening, Captain Clive had conjured up Fenton Park in his stories, a fairy-tale palace set in a fertile landscape, home to the modest brown animals of this realm. He had taught Sahira to value the small and overlooked as well as the great creatures of India. He had praised the virtues of a gentle landscape, a balance to the terrors of the magnificent one they had travelled through collecting their animals. God's creation was infinitely varied and he marvelled at all its facets.

The Company man was shaking his head in sorrow that an easy answer was denied him. "We will send word to Lord Chalmers, nonetheless. Until we get a reply, I suppose we'll have to place her in an orphanage. They might overlook her origin. You would hardly know she was a native with that auburn hair of her father's."

"But one look at that unfortunate complexion and they'll know," sniffed Mrs Bingham. "There's no whitewashing her scandalous birth."

From feeling nothing but numb grief, outrage now sparked and burned hot in Sahira's heart. Her fingers formed claws on her palms. Feeling her distress, Rama rattled the cage, provoking shrieks of alarm from the ladies.

"Surely the girl is too close to the bars. Those beasts will hurt her!" exclaimed Mrs Tailor.

"Not that one," replied a gruff old seaman who was standing by to hoist the cargo. "She's more like their cub."

The captain gave his crewman a reproving look for speaking out of turn. "Don't worry, ma'am, we've rifles and whips ready. No need to fear the wild beasts."

This wouldn't do: she was putting the tigers at risk. Sahira tried to calm herself. She couldn't let the tigers be punished for sympathizing with her. As her parents had taught her, she reached for stories of the past. They had both been tale tellers to rival Shahrazad of *One Thousand and One Nights*, so she sought help from her storybook of memories.

Her father's smiling facing came into her mind's eye, hazel eyes twinkling above his rusty moustache. *"You are as beautiful as your mother, little one. Let no one persuade you otherwise."* He held her above his head, swinging her between him and the sun. *"You are the exact same colour of my favourite spice, nutmeg."* She could still feel his whiskers on her arm as he pretended to nibble her elbow. *"And you smell like nutmeg too."*

That always made her giggle.

Baba. A wave of grief overwhelmed her and she buried her head in her knees.

The grown-ups had carried on talking about her, dissecting her with their disapproval. "And look at what she's wearing. No decent English girl would be seen wearing trousers!" declared Mrs Bingham.

"It's a *salwar kameez*," said Mrs Tailor, who had lived on a small station upcountry rather than in one of the big cities. She knew more about the natives than the women who had not emerged from their barracks. "Quite decent for India, I assure you, Mrs Bingham."

"But this is London!"

"Quite. Eleanor, dear, do you have some other clothes you can put on?" asked Mrs Tailor.

Sahira lifted her head. There it was again: the foreign middle name they insisted on using for her, finding her first name too exotic.

"I do have your kind of dresses." She'd brought a trunk of European dresses her father had had made for her in the bazaar of Hyderabad. The seamstress had copied pictures in one of the lady's magazines belonging to the Resident's wife. They had been a few years out of

date but Sahira's mother had said they would do. At twelve, Sahira wasn't expected to be in the first rank of fashion.

"Then run along and find one of your gowns," coaxed Mrs Tailor. "We need to put our best foot forward if we are going to persuade the kind people who run the orphanage to take you."

If they were kind, what did it matter how she was dressed? Biting her tongue, Sahira returned to her cabin. She had been sleeping on a mat on the floor, too scared to stretch out where her parents had lain. The beds had been stripped after their death, the linen buried at sea with their bodies. Also gone overboard were most of their clothes and possessions, all for fear of contagion. There was little left to say they had ever been here. Except the animals, of course. And Sahira.

Delving in her trunk, brought up from storage by a considerate sailor, she found one of her favourites. It was a pale green cotton dress with a border of elephants marching around the hem. Sahira folded up her salt-stained loose trousers, unbuttoned the flame-orange tunic, and slipped into the new dress. It had a scooped neck, small puffed sleeves, and fitted tightly at the waist before flaring out in silly amounts of material that were bound to get in the way. Only the elephants reconciled her to the gown. She had insisted that each London dress had some animal decoration to make it bearable. Sahira looked down at her bare feet in their sandals and remembered the women on deck in their boots and thick stockings. She had been chilled since the ship left the Azores and had wrapped herself in blankets most of the grey days and hopeless nights. It was true that her toes were cold and wet; she would have to adapt to this new climate. She dug further down in the trunk and pulled out a pair of stockings, an undergarment her mother had laughed at but what her father had blushed and called "pantalettes", and finally a pair of blue leather boots, dyed by the old shoemaker in Narrow Alley to suit Sahira's taste for colour.

"So my little girl is going to walk the London pavements in sky boots, is she?" Father had asked with a smile.

"I don't want to walk them at all," Sahira murmured to the empty cabin, tugging the laces. She just wanted to go home, so badly she could taste it, like ginger hot on the tongue.

But there was no home any longer. Nowhere on Earth was "home" to her. Sahira no more fitted in India than she did in England. Only being with her parents had made sense of her existence, so maybe her true home lay at the bottom of the sea with them?

Finally ready, Sahira buckled the trunk closed on her Indian clothes. She was Sahira Eleanor Clive, daughter of Captain Richard Clive of the East India Company service and Begum Noor un-Issa, noblewoman of one of the oldest families of Hyderabad. She had nothing about which she should be ashamed. She had given her father her sacred promise that she would look after the tigers.

And she was *not* going to an orphanage.