

The tiger in the tunnel

Ruskin Bond

Robomate

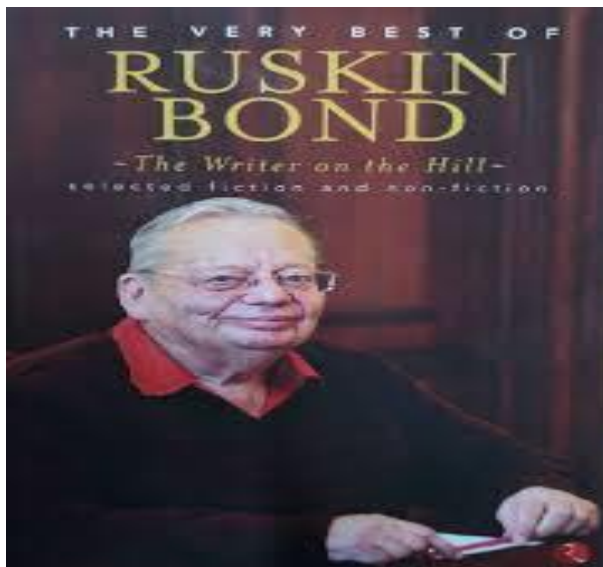
The Tiger in the Tunnel

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About the Author

Ruskin Bond is one of the most popular Anglo-Indian novelist and short story writer. He was born in 1934 at Kasoli in Himachal Pradesh. He has received several awards for his beautiful writings. He has written more than a hundred short stories, novels, essays and more than thirty books for children. His writings usually revolve around the elements of nature, animals, life, travel, love and fun. He presently lives at Landour in Mussoorie.



Summary

It is a simple and touching story of a tribal village family. The essence of the story is captured in its simplicity and innocence. It unwinds the story of Baldeo who is a watchman and carries on his daily duty religiously. It was a usual night when he was suddenly jolted by some strange sound, which he later recognizes. His worst fate is knocking at his door. The story leaves us gaping in suspense, but in the end gives a sense of content. It gives us a very valuable and beautiful message-Life has to go on and the living have to remain.

Character specifics

Baldeo

Central character

A loving father.

A simple poor man.

Sentimental.

Living hand to mouth.

Brave and courageous.

A proud tribal man.

Absent minded person.

Character specifics

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A loving son.

Tembu

The doting son.

having profound sense of responsibility.

A true tribal boy.

extremely brave and courageous.

Tembu, the boy, opened his eyes in the dark and wondered if his father was ready to leave the hut on his nightly **errand**.

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Tembu woke up wondering whether his father had left for his night duty.

There was no moon that night, and the **deathly stillness** of the surrounding jungle was broken only occasionally by the shrill cry of a **cicada**.



04/08/2020 Tiger in the Tunnel – Ruskin Bond

The "Tiger in The Tunnel," as with other adventure stories by Ruskin Bond, presents a chunk of experience that reflects the core of "Indian-ness". This story about a courageous man's act of bravery is a remarkable study of heroism. A detailed study of Baldeo's character reveals how the author adds various shades to the hero of his story.

Baldeo the watchman was responsible for signalling whether or not the tunnel was clear of obstruction, at night it was his duty to see that the lamp was burning, and that the overland mail passed through safely. Tembu, the boy lay in the station.

They lived in a small tribal village on the outskirts of the forest, about three miles from the station. Their small rice fields did not provide them with more than a bare living, and Baldeo considered himself lucky to have got the job of Khalasi at this small wayside signal stop.

The signal light was out. Baldeo set to work on haul the lamp down by its chain. If the oil had finished, he would have to return to the hut for more. The mail train was due in five minutes; having made sure that the line was clear, he returned to the entrance and sat down to wait for the mail train. Baldeo heard an animal sound, listening as he had never listened before, wondered if it was making for the tunnel or the opposite direction-the direction of the hut, in which Tembu would be lying unprotected. Before a minute had passed he made out the huge body of the tiger trotting steadily towards him. Baldeo and the tiger fought but although he injured the tiger, Baldeo was unfortunately killed. The overland mail was now approaching. The tiger raised its head, then slowly got to its feet. It found itself trapped like Baldeo. Flight along the cutting was impossible. It entered the tunnel, running as fast as its wounded leg would carry it. At the next station the driver slowed down and stopped his train to water the engine. Above the cowcatcher lay the major portion of the tiger, cut the half by the engine. There was considerable excitement and conjecture at the station, but back at the cutting there was no sound except for the sobs of the boy as he sat beside the body of his father. Tembu and his sister and mother were plunged in grief for two whole days; but life had to go on, and a living had to be made, and all the responsibility now fell on Tembu.

Three nights later, he was at the cutting, lighting the signal lamp for the overland mail

At the very onset, Ruskin Bond paints the backdrop. Baldeo is seen resting in his humble cabin. The author makes it clear that Baldeo belongs to one of the lowest strata of the village community. His decision of taking up the profession of a Railway Watchman was prompted not by any other motive but extreme poverty: "Their small rice fields did not provide them with more than a bare living and Baldeo considered himself lucky to have got the job of Khalasi at this small wayside signal stop." At the same time, Baldeo is presented as the sole provider for his family. From the first two paragraphs, the readers understand Baldeo's social standing as well as his affectionate relationship with his young son Tembu.

The story unfolds itself following the narrative technique of an adventure story. However, Ruskin Bond makes sure that the readers see the night's events from the point of view of Baldeo. On one hand, he describes the forest with marvellous detailing: "The eeriness of the place was increased by the neighbouring hills which overhung the main line threateningly." On the other hand, the author focuses on Baldeo's courage and confidence in his axe: "Like his fore-fathers he carried a small axe; fragile to look at but deadly when in use. He prided himself in his skill in wielding it against wild animals." Baldeo's axe is introduced as an extension of Baldeo himself. Bond successfully establishes the rustic but powerful quality of Baldeo's nature, symbolized by the axe he carried.

The Metaphor of Power

It is interesting to note that Ruskin Bond names his character "Baldeo", after the Hindu God. Baldeo (or Balram) is the brother of Lord Krishna, and is famed to be a person of extreme bravery and strength. It is believed that, from his strong associations with farming and farmers, he used farm equipment as his weapon when he needed to. His usual weapon is the plough which, interestingly, appears similar to a giant axe.

These associations provide an additional dimension to the stature of Baldeo, the watchman since he also is a rustic man, responsible for protecting others, and weilds an axe.