

# THE TIGER IN THE PIT

By John Byrne

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## CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

TWO THIEVES

A PERSON

A TIGER

A BEAVER

A BEAR

A RABBIT

*Note: Gender is immaterial. To the extent that the script makes reference to gender, those references can be readily changed. The characters can be played by actors of any age.*

## SETTING

An opening in a forest. A “pit” is needed for the play. The pit can be in front of the stage, formed by a cardboard box or wood frame with one side open or covered with Mylar or a similar material.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

**SCENE:** The play is set in a forest which can be indicated by a backdrop. The crucial element is a pit for the tiger to fall into. It can be set in front of the stage where the stage is raised by means of a large box or wood frame with the side facing the audience covered by see-through plastic or Mylar or simply left open. It is critical that the audience be able to see the tiger’s efforts to get out of the pit although a view of the arms and head of the tiger is probably sufficient.

**PROPS and COSTUMES:** The essential prop is a ladder. There are no other necessary props. Costuming can be as elaborate or as simple as the director wishes. The animals can be indicated by hats.

**ACTIVITY:** There are three periods of potential slapstick activity: when the thieves bring the ladder in, when the thieves are frightened by the tiger, and when the tiger first chases the person.

**ACTING:** The characters are not complex but rather exhibit strong single characteristics like naiveté or bombast which should be easily grasped and portrayed by young actors.

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***The forest scene is empty as the play opens. TWO PEOPLE enter from one side of the stage, running and looking back. THEY are struggling with a ladder. THEY go across the stage.***

FIRST THIEF: I have to stop. This is heavy and I'm exhausted.

SECOND THIEF: We have to keep going because that fellow will discover that we stole his ladder and he will come after us.

FIRST THIEF: Just for a minute. Just to catch my breath.

SECOND THIEF: Alright, alright. But only for a moment.

*(THEY put the ladder down and then sit down.)*

FIRST THIEF: Aaaaah, that's better.

*(The TIGER appears at the other side of the stage. The TIGER watches for an instant and then turns toward the audience.)*

TIGER: *(to the audience only)* This will be fun. *(The TIGER goes off stage.)*

FIRST THIEF: How much can we get for the ladder?

SECOND THIEF: Fifteen, maybe twenty.

FIRST THIEF: *(Slowly as if thinking pleasing thoughts.)* Twenty would be nice. I can think of a million things I need, starting with...

TIGER: *(from behind them as it leaps out into the open)* R-O-A-R.

*(The TWO THIEVES scream, jump up, run into each other, trip over the ladder and finally run off the stage.)*

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*(rolling over in laughter)* I've never seen anything so funny. They were sooooo scared. I am going to die laughing. *(Gets up.)*

Actually, I am going to die of hunger and the world is going to lose one super clever fiercesome tiger if I don't catch something quickly. I should have eaten those thieves instead of frightening them. But eating them might have made me a thief. I think I'll find a rabbit, instead. *(The TIGER looks around, hunting.)*

Lunch? Where are you, lunch? You cannot escape me. I am the best hunter in the whole w-o-o-o-o-rld. *(On the last word, the TIGER falls into the pit. Getting up slowly)* Ouch. What a fall.

This is not helping my search for lunch. Nor is it helping my mood, my back or my paws, all of which hurt. I've got to get out of here and get something to eat. *(Tries to climb out. Fails. Tries again. Fails again. Tries a third time and fails.)*

Only I can't get out. This is awful. This is unfair. I deserve better than this. HELP! HELP! *(Pause.)* Aaah, I hear someone coming. HELP!

BEAR: *(looks down and sees the TIGER)* Is that you down there, tiger?

TIGER: Of course it's me, Mr. Bear. Who else has such beautiful stripes?

BEAR: What are you doing all the way down there?

TIGER: *(angrily)* I am trying to get out.

BEAR: *(genuinely puzzled)* If you do not want to be down there, why did you go down there in the first place?

TIGER: I did not choose to come down here. I was tricked. I was trapped. I was minding my own business, thinking great thoughts when this hole grabbed me. Now, I can't get out. You have to help me.

BEAR: I don't know how to do that. I've never helped a tiger climb out of a pit.

TIGER: Just reach down and I'll grab your paw and you can pull me up.

BEAR: Your claws frighten me.

TIGER: I won't scratch, I promise.

BEAR: Mother always said that promises don't heal injuries.

TIGER: *(exasperated)* Well, if you're afraid, put a ladder down into the pit and I can climb out by myself.

BEAR: I don't have a ladder. I never carry ladders. I don't need a ladder. I climb very well by myself without a ladder.

TIGER: *(Slowly to make sure the BEAR understands)* I don't usually need one either but I need one now. And you don't have to have

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one with you because I know there is a ladder near the tree off to your left that you will be able to see if you look that way.

BEAR: (*looking to his right*) I can't see any ladder.

TIGER: (*trying to restrain his anger*) To your LEFT.

BEAR: Ooooooh, there is a ladder there. What is that ladder doing in the woods?

TIGER: Never mind what it's doing there. Just bring it to the pit and put it in so I can climb out.

BEAR: But if I do that and if you get out, you'll jump on me and eat me.

TIGER: I won't eat you. I promise

BEAR: Mother always said that promises make poor armor.

TIGER: What has armor got to do with anything?

BEAR: I think that means that I should be wary when dangerous beasts make promises. Mother always said that I should avoid situations which make me nervous and you are making me nervous so I think I am going to leave. Right now. (*The BEAR starts off the stage*)

TIGER: You can't do this to me! You can't leave me here, you selfish bear! Oh, how will I ever get out? Life is so unfair.

PERSON: (*comes in, looking around*) The tracks lead this way. But why did those two bring my ladder into the forest. What did they need it here for?

TIGER: They wanted to sell it for money.

PERSON: (*looking around*) Who said that? I don't see anyone. But there must be someone here. I heard a voice. Hello. Is anyone here? If you are here, do you know where my ladder is?

TIGER: Of course I do. It's under the big tree opposite from where you came in.

PERSON: (*goes to the ladder*) You're right! There's my ladder! But who are you and how did you know about my ladder?

TIGER: I'm a tiger and tigers know everything. If you want to see me, look down here in the pit.

PERSON: (*goes to and looks into the pit*) Oh. You are down there and you are a tiger. What are you doing down there?

TIGER: I'm trying to get to China. What do you think I'm doing here?

PERSON: Why do you want to go to China?

TIGER: I don't. I don't. It was a joke. Ha Ha. Now help me get out of here.

PERSON: If you don't want to be down there, why did you go down there in the first place?

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TIGER: That's the second time I've been asked that stupid question. I did not go 'down here'. I was tricked and trapped and now I'm caught.

PERSON: Oh.

TIGER: Don't just say "Oh," help me get out.

PERSON: How can I get you out? I can't reach that far.

TIGER: Do I have to do all the thinking around here? Get your ladder, put it in the pit and I'll be able to climb out.

PERSON: Tigers eat people so if you climb out, you will catch me and eat me.

TIGER: How could you think such mean things about me? I helped you find your ladder, didn't I, without asking whether or not you would eat me once you got the ladder back. And now you are refusing to return the favor by claiming I would eat you? Why would you think such a thing?

PERSON: I think you'll eat me because that is what tigers do.

TIGER: Oh, pul-lease. All tigers, and especially this tiger, are aware that altruism is the second most important element of survival. We respect that.

PERSON: What's al – tru – uh – you know?

TIGER: Altruism is the willingness to put other's needs ahead of your own for the good of everybody. I put your needs ahead of mine when I told you where your ladder was instead of claiming the ladder for myself. That's altruism. The thieves put their needs ahead of yours when they stole your ladder. That's being selfish and selfishness is the opposite of altruism.

PERSON: Oh. I understand. (*Pause.*) You said that al – uh – tru – uh, whatever it is, is the second most important element of survival. What's the first?

TIGER: It's really not the time or the place for a long discussion. We can talk about it later. Now I need help. Stop being selfish and put your ladder in here.

PERSON: You really think I'm being selfish?

TIGER: You're not sharing you ladder, are you? You're not thinking about my needs, are you? What is that other than selfishness?

PERSON: I don't want to be selfish.

TIGER: Then put your ladder down here.

PERSON: You really think that is the proper thing to do?

TIGER: Have I ever mislead you?

PERSON: We've never talked before.

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TIGER: So you're basing your lack of trust on no evidence. You know of *nothing* that I have ever done that would tend to prove that I'm likely to mislead you.

PERSON: Oooh, that's a good point.

TIGER: Of course it is. Now get that ladder down here before I die of hun... uh... unhappiness.

PERSON: Okay. Okay.

*(The PERSON gets the ladder and puts it in the pit. The TIGER climbs out and jumps at the PERSON who runs away. The TWO of them run during the following lines through Wait!.)*

TIGER: Now I am going to eat you.

PERSON: But you said...

TIGER: Altruism is the *second* most important element. The *most* important is being true to yourself. I am only doing what tigers are meant to do. You wouldn't want me to go against my own nature, would you?

PERSON: It just doesn't seem right to get eaten after helping you.

TIGER: Stop nattering and stand still. You are wasting my time.

PERSON: *(Stops running.)* Wait! You have to be wrong. It cannot be a good idea for a tiger to eat someone who helped that tiger. Eating the helper would mean that the tiger would not have any help the next time there was a problem. Therefore, the act of eating the helper would actually hurt the tiger. Clearly, you should not eat me.

TIGER: The only clear thing is that I am hungry and now my head is spinning from all your words. I can't agree that eating you is bad for me when I am hungry. Your argument is ridiculous.

PERSON: Is not!

TIGER: Is so!

PERSON: Is not!

TIGER: Is so!

PERSON: Since we can't agree, the only way for us to deal with this issue is to let someone else decide.

TIGER: Who would decide for us?

PERSON: I'll ask the next animal who comes by.

TIGER: Alright. Alright. You can ask *one* animal but hurry up about it.





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