



BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO

BY RAJIV JOSEPH



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Translations/Cultural Consultants: Raida Fahmi and Ammar Ramzi.

For Moisés Kaufman

BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO received its Broadway premiere at the Richard Rodgers Theatre on March 31, 2011. It was directed by Moisés Kaufman; the set design was by Derek McLane; the costume design was by David Zinn; the lighting design was by David Lander; the sound design was by Acme Sound Partners and Cricket S. Myers; the original music was composed by Kathryn Bostic; the production stage manager was Beverly Jenkins; the stage manager was Alex Lyu Volckhausen; and the Iraqi-Arabic translations were by Ammar Ramzi and Raida Fahmi. The cast was as follows:

TIGER	Robin Williams
MUSA	Arian Moayed
TOM	Glenn Davis
KEV	Brad Fleischer
IRAQI WOMAN/LEPER	Necar Zadegan
IRAQI MAN/UDAY	Hrach Titizian
HADIA/IRAQI TEENAGER	Sheila Vand

CHARACTERS

TIGER — Big. Tiger wears clothes. Nothing feline about him.

TOM — American, early 20s, older and wiser than Kev. Unsmiling, tough.

KEV — American, early 20s.

MUSA — Iraqi, 30s.

UDAY — Iraqi, 30s.

IRAQI MAN

IRAQI WOMAN

IRAQI TEENAGER/HADIA — Female.

IRAQI WOMAN — A leper.

PLACE

Baghdad.

TIME

2003.

A note on the Tiger: The Tiger can be any age, although ideally he is older, scrappy, past his prime, yet still tough. He can be any race except Middle-Eastern. His language is loose, casual; his profanity is second nature.

There should be no subtitles for the Arabic.

BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The Baghdad Zoo, night.

Two American soldiers standing guard next to a cage with a Bengal Tiger.

The Tiger stands like a person and faces and speaks to the audience.

TIGER. The lions escaped two days ago. Predictably, they got killed in about two hours. Everybody always gives lions so much credit. But I am bigger than them. I am bigger than those motherfuckers.

TOM. This guy is hungry.

KEV. Sergeant said they fed him.

TIGER. They liked to show off the lions here because they had eight.

TOM. No, he's hungry.

TIGER. Eight fucking lions.

KEV. This place creeps me out. I wanna see some action, not hang around no ghetto-ass zoo with my thumb up my ass.

TIGER. Which is why they had them in that big outdoor lion's den. Which is why they all got away.

TOM. Zoo duty's seen action three nights last week.

KEV. Who's gonna attack a zoo.

TOM. *We're* here. They'll attack *us*. And they've been stealing shit. Like peacocks.

TIGER. All eight of them took off as soon as the wall got blown up.

KEV. I don't know why they wanna kill *us*. We're trying to protect their zoo, you know?

TIGER. Typical lion-like behavior.

TOM. *We* blew the zoo up. Use your head. And these animals are valuable.

TIGER. Three square meals a day, and the idiots take off.

KEV. This guy ain't valuable. So let me see it.

TOM. Again?

KEV. C'mon, Tommy. Let me see it.

TOM. I showed you it already.

KEV. I wanna fire it!

TOM. You're not gonna fire anything.

TIGER. And what happens?

KEV. Come on, man.

TOM. It's not even loaded.

KEV. You told me you always keep it loaded.

TIGER. Ka-boom.

TOM. Well, you're not gonna fire it anyway.

TIGER. I mean, it's the middle of a war. Use your head.

TOM. How many times you gonna want to see it?

KEV. It's bad ass.

TIGER. Leo, the head lion — I mean, they were all named fucking Leo — Leo calls out to me just before he takes off, "Hey, Tiger, you gotta come with!"

KEV. I wrote my brother about it. He said there ain't no such thing as no gold gun. He said guns can't be made outta gold. (*The boys hear a sound.*) What the fuck was that?

TIGER. I said, Leo, you dumb stupid bastard, they're killing anything that *moves*. And Leo — this is right over his head — he yells back, "Suit yourself!" Then he runs off.

TOM. (*Picks up his machine gun.*) Halt! Who goes there!

KEV. (*Yelling, picking up his gun.*) Who's there? We're U.S. Marines!

TOM. Shut up, Kev. (*Shouts.*) Advance and be recognized! (*To Kev.*) Cover me. (*Tom exits.*)

TIGER. *Suit yourself.* I'm still freaking locked up in here, Leo! What're you gonna do, steal the keys and *let me out?* These lions

were dumb as rocks. They think because they can suddenly escape, everyone else can, too. *(Tom enters.)*

TOM. It was that fucking ostrich.

KEV. You shoulda shot it.

TOM. I'm not gonna kill an ostrich.

KEV. Fuck that, man. I don't give a fuck. I'll be like ... *(He pretends to shoot his machine gun.)* What's up ostrich, motherfucker? I'll kill you, bitch!

TOM. At ease with that shit. This is why everyone thinks you're a fucking idiot, you know that?

KEV. That's what *I'd* do, anyway.

TOM. Sergeant said no more killing animals unless they're a danger.

KEV. Sergeant is a pussy. Can I see it?

TOM. It's in my bag, Kev! Just get it! *(Kev darts to Tom's canvas satchel and pulls out a gold-plated semi-automatic pistol.)*

KEV. Holy shit, man.

TIGER. I won't lie. When I get hungry, I get stupid. I screwed up twelve years back. I just followed the scent, took a bite and then, fhwhipp!

KEV. A gold fuckin' gun.

TIGER. This tranquilizer dart comes out of nowhere, and I wake up in Baghdad.

KEV. Sweet ass.

TIGER. So that was depressing.

TOM. You happy now?

KEV. Hell yeah!

TIGER. Imagine, it's your everyday routine ... maybe you want to grab a bite, and then whack!

KEV. Yeah, this is the shit right here.

TIGER. Curtains.

KEV. You swear to God this was really Saddam's kid's gun?

TIGER. And you open your eyes and you're in this concrete block.

TOM. Uday.

KEV. Who?

TOM. Uday Hussein.

KEV. Who's that?

TIGER. Tiger of the Tigris.

TOM. Saddam's kid.

KEV. Damn.

TIGER. When you're this far from home, you know you're never getting back.

KEV. This really his gun?

TOM. Yes it was his gun. Who else has a gold-plated gun?

KEV. Damn.

TOM. (*Looking at the Tiger.*) Look at this poor bastard. He's hungry. (*To Tiger.*) You hungry, buddy? (*Tom hits the cage.*) Hey, buddy!

TIGER. Yeah, fuck you too.

TOM. Goddamn! You hear that growl, baby? He's starving.

KEV. How you know for sure? How you know that it was Saddam's kid's gun?

TOM. We raided the mansion. I was there, man. Two-day stand-off.

KEV. Fuuuck ...

TIGER. What if my cage *had* gotten hit? What if, ka-boom, there's a big gaping hole in my cage? What do I do then? I'm not gonna go traipsing around the city, like the lions did. No, fuck that.

KEV. What mansion?

TOM. The Hussein brothers' mansion, jackass. Uday and Qusay. They were stacked with gold and shit. Everything in the house was made of gold, practically.

TIGER. But I think I'd step out for a bit. Hang around the zoo. Hunt something. Kill all the people, kill everyone. Eat them.

KEV. What else was gold?

TOM. All their guns. Sergeant got the gold Uzi.

TIGER. Then I'd sleep a little. And then get up, kill some of the animals. Eat them. Sleep some more. But I guess at that point, I'd probably step out. Into the world. Not like the lions did, but still, have to admit, I'm curious.

TOM. The toilet was made of gold.

KEV. No shit. The shitter?

TIGER. The world is probably a fascinating place.

TOM. The *toilet* was gold. Sergeant dismantled the whole thing. I won the seat off him in poker.

KEV. You won a toilet seat?

TOM. *Gold* toilet seat. I won the *gold* toilet seat.

KEV. Where is it.

TOM. Somewhere safe. I buried it.

KEV. Where?

TOM. Yeah, I'm gonna tell you, Kev. I'm gonna tell *you*. Some-

where safe. Between this gun and that toilet seat, I am set. Back home, I'll be sitting pretty.

KEV. Sitting pretty on a gold toilet seat!

TOM. No, dude. I'm not going to *use* it. I'm gonna hit eBay with that shit, you know?

KEV. Man. I haven't seen nothing since I been here.

TIGER. Zoo is hell. Ask any animal. Rather be shot up and eaten than be stuck in a fucking zoo ten thousand miles from where you were supposed to be. Like that polar bear they brought in six years ago. He committed suicide. Some world.

KEV. You got to kill Saddam's kids, man. That's awesome.

TOM. Yeah, it was cool.

TIGER. And the fucking lions! They get it *all*, right? Every captive animal's dream: that a bolt of lightning comes down and ZAP! Frees you in an instant. There it was: freedom! And they blew it. They walked right into the mouth of the beast. Dumb sons of bitches. It's too iffy strutting out into the world like that. I can see them: the eight Leos running through the streets of Baghdad, laughing their heads off. And then — ka-boom — mowed down by artillery. Casualties. A pride of fucking lions.

KEV. I ain't seen shit. Nothing. Not one Iraqi did I get to kill! And I ain't got my dick wet neither! You know back in Vietnam, there was so many Vietnamese bitches all over the place, and everyone got a piece.

TOM. You weren't even born yet.

KEV. I'm just saying. There ain't much pussy in a Muslim country.

TOM. Sergeant got some. Sergeant gets that shit all the time.

KEV. You ever get any Iraqi pussy?

TOM. No, man. Fuck that. I got values. Hand me that Slim Jim. *(Kev hands Tom a Slim Jim, Tom unwraps it and sticks it through the cage, trying to poke Tiger.)* Dumb bastard is so hungry, he don't even know he's hungry.

KEV. Leave him alone. He's barely got any fur left anyhow.

TOM. Eat! Eat it up, man!

TIGER. Don't wanna eat.

TOM. Come on, tough guy. Give me another growl.

TIGER. Leave me alone.

TOM. Atta boy. Get angry. Eat something.

TIGER. *(To audience.)* This is what I'm talking about. Pure stupidity. I'm a fucking Tiger. *(Tom hits Tiger with the Slim Jim.)*

BENGAL TIGER AT THE BAGHDAD ZOO

by Rajiv Joseph

5M, 2W

The lives of two American Marines and an Iraqi translator are forever changed by an encounter with a quick-witted tiger who haunts the streets of war-torn Baghdad attempting to find meaning, forgiveness and redemption amidst the city's ruins. Rajiv Joseph's groundbreaking play explores both the power and the perils of human nature.

"Set in the chaotic first days of the American invasion of Iraq, this boldly imagined, harrowing and surprisingly funny drama considers the long afterlife of violent acts, as well as the impenetrable mysteries of the afterlife itself."

—The New York Times

"Joseph's metaphoric inventiveness is magnificently displayed throughout, and the kaleidoscope of figures and images bespeaks a purely theatrical imagination."

—Los Angeles Times

"Tragic yet darkly comic and highly imaginative ... Joseph has created a theatrical landscape that is totally different from the harrowing war reports to which the nightly news has accustomed us."

—CurtainUp

"The bottom line: Dark and disturbing but also corrosively funny, Rajiv Joseph's play set during the early days of the Iraq War is an exotic original."

—The Hollywood Reporter

Also by Rajiv Joseph

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