

## Life of Pi

The ship sank. It made a sound like a monstrous metallic burp. Things bubbled at the surface and then vanished. Everything was screaming: the sea, the wind, my heart. From the lifeboat I saw something in the water.

I cried, "Richard Parker, is that you? It's so hard to see. Oh, that this rain would stop! Richard Parker? Richard Parker? Yes, it is you!"

I could see his head. He was struggling to stay at the surface of the water.

"Jesus, Mary, Muhammad and Vishnu, how good to see you, Richard Parker! Don't give up, please. Come to the lifeboat. Do you hear this whistle? TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! You heard right. Swim, swim! You're a strong swimmer. It's not a hundred feet."

He had seen me. He looked panic-stricken. He started swimming my way. The water about him was shifting wildly. He looked small and helpless.

"What are you doing, Richard Parker? Don't you love life? Keep swimming then! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! Kick with your legs. Kick! Kick! Kick!"

He stirred in the water and made to swim.

His head was barely above water. He was looking up, taking in the sky one last time. There was a lifebuoy in the boat with a rope tied to it. I took hold of it and waved it in the air.

"Do you see this lifebuoy, Richard Parker? Do you see it? Catch hold of it! HUMPF! I'll try again. HUMPF!"

He was too far. But the sight of the lifebuoy flying his way gave him hope. He revived and started beating the water with vigorous, desperate strokes.

"That's right! One, two. One, two. One, two. Breathe when you can. Watch for the waves. TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE!"

My heart was chilled to ice. I felt ill with grief. But there was no time for frozen shock. It was shock in activity. Something in me did not want to give up on life, was unwilling to let go, wanted to fight to the very end. Where that part of me got the heart, I don't know.

"Isn't it ironic, Richard Parker? We're in hell yet still we're afraid of immortality. Look how

close you are! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! TREEEEEE! Hurrah, hurrah! You've made it, Richard Parker, you've made it. Catch! HUMPF! ”

I threw the lifebuoy mightily. It fell in the water right in front of him. With his last energies he stretched forward and took hold of it.

“Hold on tight, I'll pull you in. Don't let go. Pull with your eyes while I pull with my hands. In a few seconds you'll be aboard and we'll be together. Wait a second. Together? We'll be together? Have I gone mad?”

I woke up to what I was doing. I yanked on the rope.

“Let go of that lifebuoy, Richard Parker! Let go, I said. I don't want you here, do you understand? Go somewhere else. Leave me alone. Get lost. Drown! Drown!”

He was kicking vigorously with his legs. I grabbed an oar. I thrust it at him, meaning to push him away. I missed and lost hold of the oar.

I grabbed another oar. I dropped it in an oarlock and pulled as hard as I could, meaning to move the lifeboat away. All I accomplished was to turn the lifeboat a little, bringing one end closer to Richard Parker. I would hit him on the head! I lifted the oar in the air.

He was too fast. He reached up and pulled himself aboard.

“Oh my God!”

Ravi was right. Truly I was to be the next goat. I had a wet, trembling, half-drowned, heaving and coughing three-year-old adult Bengal tiger in my lifeboat. Richard Parker rose unsteadily to his feet on the tarpaulin, eyes blazing as they met mine, ears laid tight to his head, all weapons drawn. His head was the size and colour of the lifebuoy, with teeth.

I turned around, stepped over the zebra and threw myself overboard.