

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 toward a house at the edge of a village. In the barn, 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 in the house.

“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 hear you and come and get you?” Tiger wondered how she knew he was there. “Hush. If you don’t stop crying a tiger will come to eat you,” said the mother.

Hearing how frightened the mother was of him made Tiger think 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.*

But the baby just 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. He was strong and clever, with sharp teeth, big ears, and sensitive paw, but still, the baby did not seem to be afraid; it just kept on crying. “That baby’s not afraid of me,” Tiger said. Then he grew angry and began to tear the ground with his sharp claws. And soon, 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. She looked around and saw a bowl of fruit sitting nearby. “What will be the sweetest?” thought the mother. She pushed aside the peaches and plums and looked at the bottom of the bowl for the sweetest dried fruit. “Ah, here is a dried persimmon-fruit,” said the mother and she picked it up and 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. “What is this persimmon fruit? It must be a very scary thing to make the baby stop crying. I have not seen one, but it must be stronger, more sensitive, and more clever than I am if it stopped the baby’s cries so quickly when I could not.” So Tiger 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.

The baby stayed quiet with the sweet fruit in his mouth, so the tiger thought, “The baby is more afraid of the persimmon than he is of me. That persimmon must be really scary and strong. Even stronger than I am. It must be a monster! I’d better get out of here before the persimmon monster gets me. I’d best go hide in the ox stall.” 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 monster. For a short time he sat alone, except for the munching ox. But soon someone else crept into the stall to steal the ox. It was a thief. Not wanting to get caught, the thief quickly reached out to grab the ox. But in the dark he grabbed Tiger instead.

“Oh no, oh no,” thought Tiger when he felt the hand grab him, “the persimmon monster’s got me now.

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

And he sat very still while the thief held him tight and 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 the persimmon monster 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, he managed to hop onto the “ox-tiger’s” back to ride away.

As Tiger sat beneath him, the thief stroked the tiger’s fur. The thief thought to himself, “Funny, this doesn’t feel like any ox I have ever known.” While the thief was busy wondering what was happening, Tiger carried him out of the barn. In the moonlight the thief could see just who it was he was riding. “Oh no,” he thought, “this is not an ox; this is a tiger! I am riding on a tiger’s back.” The thief was so frightened that he nearly fell off Tiger. “I can’t fall off, I can’t” he thought. “If I fall off, Tiger will gobble me up for sure.” And he squeezed Tiger with his legs so as not to fall off.

Tiger felt the thief’s legs tighten and he was sure it was the persimmon monster riding on his back, and he was sure the persimmon monster was going to squeeze him to death. “The persimmon monster is squeezing me,” moaned Tiger “I’m going to die. I’m going to die. I’m going to die!

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

“What bad luck, to die at the hand of a giant persimmon monster. I have to get him off,” moaned Tiger. And Tiger ran faster.

“I can’t fall off,” thought the thief. “If I fall off Tiger will gobble me up for sure.” And he squeezed Tiger still harder so as not to fall off.

Feeling the thief’s legs tighten further still, tiger thought, “I’m going to die. I’m going to die. Persimmon monster will squeeze me to death. What bad luck, to die at the hand of a giant persimmon monster. I have to get him off my back.” And Tiger ran faster yet.

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

But the thief thought, “I can’t fall off! If I fall off Tiger will gobble me up for sure.” And he squeezed Tiger still harder so as not to fall off. The harder he squeezed, the faster Tiger ran. But Tiger did not look up at where they were going. He did not see that there was a great tree branch hanging over the path. He ran and ran right to the tree and ducked his head just in time.

But when Tiger ran under the branch, bang, the thief, who sat high on his back, was knocked off and tiger ran away as fast as he could. “Oh,” said the thief as he watched Tiger run on, “Oh, oh, I am free!” The thief quickly climbed into a hole in the tree to hide and there he stayed.

Tiger felt the giant persimmon monster fall off his back but he didn’t dare turn round and look at it. He just ran and ran, and ran, farther and farther away from the great persimmon monster that was so terrifying that it could

silence the baby. Tiger ran farther and farther and farther into the forest. Finally, he was sure he had run far enough, and he fell to the ground and let out a sigh of relief.

“I’m alive. I can’t believe it,” he roared. “I thought that dried persimmon monster was going to eat me up! But I showed him, I can run too fast even for a persimmon monster!” And he rolled over on the grass laughing.