



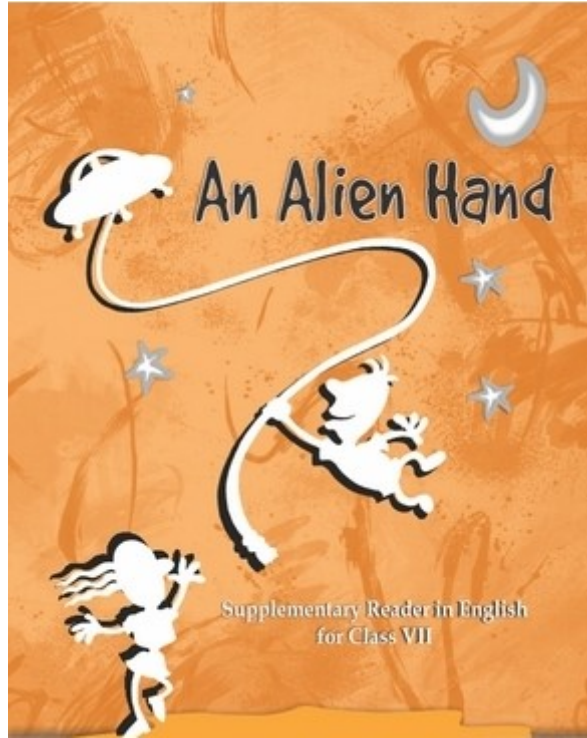
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A2 Stories

Elementary Plus Level

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu.**

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# An Alien Hand

Supplementary Reader in English  
for Class VII

# 1. A Tiger in the House

By Ruskin Bond

TIMOTHY, the tiger-cub, was discovered by Grandfather in the Terai jungle near Dehra.

One day, when Grandfather was strolling down the forest path at some distance from the rest of the party, he discovered a little tiger about eighteen inches long, hiding among the intricate roots of a banyan tree. Grandfather picked him up, and brought him home. He had the distinction of being the only member of the party to have bagged any game, dead or alive.

At first the tiger-cub, who was named Timothy by Grandmother, was brought up entirely on milk given to him in a feeding-bottle by our cook, Mahmoud. But the milk proved too rich for him, and he was put on a diet of raw mutton and cod-liver oil, to be followed later by a more tempting diet of pigeons and rabbits.

Timothy was provided with two companions — Toto, the monkey, who was bold enough to pull the young tiger by the tail, and then climb up the curtains if Timothy lost his temper; and a small mongrel puppy, found on the road by Grandfather.

At first Timothy appeared to be quite afraid of the puppy, and darted back with a spring if it came too near. He would make absurd dashes at it with his large forepaws, and then retreat to a ridiculously safe distance. Finally, he allowed the puppy to crawl on his back and rest there!

One of Timothy's favourite amusements was to stalk anyone who would play with him, and so, when I came to live with Grandfather, I became one of the tiger's favourites. With a crafty look in his glittering eyes, and his body crouching, he would creep closer and closer to me, suddenly making a dash for my feet, rolling over on his back and kicking with delight, and pretending to bite my ankles.

He was by this time the size of a full-grown retriever, and when I took him out for walks, people on the road would give us a wide berth. When he pulled hard on his chain, I had difficulty in keeping up with him. His favourite place in the house was the drawing-room, and he would make himself comfortable on the long sofa, reclining there with great dignity, and snarling at anybody who tried to get him off.

Timothy had clean habits, and would scrub his face with his paws exactly like a cat. He slept at night in the cook's quarters, and was always delighted at being let out by him in the morning.

"One of these days," declared Grandmother in her prophetic manner, "we are going to find Timothy sitting on Mahmoud's bed, and no sign of the cook except his clothes and shoes!"

Of course, it never came to that, but when Timothy was about six months old a change came over him; he grew steadily less friendly. When out for a walk with me, he would try to steal away to stalk a cat or someone's pet dog. Sometimes at night we would hear frenzied cackling from the poultry house, and in the morning there would be feathers lying all over the verandah. Timothy had to be chained up more often. And finally, when he began to stalk Mahmoud about the house with what looked like villainous intent, Grandfather decided it was time to transfer him to a zoo.

Reserving a first class compartment for himself and Timothy — no one would share a compartment with them — Grandfather took him to Lucknow where the zoo authorities were only too glad to receive as a gift a well-fed and fairly civilised tiger.

About six months later, when my grandparents were visiting relatives in Lucknow, Grandfather took the opportunity of calling at the zoo to see how Timothy was getting on. I was not there to accompany him but I heard all about it when I returned to Dehra.

Arriving at the zoo, Grandfather made straight for the particular cage in which Timothy had been interned. The tiger was there, crouched in a corner, full-grown and with a magnificent striped coat.

"Hello Timothy!" said Grandfather and put his arm through the bars of the cage.

The tiger approached the bars, and allowed Grandfather to put both hands around his head. Grandfather stroked the tiger's forehead and tickled his ears, and, whenever he growled, smacked him across the mouth, which was his old way of keeping him quiet.

He licked Grandfather's hands and only sprang away when a leopard in the next cage snarled at him. Grandfather 'shooed' the leopard away, and the tiger

returned to lick his hands; but every now and then the leopard would rush at the bars, and he would slink back to his corner.

A number of people had gathered to watch the reunion when a keeper pushed his way through the crowd and asked Grandfather what he was doing.

"I'm talking to Timothy," said Grandfather. "Weren't you here when I gave him to the zoo six months ago?"

"I haven't been here very long," said the surprised keeper. "Please continue your conversation. But I have never been able to touch him myself, he is always very bad tempered."

"Why don't you put him somewhere else?" suggested Grandfather. "That leopard keeps frightening him. I'll go and see the Superintendent about it."

Grandfather went in search of the Superintendent of the zoo, but found that he had gone home early; and so, after wandering about the zoo for a little while, he returned to Timothy's cage to say good-bye. It was beginning to get dark.

He had been stroking and slapping Timothy for about five minutes when he found another keeper observing him with some alarm. Grandfather recognised him as the keeper who had been there when Timothy had first come to the zoo.

"You remember me," said Grandfather. "Now why don't you transfer Timothy to another cage, away from this stupid leopard?"

"But— sir —" stammered the keeper, "it is not your tiger."

"I know, I know," said Grandfather. "I realise he is no longer mine. But you might at least take a suggestion or two from me."

"I remember your tiger very well," said the keeper. "He died two months ago."

"Died!" exclaimed Grandfather.

"Yes sir, of pneumonia. This tiger was trapped in the hills only last month, and he is very dangerous!"

Grandfather could think of nothing to say. The tiger was still licking his arm, with increasing relish. Grandfather took what seemed to him an age to withdraw his hand from the cage.

With his face near the tiger's he mumbled, "Goodnight, Timothy," and giving the keeper a scornful look, walked briskly out of the zoo.

## 2. The Alien Hand

By Jayant Narlikar

"TILLOO! How often have you been told not to go that way?"

"But why does Daddy go there every day?"

"Because that's his job, Tilloo!"

'That way' was an underground passage. Tilloo's father went every day for work along that passage. And every day he came back from that direction. What lay at the end of that forbidden route? Not only Tilloo, but a great majority of the community would have liked to know. Tilloo's father was one of the select few permitted to go that way. The above conversation invariably took place between Tilloo and his mother whenever he insisted on following his father.

Today, however, was different. Tilloo's father was enjoying a siesta at home and Tilloo managed to get hold of his security card. Then, evading his watchful mother's eye, Tilloo made his way to the forbidden passage.

A metal door barred his entry. But Tilloo had watched his father slip the magic card into a slot. He did the same... and the door opened noiselessly. A well-lit passage seemed to beckon him.

Snatching the card which had come out of another slot in the wall, Tilloo started his march along a gentle upward slope—for the passage led from the underground habitat to the surface of the planet. Tilloo looked forward to seeing the sun (if it was daytime) or the stars (if it was night) about which he had heard and read so much.

But alas, that wasn't to be!

Tilloo had underestimated the security arrangements. Invisible mechanical devices had already detected and photographed the small intruder, sent his picture to the Central Bureau where it was thoroughly checked... And before he had advanced ten paces a strong hand fell heavily on his shoulder. Gently but firmly he was escorted by the security staff back home to an anxious and angry mother. While he was being scolded he received help from an unexpected quarter.

“Let me explain to him, darling!” said his father who had just got up. “If he is properly briefed, he will not do such a thing again.” He started to explain.

“Listen, Tilloo! I work on a surface where an ordinary person cannot survive because the air is too thin to breathe and where the temperature is so low that you would freeze to death.”

“But, Daddy, how do you manage to survive?”

“Because I go well-equipped, in a special suit with a reservoir of oxygen. I can keep warm and my boots are specially designed to make it easy for me to walk on the surface. What’s more, I’ve been trained to survive and work on the surface.

“There was a time when our forefathers lived on the surface quite naturally. Indeed they did so for millions of years. But times changed. The very sun, which had provided us with sustenance, turned hostile. It changed only slightly but the change was sufficient to upset the balance of nature on this planet.

“First the birds became extinct. The animals followed. The fish couldn’t bear it anymore either. We managed to survive only because of our superior technology, but we were forced to live underground under artificial conditions. Thanks to solar energy, we can generate sufficient power to make our life comfortable. But the machines which make this possible must always be in good working condition. Some of them are on the surface—belong to the team whose responsibility it is to keep watch on them and to service them.”

“Daddy, can I join the team when I grow up?”

“Of course, if you want to,” said his father.

“But for that you must be a good boy and do as your parents tell you.” His mother had, as usual, the last word.

Next day when Tilloo's father went to work, he found the Control Room full of excitement. People were crowded round the big TV screen. It showed a dot in an otherwise clear background.

"It isn't a star—for it's changing its position. Our computer has given a trajectory for this 'thing'. It's heading towards us." The Supervisor of the last shift explained.

"A spacecraft?" Tilloo's father asked. By now he was joined by his teammates on the new shift.

"So we think; but it needs watching."

A spacecraft? Where from? The solar system wasn't known to have any life anywhere else except on their planet. Tilloo's father recalled the ancient days recorded in the archives at the Central Bureau when their ancestors had a well-developed space programme and had searched the solar system with manned and unmanned spacecraft and found that they were indeed 'alone'. Now, in the days of energy shortage and underground life, they had no space programme. They could only watch impotently from their vantage point. Who were these strangers?

The conference room in the Central Bureau was so quiet that an outsider would have thought it was empty. Far from it. It was full to capacity but the members of the Central Committee were unusually quiet. They knew that the President was going to make a momentous announcement.

"Colleagues! I will give you the report as I have it. While I speak there may be a change in the situation," the President paused to get his papers in order and then continued. "Two spacecraft are approaching us. One is in fact orbiting our planet while the other is still far away. We guess that they are coming from our neighbouring planet. How should we react? Number One, your views please."

Number One was in charge of defence. He was known for his courage and wisdom. "Sir, if we wish we can totally destroy these spacecraft with our missiles. But that won't make us any wiser. We do not have the capacity to render these craft unoperational in space; but should they land we can render them ineffective anytime we choose. Our reports say that they do not contain living beings, they only have instruments."

"Number Two, your opinion please," the President asked the scientist on the committee.



“I recommend non-interference and passive observation. Since we do not know the power of the senders of these spacecraft, and we are still in the dark about their intentions, it is wise not to reveal our existence. If we destroy these spaceships or render them ineffective, we might reveal our existence.”

The President looked at Number Three, a social scientist. He rarely agreed with Number Two. But this was one of those rare occasions when he did.

“I agree with Number Two, sir. In fact I will go so far as to say that we should keep our surface activities to the minimum, thus creating the impression that there’s no life on this planet. Fortunately, our surface conditions do give that impression.”

Before the President could speak his personal telephone rang. He lifted the receiver and listened quietly for a minute.

“Colleagues!” he announced, “the first spacecraft has landed.”

It was a red letter day in Tilloo’s life—the day he was waiting for. For his father had at last taken him to the Control Room. From here he could see the alien spacecraft on his TV screen.

“What a funny looking thing, Daddy! What does it contain?” Tilloo asked.

His father shook his head, “Can’t say for sure. We are only allowed to observe it from far. But we control all its parts and can exercise our power if it is up to any mischief.” He pointed to an impressive panel with several coloured buttons on it. Tilloo looked at them wistfully.

“Look, it’s up to something, Daddy,” Tilloo suddenly noted some movement in the spacecraft. Others in the Control Room saw it too. All eyes were now glued to the screen.

A mechanical hand was emerging from the spacecraft. It was approaching the surface of the planet. It bent and touched the soil. What was it up to? People crowded towards the screen for a closer look. The telescopic lens of the TV camera zoomed in to the tip of the mechanical hand.

Tilloo was staring at the control panel and its attractive buttons. An irresistible desire got hold of him to press the most prominent of all buttons, the red one. He moved...

There was a shrill whistle and Tilloo found himself the centre of attention. His father pulled him away roughly and restored the red button to neutral position. But the damage was done.

The mechanical hand from the spacecraft ceased to work.

At a press conference held by NASA, a scientist was briefing the world press:

*... Everything has been going on smoothly with the Viking Mission. There is a small hitch. The mechanical hand which was to dig out the Martian soil for examination has developed a malfunction... We don't know the cause but our technicians are confident they'll sort it out...*

And shortly afterwards there was another press release from NASA:

*... The mechanical hand is working again, thanks to the efforts of our technicians. Soil samples are being collected and examined... Soon we will know the answer to the question whether there is life on Mars.*

Life on Mars? Of all the planets in our solar system, Mars is nearest in location and physical conditions to our Earth. So the scientists behind the Viking Mission were hopeful of finding life on Mars. But they were in for a disappointment. The Viking Mission found no signs of life on Mars