Helping your children choose books they will love

I ♥ reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

Opening extract from

# A Tiger Too Many

Written by

## Antony Wootten

Published by

## Eskdale Publishing

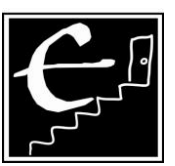
**All Text is Copyright © of the Author and/or Illustrator**

Please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

# A Tiger Too Many

**Antony Wootten**



Eskdale Publishing
**www.eskdale.150m.com**

Eskdale Publishing , UK

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Eskdale Publishing,
North Yorkshire

**www.eskdale.150m.com**

Text copyright © Antony Wootten 2011
Cover illustration copyright © Antony Wootten 2011

The rights of Antony Wootten to be identified as the author and illustrator have been asserted.

All rights reserved
No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted by any means or in any form, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the publisher's prior permission.

All characters in this publication, both human and animal, are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

A Catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-9537123-1-1

An environmentally friendly book printed and bound in England by
www.printondemand-worldwide.com

This book is made entirely of chain-of-custody materials

*I would like to thank the late Clinton Keeling, the zoological historian who became my unofficial advisor while I was writing this novel. Clinton's detailed memories of London zoo, as well as events in the wider world during the war, which he willingly and patiently shared with me, were valuable beyond words.*

# *Chapter 1*

Adults tried not to show us they were scared about the war. But we already had our gas masks, and we'd helped with the preparations, like putting up the blackout curtains, and sticking tape across the windows to stop glass flying around if a bomb landed nearby. How could we not be scared? We just had to carry on as normal though. The war started on the 3rd of September 1939, and for me, everything changed the very next day. Even though it would be almost a year before the Germans came, that was the day the killing started.

Pete, my brother, was much older than me. He was a grown-up, and sometimes people thought he was my dad. But my dad had died when I was a baby. Pete worked in London Zoo, and whenever I could, I went with him to help. It was a Monday, but my school, and most public places, were closed, in case of bombing raids. The zoo was closed too, but only to the public. There was still lots of work to be done there. Mum was a housemaid for a rich lady in town, and she had to go to work as normal, so she said I had to go with Pete. I'd be safer there

than on my own at home. It was sunny, but I had a dreadful sick feeling in my stomach. I could see the silvery barrage balloons in the sky. I liked the way they stayed up there, like kites, swaying peacefully, and changing shape very slightly in the wind. But I knew they were supposed to stop the Germans flying their planes low over London to drop bombs, and that made me feel afraid.

Pete was Junior Keeper in the Lion House. Mr Florey was in charge of the Lion House, but today he'd gone up to Whipsnade. The Lion House was a long, brick building. Outside, there were enclosures where some of the animals could walk about, but lots of animals were kept inside too. It wasn't just lions in the Lion House. There were Jaguars, tigers, and cheetahs. There were even two giant pandas, Tang and Ming. They were so soft and friendly looking, I loved watching them. I loved all the animals. But my favourite was Ronny, the oldest tiger. His orange stripes were the same colour as my hair. I thought he looked wise and gentle, and I felt sorry for him because he was getting old and was often ill.

But today, something was happening in the Reptile House. I could see it from outside Ronny's cage. It was at the other end of Broad Walk, the

wide path which ran through the middle of the zoo. I'd seen the keepers coming and going with boxes, and the man in the suit with his clipboard, and the lorry parked outside. I followed Pete round for ages, getting in his way, asking him what they were doing. Eventually, when we were having a break in the keepers' room upstairs, he told me.

And I couldn't believe it.

"Why do they have to *kill* them?" I gasped.

"Jill, Sugar," Pete said softly, putting his big hand on my shoulder. Pete always called me Sugar. He called other people 'Honey'; well, girls and ladies anyway. But 'Sugar' was just for me. "I know how you feel," he said, stooping so his blue eyes were right in front of me. "But, you know, there's a war on now, the zoo could get bombed. If any of those snakes got out, it would be really dangerous. If one of them bit someone... Some of them can kill, you know."

I knew Pete was right, and I'd been coming here with him for long enough to know that sometimes animals had to be killed if they were sick or injured. But killing healthy animals seemed so unfair. They couldn't help being poisonous. The lump in my throat wouldn't go away, even when Pete hugged me. He stroked one of my plaits. "I

wouldn't have brought you today if I'd known. No-one tells me anything. Anyway, it's not all bad. I've got a surprise for you a bit later. You'll love it. I promise." He squeezed my cheek. Pete knew I hated it when other people did that, and he only did it as a joke. Usually I'd laugh, and then maybe punch him in the arm. But today I just turned, and went outside.

"Don't do anything that'll get me the sack!" Pete called.

I didn't want to help Pete today. Today I just wanted to wander around, looking at the animals, and trying to forget the poor snakes and the war. I had my heavy gas mask hanging at my side. The string was already digging into my shoulder, but Mum said I had to carry it wherever I went, now.

I could smell a bonfire somewhere. The zoo was almost deserted, and Ronny was pacing backwards and forwards in his enclosure. I leaned on the barrier and watched him through the thick wire mesh. He always had his head down these days. He seemed sad, and tired. Pete said the enclosures never got any sun, and the cold North Wind could blow right into them. That's not good for a tiger. I wished I could save him, take him somewhere warm to live. He looked at me. I loved it when he

did that. Some of the other animals never looked at you, as if they couldn't even see the people outside their cages. But Ronny always looked at the visitors. Sometimes he growled at them, or jumped at the side of his enclosure, making it shake and rattle, and the people scream. I gazed back at Ronny's dark eyes. I knew he was only teasing.

I could hear the howler monkey whooping now, and the chattering of the birds in the nearby Bird House. But when the zoo was closed like this, it always surprised me how quiet the animals really were.

Opposite Ronny's enclosure were the wolves. They paced up and down all the time, and the wind ruffled the fluffy hair on their backs. I watched them for a while, then wandered up onto Broad Walk. I was going towards the big pond, to see the penguins, when I heard a gunshot. I recognised it straight away. That's how they killed the bigger animals. Surely not snakes though. Pete hadn't said any of the bigger animals were being killed today.

There was another gunshot. It was close by. I suddenly wondered if maybe it wasn't the zoo-people at all. I froze in terror. Had the Germans come here already? But why would the Germans

come and attack the zoo? No, animals were being killed. With my gas mask box banging against my side, I ran back past the wolves, towards the Antelope House. I was sure the noise had come from there.

I could already see the zoo lorry parked outside the front. Six men came out of the building, carrying a large animal in a sort of canvass hammock. It was like a big deer, with a ruddy-brown back and stripes on its legs. An eland. They swung it up onto the back of the lorry, making it bounce as the animal landed. They pulled the hammock out, and went back inside with it. A few minutes later they came back out again. This time they had a smaller animal, with short horns. It was a zebu. Soon it was on the lorry beside the eland, its legs sticking up in the air at an angle, like dead trees, and the men were mopping their brows.

I couldn't understand it. I knew about the snakes, but these two animals were so gentle. They wouldn't hurt anyone even if they did get out. Why did they have to die?

A man in a suit came out next. He was holding a clipboard. He had an old-fashioned bowler hat on and his gas mask box strung across his body. I wiped my eyes, took a deep breath and walked

right up to him.

"Excuse me," I said, all calm, like my mum when she gets cross with someone. "Please kindly tell me why you are having these animals shot." I had my hands on my hips.

He looked down at me. "Hello, young lady," he said sternly. "Pete Larch's little sister isn't it?" I nodded. He sighed, and looked around at the other men. They all just looked away and started talking.

I carried on looking up at him, trying to be stern.

He crouched down in front of me and smiled. "My, you're a bold one, eh?" he said, and squeezed my cheek. I just looked back at him, without reacting. He stopped smiling. He sighed again, and said, "My dear, sometimes, so others can go on living, some have to be... sacrificed."

"Why?" I said.

"It's... complicated."

"But... they're not even dangerous like the snakes."

"No."

"Were they ill then?"

"Er... They were old and… they needed a lot of medicine. It's... it's a lot to do with money. It's very complicated." He cleared his throat.

But suddenly I had a horrible thought. "Are you going to kill all the dangerous or old animals?"

"Not all of them, no. Of course not." He smiled again.

"What about the tigers?"

"Well..." He stood up and looked around at the others. He waved one of them over, and whispered something to him. I heard what he said. He'd sent for Pete. The other man hurried off. I could feel tears pricking at my eyes. I shook my head. I couldn't speak. I walked away slowly. "Come back," the man in the suit said. I didn't, so he tried again, more sternly this time, like a teacher. But I kept walking.

I was about to break into a run when I saw Pete coming towards us. He must have already been on his way to find me. "Pete," I shouted as I ran up to him. He hugged me, lifting me up.

"What's wrong, Sugar?"

"It's Ronny. They're going to kill him."

I'd expected Pete to be horrified. But he just lowered me to the ground and held my hands. "I know. I've just found out."

"Well..." I began. "Well... aren't you going to stop them?"

"I wish I could. I wish I could. But it's for the

best."

I didn't know what to say. For a moment, I just stared at him with my mouth wide open. How could he just let this happen? I hated him suddenly.

But if he wasn't going to do anything, I'd have to.

I looked around at the other men, who seemed to be watching me as if I was one of their dangerous animals and needed to be captured. The man in the suit gave me kindly smile, but it didn't work. I ran again. This time I knew where to run to. I'd only ever heard of Doctor Barker, the man in charge of the whole zoo. I didn't really know what he looked like, but I knew his office must be in the big building on the other side of the zoo. Somehow, I would stop the killing. I would save Ronny.