

Victoria is a tiger cub, about a year and a half, weighing 150 pounds, who has been the Sanjana family pet since her mother (a maneater) was shot by a hunter. The plan had been to enjoy the cub and return the adult to the zoo, but no plan had been made for the adolescent. The following scene shows the Sanjanas breakfasting in their compound, trapped by their lack of foresight, Sohrab Sanjana petting Victoria, daring their servant Aphoos to do the same.

“Come on, Aphoos, show some courage. Victoria will not hurt you.” Victoria purred, rolling onto her back beside Sohrab, inviting him to scratch her chest, paws dangling over his hand as he obliged, chuckling knowingly. “See? She is just a big kitty.”

Victoria rolled onto her stomach to sit and lap his palm like a saucer of milk. “Not so much, Victoria. You have a very rough tongue—like the back of a hedgehog. You will scrape the skin right off my hand.”

He tried to remove his hand, but Victoria held it between her paws, her purr rising to a growl. She clamped his hand firmly at the wrist, lapping beads of dark red blood released by her tongue and the pressure of her paws from the cut reopened on his thumb. Fear enveloped him like a cave of ice. He was afraid to pull his hand away forcibly, afraid she might fight for what she imagined was hers already, afraid for what he might already have lost, a fear which permeated the air, gradually enveloping the other Sanjanas in Sohrab’s cave of ice as they became aware of his predicament.