

# Should We Eat Tigers?

**T**WO VIRUSES had gorged themselves on a fat juicy tiger. Since it was a warm summer evening, they had retired to the back porch for coffee and conversation:

- H. Life is good. I hope our posterity will have evenings like this.
- I. Yes, that was a very fine tiger—so young and fresh. But it was not easy to find. If that circus had not been in town we would have been hard-pressed.
- H. Our families have lived on tiger for millions of years.
- I. But they are getting more difficult to find.
- H. Hmm. Let's see, there are about 5,000 tigers left; at 150 pounds apiece, that's only 750,000 pounds of tiger.
- I. Not much, is it? It will be tough for the children to find a meal like the one we just had.
- H. Speaking of the children, when are we going to—ah—reproduce?
- I. Oh, not for another twenty minutes or so.

*(They fell into silence and watched the sky redden with the setting sun, thinking of the offspring who were yet to be.)*

- I. The little ones are so hungry when they are first born.
- H. Maybe we should switch our diet. Eat something that is easier to get. It would be hard, but—
- I. But what would we switch to? Ants?
- H. There certainly are a lot of ants, but they are so small. It takes a great many ants to make a pound, and they are almost all shell.

- I. If not ants, what?
- H. I was thinking of people.
- I. People? The family tried that once, several hundred years ago. From what I hear, they taste foul and cause gas.
- H. Yes, but look at the numbers. There are five billion of them. At 120 pounds each, that's 600,000,000,000 pounds, and in another fifty years, it will be 1,200,000,000,000 pounds. They certainly are easy to find.
- I. You're being silly again. No one would switch to eating people.
- H. I don't know—what about the HIV family? They switched and seem to be doing very well.
- I. Well—yes. It's disgusting. Great-grandmother was at the mall yesterday, and those HIV's were all over the place.
- H. And they aren't the only ones. Grandmother was reading in the paper this morning about some viruses in the southwest who switched from deer mice to people.
- I. Switching from deer mice to people is one thing, but who would give up tigers?
- H. I suppose you are right. It was just an idea.
- I. Anyway, it's time to reproduce. We had better get at it.

*(They both smiled as they rose to go inside. At the door, H paused, looked around, and, with a worried expression, turned to I.)*

- H. The little ones are going to be hungry when they are born. Do you see any tigers about?
- I. No—only people.

—RUSSELL RAINVILLE



