

## Tiger, Tiger

*By Marilyn Reeves*

Oh, you foolish two-footed creatures who dare to taunt me as I pace, trapped inside this hateful place! Take care that your little ones not draw too near. Don't you know I can thrust out knife-sharp claws and grab a hand, grab an arm – without warning, quick as lightning?

Oh, how tedious it is to watch you carry on like gibbering monkeys in a tree. Some of you throw things – try to hit me – and laugh at my ferocity. Others point and sigh, and say "Poor thing." Spare me your maudlin sympathy! I wish you were in here instead of me.

Day after day, all day long, until that bright orb that lights the sky finally goes down, I endure your unbearable company. Then, finally at night, I enjoy a brief reprieve. A haunch, a leg, is lowered down inside my cage, and I gnaw for hours at the bone that I retrieve.

Trapped in a cage across from mine is a magnificent African lion. Some call him "King of the Jungle" and to be sure, he is a fine fellow, but not half so beautiful as I. He has no stripes, just a big lot of hair, and is lazy as can be. Rather than pacing back and forth, he sleeps the day away. But I can only sleep when the two-footed ones have left the complex for the day.

And when I sleep I dream.

My sister and I are following our mother, who moves stealthily through the trees, taking cover under their sheltering leaves. To some hapless creature passing by, we are but mere shadows dancing in the forest bright. Stripes of orange and black and white, flickering in the light.

Suddenly our mother tenses, energy gathers in her haunches, and then she springs and strikes! A small cry from the unsuspecting prey. Woe to the poor creature that will be our meal that day. We rip and tear the fur away and feast upon the meat. Hunger sated, we retreat to our hideaway. The silvery moon casts shadows neath the bushes where we sleep 'til break of day.

But in the morning when I wake, I'm back inside this cage again. Life isn't supposed to be this way! How I yearn to return to that place where I was meant to be. If only I could tear down these bars that confine me, so that I could once again run free!

But if you were to pursue me, once you found me, you'd be compelled to look into my eyes. Those mesmerizing amber jewels would be the last thing you would see.