

*in which Tiger and Alexander move to Greenhouse  
Place*



When Alexander first let him out of the cat cage, Tiger wanted to catch the first plane back to Adelaide.

'I know the yard's a bit small,' Alexander said, stroking Tiger's fur, 'but now we're in Canberra – the capital of Australia – and things are bound to be different.'

And then he went back inside the house to unpack boxes. Just like that.

With one leap and a scramble, Tiger was up on the splintery fence to get a better view. The grass was high. Tufts of dandelions were poking up. The shrubs provided no elbow room. On the other side of the yard was an old plum tree. Good for climbing, Tiger noted. The fruit had already dropped to the ground where some of it had split open. The bees and ants

were having a good time.

Just then he heard a noise in the next yard. Two big mongrels were snoring under the shade of a wattle tree. Tiger's whiskers twitched with disdain. He couldn't understand why people kept watchdogs when they could have cats to look after them. But people were a bit slow sometimes.

Tiger dug his claws into the fence and edged back down to the ground. All this work had made him feel rather peckish. Where was the cat-door? In Adelaide, it had been on the back verandah. But this house didn't have a verandah. Only a concrete slab for a patio on the side, with steps leading up to a door.

Let's check that out, thought Tiger.

He bounded up to the landing and found only a solid door. Hmm. There was no point looking hungry if Alexander couldn't see him through the door behind the screen.

His tummy began to grumble. He hadn't had a good meal for days, it seemed.

Before they left Adelaide, Alexander had lured him into the cage with Cat Gourmet – his favourite, Salmon Paté. From then on, there'd been nothing but dried food. Dried food was OK for afternoon tea. It had the faint scent of beef, peas and potatoes. But Alexander had tricked him with the bowl and put him behind bars. Alexander needed to be taught a lesson, but there wasn't much Tiger could do except put on his Sad Cat Look and turn up his nose at the dried food.

He kept up the hunger strike until they put his cage in the cargo hold with the luggage. After they shut the door, though, it was dark and lonely. Tiger didn't know what to expect. He missed Alexander. And there wasn't much you could say to a suitcase. Then there was a roar of engines, and suddenly they

were zooming along. Tiger curled up into a little ball and put his head beneath his paws. His whole life flashed in front of his eyes. This was it – game over!

When the world didn't end right then, Tiger discovered he was still hungry. If he had just a *little* food, Alexander might not notice. But one bite led to another, and soon it was all gone.

Alexander probably wouldn't have learned his lesson anyway.

You have plenty of time to think when you're lying awake in the dark, so Tiger thought about Adelaide. He didn't understand why they'd had to move from South Australia, but it had something to do with Alexander being a writer. Humans always thought the grass was greener somewhere else. It was no good telling them that grass was grass no matter where it grew, and, if it was brown, all you had to do was wait until the next rain fixed it.

He should have gone walkabout again when Alexander first brought the packing boxes home from the grocery store. The first time he went walkabout was after Alexander got him 'fixed' at the vet's. He was sore for days. So he took off on a real adventure to teach Alexander a lesson. He walked in the cool of the mornings and the evenings and slept out under the stars – wondering if there were cats on other planets, and if they were as smart as he was. For food, he just waited until dinner time and sniffed the air. It helped being well-groomed when you turned up at a stranger's house looking for scraps. He knew how to make the most of his fine long ginger fur and big cool grey eyes.

When you're good-looking, he told himself, you never get left out in the rain. And there's always full cream milk in your bowl.

Tiger liked being a free spirit, but then he got to

thinking about Alexander and how he would worry. He'd probably called the animal rescue people and taken out full-page ads in the newspaper offering a reward for anyone who found him.

So Tiger went back. Of course, Alexander was pleased to see him. As he strutted in through the front door, Tiger noticed that Alexander's eyes were moist.

'I missed you,' Alexander told him. 'You and I are a team, you know.'

When the time came for them to move from Adelaide, Alexander tried to explain that it was for the best.

'I'm sure I'll get more writing done there,' he said. 'And you'll like it, too.'

We'll see about that, Tiger thought.

Back on the landing, Tiger was getting tired of waiting to be let in. He could have miaowed, but he didn't want the dogs next door to think he was a whiner. Besides, Alexander wouldn't hear him anyway – he was probably too busy unpacking his books somewhere. The only question was *where*? Tiger trotted around to the other side of the house to look. There was a big jacaranda tree next to the carport.

Now we're getting somewhere, he thought.

He scampered up the tree and dropped lightly onto the carport. From there, he had a commanding view. He couldn't see Alexander at first, but it was rather nice up there. The branches of the tree gave a bit of shade, and there were plenty of dead leaves for him to make a little nest with. If he kept still, birds might flit by. They would be scared of him at first, but after a while they'd see that he meant them no harm. Tiger hadn't hunted birds for years. Not even at times like this when he was hungry. The last one he'd eaten had given him worms. As if the worm pills he had to take weren't bad enough, he'd had to put up with

stern words from Alexander.

'We must get on with our fellow creatures,' Alexander had said to him, right in front of the vet. 'The world's having enough problems without us making things worse.'

By 'us', Alexander meant cats. It was true that cats had had a lot of bad press lately. Especially those cats who'd gone bush. It didn't matter that they might have been dumped there when they were kittens and were just trying to get by. Still, Alexander had a point. The birds were just trying to get by too. Besides, as long as he spooned out Cat Gourmet on demand, Tiger didn't need to hunt — there was no need to end up with feathers stuck between his teeth.

Tiger had to admit that life *was* easier when you got on with other living things. With the possible exception of dogs. But even dogs could be all right once you showed them who was boss.

From the front end of the carport, Tiger could see across the road to a big park with lots of gum trees and long grass. It seemed to stretch on and on, and there was no sign of stray dogs. Hmm, thought Tiger. Now that looks promising for a stroll — after dinner, of course.

The front door opened just then and Alexander came out with Tiger's bowl.

'Sorry about that, chum,' he said, as Tiger bounded over. 'Couldn't remember where I'd packed your bowl. It was hidden under the recipe books!'

That scent was unmistakable — Veal Parmesan.

All is forgiven, thought Tiger. Yum!



*in which Tiger meets Prince*

Say what you will, Tiger thought, licking his lips as he walked down the driveway, the world would be a happier place if everyone just had a full tum.

As the sun went down, a cool breeze came up. A fine time for a prowl in the park. Tiger cut across the front yard and stopped at the edge of the flower bed that marked the property line. The dogs next door might be awake by now. He pretended to sniff at a banksia bush, and then had a lick or two at his fur, but he was really checking out the gate to their back yard. The latch seemed solid enough, but you could never be sure ...

He remembered what his mother had told him when he was just a kitten: *You're only as safe as the nearest tree.*

Next Door's yard didn't have any trees, just a patchy lawn and a few scrubby bushes that seemed to be crying out for a good feed and some water. There

was a nice big gum tree back in Tiger's yard, but the last thing he wanted was to be caught out in the open with two dogs between him and his escape. One dog he could handle. Two coming at you at once could be a bit of a challenge.

There was only one way to be sure.

He trotted over to the gate between the two yards and scampered up onto the tallest post. Sure enough, the dogs were awake. As soon as they got his scent, they came racing over, barking like crazy.

'Don't get your collars in a knot,' said Tiger. 'I just came by to introduce myself. My name's Tiger, and I'm your new neighbour. My bloodline goes back to the Egyptians, you know.'

(Tiger's mother had told him the Egyptians were a people who lived by the River Nile and thought of cats as gods.)

'A cat! A cat!' the biggest dog barked, jumping up against the gate.

The post Tiger was sitting on shuddered ever so slightly, but the gate held.

'Do something, Tony,' the second dog growled, pacing back and forth.

'I'm doing my best, Cleo,' he said, wheezing a bit. 'You could help for a change!'

'Tony and Cleo?' laughed Tiger. 'What kind of names are those?'

Tony put a bit more energy into his next jump, but it still fell well short of Tiger. He shrank back, gasping for air.

'It has something to do with Shakespeare, I think,' said Cleo, haughtily. 'I think he's a writer. Have you heard of him?'

'My human's a writer, too,' said Tiger. 'He'd know that Shake-spear guy – if he's any good.' Tiger began to preen his whiskers regally.

'Huh!' said Tony, still panting. 'Just because you're up there and we're stuck in here, you think that you're better than we are.'

'Did I say such a thing?' Tiger said, trying to keep a straight face. 'But it's true, the world *can* be a cruel place. Anyway, I'll be seeing you around!'

With that, he skittered back down the post. Cleo and Tony kept barking until he was out of the yard and had crossed the road into the park. He headed straight for the tall grass. In a strange place it was best to take cover until you got your bearings. As the sky darkened he could hear crickets and frogs nearby. Tiger stopped. Where there are frogs there must be water, he thought. He decided to have a look.

As he cut through the park toward the frog-sounds, the grass tickled his whiskers and skipped along his fur like a gentle comb. In the poor light, he nearly tripped over a young brown snake.

'Watch where you're going, fur-ball!' the snake hissed, before scooting off into the bush.

'I think I'll go *this* way,' Tiger said, turning sharply to his right. 'Where there's one snake, there are sure to be others.'

A few metres later he came to a creek. It wasn't very wide, but it had a steady flow of water. The frogs were louder now but still invisible.

He moved on toward the frog-sounds. I could listen to them for hours, he thought. Aside from cats, few creatures had it better than frogs, as far as Tiger was concerned. Frogs could be happy even in a swamp. Frogs knew how to fit into the music of the night.

It sounded as though they were all around him now.

'Hello!' he called. 'I've just moved in across the road, and I'd like to say g'day!'

But there was no reply, and it was getting darker.

Soon the moon would be up. Maybe it would be better to let the frogs come to him. So he settled down on the bank, yawned and flexed his claws. This was as good a place as any for a short snooze.

He'd only just closed his eyes when he heard a splash down by the creek. He inched forward on his belly to have a look. A giant bullfrog — the biggest he had ever seen — had just sprung out of the water and was stretching his legs behind him, one at a time. Tiger laughed.

The frog stopped and glared up the bank at him. 'What's so funny, feline?'

'Excuse me,' said Tiger. 'I've never seen a frog stretch. I didn't mean to be rude.'

'When you've been around as long as I have,' said the frog, 'you have to work hard to keep fit.'

'I guess that makes sense,' Tiger said. 'How old are you?'

'As old as the hills,' winked the frog, 'and then some.'

'I didn't think frogs lived as long as that,' said Tiger.

The frog narrowed his eyes. 'You're not from around here. You're not feral by any chance?'

'Do I *look* feral?' said Tiger. 'I groomed myself less than an hour ago!'

The frog hopped up the bank. 'You have a human, then?'

Tiger was taken aback. 'Of course. His name is Alexander.'

'Ah,' said the frog. 'He's not Greek, by any chance?'

'Greek?' said Tiger.

'Long ago the Greeks had a king with that name,' said the frog.

Tiger hadn't heard of the Greeks, but they sounded important. 'You sure know a lot,' he said. 'For a frog.'

The frog flicked his tongue and caught a moth that was passing by. 'I do a lot of reading,' he said, gulping it down.

'I can't be bothered with books,' said Tiger, 'Give me a good horror movie any time. Back in Adelaide, Alexander always used to get out a video on Friday nights. Then he'd pick up some fish and chips and we'd be right for the evening.' He gulped. 'They *do* have fish and chip shops around here, don't they?'

'Of course,' said the frog. 'Canberra's a very important city, you know.'

'That's what Alexander said,' Tiger said. 'You two would get on. He's a reader, too. I suppose he has to be – since he's a writer.'

'Perhaps we'll meet some day,' said the frog. 'Right now, though, I'd better be on my way. The others will be waiting.'

'The others?' said Tiger.

'Of a very special group,' said the frog, hopping down the bank.

'Can I come along?'

'I'm afraid you're not special enough.'

Tiger bristled. 'I'm a cat, aren't I? And a highly intelligent one, at that.'

The frog paused at the edge of the creek. 'Hmm,' he said. 'I'll think about it.'

'Wait!' cried Tiger. 'I don't even know your name!'

But he was too late – the frog had already disappeared into the water.

'And I'm lonely,' Tiger added, shivering a bit.

*They call me Prince.*

Tiger glanced around. It was the frog, all right, but he was nowhere in sight.

'Hmm,' said Tiger, pinching himself. But he was already awake.

