

The Tiger in the Tunnel – Ruskin Bond

An Overview

“The Tiger in the Tunnel” by Ruskin Bond is a short story about doing duty with courage and valour. In this story, we see Baldeo and his son Tembu. They hail from a tribal village in North India, where Baldeo’s wife and daughter lives. Baldeo and his son live in a small hut nearby a tunnel where the overland trains pass by. In the village, they have a small piece of land on which they grow some crops but it is never suffice to fill their bellies. So as to lessen the burden of financial constraint on the family, Baldeo has taken a job of a tunnel guard. His duty is to make sure that the tunnel is clear off the obstacles before trains pass through it. He is stationed at that tunnel which is located in the hills and surrounded by dense forest from both sides where wild animals often create havoc.

At the same time rumours have that a man-eating tiger has killed many humans in and around the tunnel. Like every other night, one night Baldeo picks up his lantern and a small axe in his hand and moves out of the hut to pass the signal for the late night train. The train is running late tonight. When he is moving out of the hut, Tembu wakes up and urges to accompany him. Baldeo refuses his help. As he is walking along the railway track towards the tunnel, he hears a sharp crackling sound from the undergrowth. All of sudden his mind filled with all fears that could possibly happen to him. Also the fear of tiger keeps him alert. He checks the tunnel – it is free from the obstacles. The train is running late.

The light he is carrying for the signal is low and about to dim down. He sits down and reignites it for the proper signaling. Just a few yards before the tunnel, he hears the mild roaring of a tiger. The tiger leaps at him. Baldeo realizing the situation sways the axe at the tiger. The axe hits the shoulder of the tiger. By the time train approaches the tunnel but the tiger does not heed at it. Its trembling wakens up Tembu. The wounded tiger attacks again and this time Baldeo again strikes the axe at the shoulder of the tiger. This time the axe sticks to the shoulder of the tiger, leaving Baldeo defenseless.

The tiger this time jumps at Baldeo and rips him apart. But the tiger does not see the approaching train, as it’s so fiercely busy killing Baldeo. The train running fast passes the tunnel safely and at the next station the driver sees the corpse of the tiger attached to the front of the engine. On the other hand, Tembu comes out in search of his father. Upon finding his father dead and torn apart, Tembu cries all night at his dead body and also protects it from the wild animals like hyenas.

The family remains grief-stricken for two days. After a few days, to carry forward the responsibilities of his father, Tembu joins the duty as a tunnel guard. For his protection he has that legendary axe.

Questions & Answers

1. Give an account of Baldeo's fight with the tiger in the story "The Tiger in the tunnel."

Ans: In "The Tiger in the Tunnel," Baldeo confronts the deadly man-eating tiger in the tunnel after his first month on the job. Even though he has heard the rumors about this dangerous tiger, he is still unafraid to do his job because his family depends upon his wages for their livelihood, and he is skilled with his axe.

The train is late, and Baldeo begins to "nod" in the tunnel. However, he is awakened by the noise of the tiger who is unafraid of the man because he has killed many men previously. There is no possibility of escape, and Baldeo sees the shape of the approaching tiger. Surprising the tiger, Baldeo strikes the first blow on the tiger's

shoulder with his prized axe. On the second blow that Baldeo delivers to the tiger, he almost severs the animal's leg. Unfortunately, the axe is stuck in the tiger's body, leaving Baldeo defenseless. In a few minutes, Baldeo is dead, and the tiger is wounded.

Ironically, the train approaches and there is no escape for the tiger. He is dismembered by the train and meets the same fate as Baldeo. Both man and tiger are dead due to the confrontation in the tunnel.

2. Who is Baldeo in The Tiger in the Tunnel by Ruskin Bond?

Ans: Baldeo is the main character in this great and terribly sad short story. He is a married man and a father of two children. He has a daughter and a 12-year-old son named Tembu.

Baldeo and his family are not wealthy, and they live near a forest in India. Baldeo provides for his family in two ways. He works their small rice field but is forced to supplement the remainder of the family's income by working for the railroad. He is one of the line's watchmen, and his job is to make sure that the railway track through a nearby tunnel stays clear. There is also a signal lamp that he tends to.

Baldeo is a hard working man, as evidenced by the long hours he puts in to ensure that his family has enough to eat. We also know that he cares deeply for the safety of his son. That is why Baldeo doesn't have Tembu accompany him to check the tunnel and the lamp. Baldeo knows that the jungle can be a dangerous place, and he has been hearing stories of a man-eating tiger. I believe that it also has to be said that Baldeo is quite brave. He knows that the tiger has him cornered; however, Baldeo doesn't panic. Instead, he bravely squares off against the tiger, knowing there is little chance for winning.