

Driven to Near Extinction

The darkness quickly took over any signs of light. The cold rain dripped hard upon my head because of the missing trees that had been cut down by the Wasakis. I ran quickly through the jungle, letting the leaves hit my face, it hurt but I did not care, for the Wasakis were chasing me.

The Wasakis were two-legged creatures and always held long sticks that spouted fire and brought death. They pointed it at jungle creatures and in a second, their lives were over. I refused to stop. I had gotten away before and I could do it again. That was what I thought until I heard a loud BANG and a sharp pain went throughout my leg. I collapsed right there onto the ground, in the middle of the jungle uncovered by trees as I heard them come, and there were so many of them.

I was born as Iniko, the youngest of three cubs. My oldest brother is named Tarak and my other brother is named Pavel. Tarak was always big for his age he was strong, his paws were large, his legs were muscular and so he had a powerful strike. Pavel on the other hand was smaller and weaker. He often was sick and stayed with my mother. My mother always watched us as my father went out hunting all the time. Tarak and I always went exploring and we usually swam in the river. She would scold us a lot though when we went without her because there were green beasts that lived in the water called crocodiles. Our most favorite place in the whole jungle was near the edge where large groups of banyan trees grew, they towered over the other trees and their roots would grow over several acres. This place was the perfect place to take a nap.

When my father came back, he never came back with a lot of food. He usually came back with a monkey, which he gave to the three of us. Soon I became very hungry and Tarak and I usually hunted together, catching small lizards and squirrels. When the three of us were one years old, old enough to hunt, we accompanied our parents and watched them hunt through the tall grass. They would slowly creep up to the animal and pounce on them when the time was right. "If the animal is smaller than you, go for the back of neck. If the animal is larger than you, go for the throat" my mother always told us. Soon Tarak and I began hunting animals larger than lizards and squirrels, like monkeys.

With the family effort, we still did not get much to eat and soon Pavel become ill and was close to death. He could not move and had trouble breathing. We could not feed him because we could not find anything, all of the sambers, nilgai, boars, and deer had fled. Days later, Pavel died and we all began a desperate search for food.

We went out further in search of food until we left our home and journeyed to the other side of the jungle. When darkness reached the jungle floors, Father came back with food.

“What is it?” I asked him. It had a lot of white fur and was very round. I had never seen a creature like it before.

“The Wasakis call it a sheep.”

“Was it hard to catch Father?” Tarak asked.

“No, these sheep were huddled into a fenced-off area, close to where the Wasakis sleep. I came, and they made noise. I killed one and dragged it back. And that was it. Your Mother is coming back with another.”

When Mother came back, we started to eat and it tasted very good, much better than monkeys. We slept sound and full that night, something we haven’t done for a while. We decided to stay close to this Wasaki territory to be closer to the food.

In the morning, Tarak and I explored the area. This side of the jungle was very different from the place I was born from, it was much steeper and had less trees. Some of the trees were cut down and only the big bottom of the tree stayed behind. There were some parts of the forest floor which seemed more flat and defined than the rest of the forest floor, as if many creatures had walked through this area.

“Iniko, come here, on this hill. Look, you can see so many more Wasaki farms. There are so many.” Tarak said in amazement. “Should we show Father?”

“Let’s go.”

As Tarak ran down to show Father, I stared at the Wasaki farms, they were made from the trees of the jungle, the houses were from the trees and the Wasaki boy who chopped the trees into small pieces to bring into his home. From here I could see many sheep in a wooden fence. In the back of the Wasaki farms were small skinny “trees”, very green with no trunk. The “trees” grew in a straight line and were exactly the same as the one next to it.

That night we went down again. Father showed us where the sheep were. I walked around the farm until I noticed these large animals, much larger than sheep and larger than I was. These animals were white with black spots. They were kept in a place much nicer than the sheep and looked to be better taken care of.

“Father, Mother, Tarak. Look.” They ran over and each started in amazement.

“Cows, I think” Father said. He crept closer and jumped onto the cow and bit its throat and suffocated it to its death as it “moored” and tossed its head side to side. As Father dragged it home I noticed a trail of blood that stained the grass on our way home and thought nothing more of it. The cow was much better than the sheep, larger and juicier.

The night was cool as we slept until a loud noise near the Wasaki farm woke me up. I ran up the hill and looked at the village. A lot of the Wasakis were holding fire, pointing and running towards the hill. I stared at them curiously wondering what they were going to do. When their shouting got louder, I woke up my family and told them what had happened. My mother took Tarak and me to a bush on the other side of the hill. My Father ran off just as the Wasakis had reached sight of him, I had never seen Wasakis before and knew only what I had heard from my Mother, they ran after my Father with so much vengeance because my Father had killed their cow. They started to shoot at him but my Father keep running. Tarak started to run after my Father, but my Mother cut him off and said: Don't, Don't think about it Tarak, you stay here and take care of Iniko, don't move until I come back." Tarak lowered his ears and walked back to me as she ran off into the darkness where the noise and light began to fade.

Tarak heard a twig crack and woke me up. I opened my eyes and slowly looked around from under the bush, and then I saw a shadow coming towards us. I closed my eyes and held my breath afraid that it would be a Wasaki.

"Mother!" Tarak shouted. And I opened my eyes again, rejoiced.

"Where's Father?" I asked. She said nothing and put her head down. And as she did that I knew that he was gone, killed by the Wasakis.

I left Mother and Tarak a year later now, being two, I was ready to be on my own. I decided to travel back to my first home, back to the Banyan trees, a shady place to nap. I was getting hungry and decided to hunt, I stepped into the tall grass and crouched down low, and put my ears down to hide the whites spots behind my ears. I noticed a boar and a spotted deer. Since the boar was a fatter, darker, and a slower creature, I decided to hunt the boar. I remembered what my Mother had said about hunting and so I set my eyes on its neck as I crept down even lower. I jumped up and at the same moment, the deer turned and ran, I looked at it and realized that I had just given a chance for the boar to escape. It too, turned around and squealed but I made a quick turn easily catching it. I dragged my kill to a safe place to eat, away from other predators and thieves and began to eat my kill. I climbed onto a tree to take a nap. It would take me another couple days to reach the Banyan land. I started off again at night using my whiskers to get around. A week later I reached the spot where the Banyan land was supposed to be. But all I saw were long green plants all planted in a row. I was confused, where had the Banyan trees gone, then I saw machines which I knew were built by Wasakis, they took away the Banyan trees for their purposes only, they didn't care about the beauty of the land, they were only interested in what they could take from it. I understood now why the animals had left the jungle, there nothing to eat, and their homes had been destroyed.

A year later, I began to look for a mate. I searched month after month, I could not find one. I went around, not really sure where to go. Upon wandering I saw the edge of the

jungle. From a distance, I saw an orange and black striped creature. Was it a mate, I thought? I was pretty sure that it was a tiger, but why was it so far out? I decided to come and take a closer look, I looked at it and it did not move. Next to the tiger, it said: *Exxon/Mobil*. I smelt the place, and it smelt like oil. I stepped up closer to the “tiger” and under it was a platform which said “*Put a tiger in your tank*”. Walking closer to the “tiger” I slid my body on it and brushed my tail by its face. I started to hit my paw against the tiger and still it did not move. I left the “tiger” and looked around the place. It was much hotter out here than in the jungle. There were no trees and I saw why, the ground was dry soil, cracked and the topsoil took off with the wind. The towers were tall and dark. I went to a large green metal container, filled with metal pipes and trash. As I rummaged through the objects, a metal clank came from the side of the large building. A Wasaki came out of the smoky building and looked at me. Scared, I ran off.

I lived by myself for a year, unable to find anyone. When the time was right, I tried again. I thought that maybe there were no tigers on this side of the jungle and I headed back to the other side to look for mates. It took two days to travel to the middle of the two sides. I stopped when I saw a Wasaki village, right in the middle of the jungle, splitting it into two. The voices of the Wasakis made me uncomfortable, reminding me of the death of my father. I turned around and headed back. I felt the jungle getting smaller. Trees were being cut down and buildings and farms were all around the jungle. I felt trapped; I was unable to find a mate. Lonely, I headed for the river to bathe. As I was swimming, I saw another tiger looking at me; I swam to that side and looked up. It was Tarak. I hugged him, and we mated.

Months later, I had a cub of my own. I had a son, whom I named Apu; he was born blind as all cubs were. But already I knew he was different, he had a beautiful coat, brightly colored orange with dark black stripes. So for the first few weeks, Apu laid in the den, blind. Weeks after, he still could not see where he was going. I later realized that he was permanently blind, unable to see anything. It was hard to take care of him when he was younger, because he would always bump into things. As he grew older, he made great use of his whiskers, if his whiskers fit, his body will fit.

One day I noticed, a car coming to the Exxon place, a Wasaki steps out and introduces herself to the boss of Exxon.

“Hi, I’m Sandra Aidy. I’m with the Project Tiger organization, founded in 1978.

She started to explain Project Tiger, which protected Tigers by converting land into tiger reserves. They first eliminated Wasaki exploitation and disturbances. Next they limited new Wasaki disturbances and repaired damages caused by them. Lastly, they monitor tigers and other wild animals in the area.

The sky became dark and cloudy and the clouds started to rumble. As they continued to talk and exchange cards and information, I turned to Apu, who was just behind me, lying

down. I turned around to lie down with him and a Wasaki with a rifle stared at me and Apu from behind a bush, I roared to warn Apu but I also caught the attention of the woman Wasaki down below. I attacked the man and slashed his throat open and left him there to die. Others were coming; I hid Apu in a bush and ran through the dark air and dense coverings of the jungle.

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I lay here now, listening to their increasing voices. I try to stand up and I fall again, anger fills me as I lay down to die. The Wasakis are here now; I see them clearly as the rain outlines their shapes. They circle me and cock their rifles and take aim. I put my head down and listen to the rain.

“Stop” I heard, it came from the dark.

“Stop, don’t shoot, can’t you tell it’s wounded, I’m taking it. I’m with the Project Tiger organization. I’m taking it. It’s enough.”

I laid there and thought about Pavel and my Father, how they died. It was caused by the Wasakis. And only they could fix what problems they had caused. I looked at the woman and thought that my species still had some hope left.

Afterword

The story is told from Iniko, meaning *born during troubled times*. She starts out by being chase by Wasakis and from there she tells us of her life struggling to stay alive. Tigers are one of the many endangered species that live in our world today. We have done many actions that have resulted to the extinction and near extinction of many creatures and it is our obligation to help them.

Tigers are affected by poaching because they are fierce creatures, who are often thought of as trophies. They are thought to be useful in oriental medicines and they are killed by farmers in revenge for killing their livestock. They suffer through habitat loss for agricultural purposes, logging, and population fragmentation which cause tigers to breed within the family, weakening their gene pool. The weakening of the gene pool causes tigers to have birth defects: immune deficiency, scoliosis of the spine (distorted spine), mental impairments, blindness, and grotesquely crossed eyes that bulge from their skull.

The fictional story of Iniko portrays some of the problems that affect the survival of tigers. Iniko's father is killed through the vengeance of killed livestock, her brother Pavel dies of starvation because most of the jungle creatures have fled. Iniko is forced to mate with her brother because she is unable to find other tigers in her habitat and is unable to return to the other side of the jungle when a village cuts the jungle in half (population fragmentation) and is forced to mate with Tarak, her bother. Iniko gives birth to Apu who is blind. She faces habitat lost, when her "banyan land" was cut down.

Resources:

<http://greetingindia.tripod.com/symbols.html>

<http://www.exxposexxon.com/>

<http://www.lairweb.org.nz/tiger/>

<http://projecttiger.nic.in/index.asp>