

A Tiger in the Zoo

Summary of the Poem A Tiger in the Zoo

A Tiger in the Zoo by Leslie Norris

He stalks in his vivid stripes
The few steps of his cage,
On pads of velvet quiet,
In his quiet rage.

In this stanza, the poet describes the appearance of the tiger in the zoo and its daily movements. He says that the tiger moves up and down of his cage. The stripes on its body can be distinguished even seen from far as they are darker in colour than the rest of its coat. The tiger walks quietly without making a sound because of his smooth velvet pads. The tiger is able to walk only few steps because of the length of its cage. It covers that distance in a few mere steps only. The tiger is full of anger but it is suppressed because he knows that he is helpless here.

He should be lurking in shadow,
Sliding through long grass
Near the water hole
Where plump deer pass.

In this stanza, the poet is filled with pity while looking at the imprisoned tiger. The poet imagines another life for the tiger other than the zoo. He says that the poor tiger should have been in his natural habitat that is in the wild forest. He says that under normal conditions, this tiger would have been moving in the darkness not in the clear daylight. It would have been lying in the shadows of trees or hiding itself behind long grass so that its prey will not be able to detect its movement. In this way, the tiger would have moved near the water hole where all the animals of the forest come to drink on sunny afternoons. There, near the water hole, he would be waiting for some fat deer to pass that way. Thus, he would be lying there in expectation of a heavy feast.

He should be snarling around houses
At the jungle's edge,
Baring his white fangs, his claws,
Terrorising the village!

In this stanza, the poet says that even though he would prefer the tiger to live in the wild, it is not as if it would lose all touch with human civilization. He imagines what the tiger will do in case he failed to find any prey in his natural habitat. He says that the tiger would be growling at the edge of jungle near some village. He would be showing his white fangs and claws while moving here and there with the intention of scaring all the inhabitants of that village. He would thus become a cause of terror for the villagers. The poetess here gives a hint that if we destroy the natural habitat of tigers, they will be forced to turn to our towns and villages to find their food.

But he's locked in a concrete cell,
His strength behind bars,
Stalking the length of his cage,
Ignoring visitors.

In this stanza, the poet stops imaging the tiger's alternate life and returns to its real one. The poet sees the tiger caged in a small concrete cell in the zoo like a prisoner in the jail. In spite of all his strength, it now lies imprisoned behind the bars. The tiger pays no attention to the visitors who come to see him every day at the zoo. Instead of this, the tiger Very slowly and silently, moves up and down along the length of the cage without any disturbance in the form of human intervention.

He hears the last voice at night,
The patrolling cars,
And stares with his brilliant eyes
At the brilliant stars.

In this stanza, the poet describes about the daily routine of the tiger. The tiger does not rest during the day because of the visitors. Even at night, it stays

awake till the very last voice of the zookeeper locking up and going home can be heard. After that too, it does not go to sleep. All night, it remains disturbed due to the noise of the patrolling cars. He keeps staring at the brilliant stars with his brilliant eyes. Perhaps he is asking heaven why he has been imprisoned there.

Quick Revision Notes

- This poem contrasts a tiger when it is in its natural habitat and when it is imprisoned in a zoo.
- On a starry night, the poet sees a tiger in a zoo.
- The tiger moves slowly up and down in his cage.
- He is full of rage but is quiet in his helplessness.
- The poet is moved to pity for the tiger.
- He says that the tiger should have been in the jungle.
- He should have been moving quietly in the shadows near some water hole, and waiting for a plump deer to pass that way.
- But sadly he is locked behind bars in a concrete cell.
- He does not take any notice of the visitors and is looking at the brilliant stars with his brilliant eyes.
- Now, he has to be content with merely looking at the stars.
- He is no longer free to move in his natural habitat and look at the brilliant stars from there.