

The Persimmon Monster

- traditional Korean tale NKA Available in picture book, though the text has been adapted here to better meet the young child.

Long, long ago when tigers smoked pipes and rabbits had long, long tails, a huge tiger lived in the forest. His roar was so loud the other animals ran when they heard him coming. He was so sure of his strength that, as he roamed through the forest, he would roar out a challenge no creature had the courage to meet.

One year, winter was so hard that no animal had enough to eat. Hunger forced Tiger to leave the snow-covered forest in search of food. Night was falling when he finally crept into the yard of a house at the edge of a village. He saw a large fat ox in a stall near the gate. The sight made his mouth water. He sneaked up to the stall to catch the ox. Then, just as he was ready to pounce, he heard a baby cry.

“Human babies are very loud,” thought Tiger. And then, being very curious and wondering what other meals might be had at this farm, he crawled toward the house.

“Stop crying,” whispered the mother to the baby, “do you want Tiger to get you?” Tiger wondered how she knew he was there. “Hush. If you don’t stop crying a tiger will get you,” said the mother.

And thinking how strong he was, Tiger puffed up with pride.

*“My teeth are sharp, my gold coat shines;
No creature has such strength as mine,”
he said under his breath.*

The baby cried on. “Hush, hush,” said the mother. “Tiger will hear you.”

And thinking how strong his ears were, Tiger puffed up with pride.

*My teeth are sharp, my gold coat shines;
No creature has such ears as mine.*

Still the baby cried on. “Hush, hush,” said the mother, “your cry is so loud it will shake the earth, and Tiger will feel the earth moan in his sensitive paws.”

And thinking how strong his paws were, Tiger puffed up with pride.

*"My teeth are sharp, my gold coat shines;
No creature has such paws as mine."*

And Tiger reached out to look at his own his fine paws. Still, the baby kept on crying. "But that baby's not afraid of me." Tiger grew angry and began to tear the ground with his sharp claws. And Tiger gave a low growl outside the baby's window.

The mother heard the low growl and knew she must do something to stop the baby's crying, and do it quickly. "Look, here's a dried persimmon," said the mother and she put the sweet fruit into the baby's mouth. The baby stopped crying immediately and began sucking on the sweet dried fruit.

Tiger heard the baby stop crying. "Oh," he said to himself. "There must be something very scary in there to make the baby stop crying." So he moved closer to see what it could be. But Tiger could not see through the paper window and he did not know what a persimmon was. But the baby was quiet and so he thought, "The baby is more afraid of the persimmon than it is of me. It must be really scary and strong. Even stronger than I am. I'd better go hide in the ox stall before the persimmon gets me." And Tiger sneaked off while the baby quietly sucked away at the sweet, dried persimmon fruit.

Tiger slunk into the ox stall and sat down to calm his nerves and hide from the fierce persimmon. Soon someone else crept into the stall to steal the ox. It was a thief. The thief reached out to grab the ox, but in the dark he grabbed Tiger. "Oh no, oh no," thought Tiger, "the dried persimmon's got me.

*"Alas, alack, how can I flee?
Persimmon is more fierce than me."*

And he sat very still while the thief stroked his fur. "What a nice coat this ox has, so soft and silky" thought the thief. "I'll get a lot of money for you," he said out loud. Fumbling in the dark the thief managed to get a rope around Tiger's neck.

"What can I do?" thought Tiger. "I can't growl, I can't roar, or that giant persimmon is sure to kill me. Oh my," he trembled, "this is surely the end of me."

The thief, unable to see in the night, was very happy to have what he thought was a fine ox calf in tow. Eager to get away quickly, but still fumbling in the dark, he managed to hop onto the ox-tiger's back to ride away.