

The Hare and the Tiger

There was once upon a time a tiger. He had sharp claws and sharp teeth and sharp eyes and when I say that he had sharp eyes I mean that he could see deep into the dark forest when he was hunting his prey. The tiger would hide behind a bush and wait for a small animal to walk past on the path and then he would POUNCE on it. He would lie stretched out on a branch over a path and he would wait for a small animal to pass below and then he would POUNCE on it.

Well, this was all in the good old days when Tiger was young. Now Tiger was getting old and his claws weren't quite so sharp and his teeth weren't quite so sharp and his eyes weren't quite so sharp. And poor old Tiger would spend his time walking in the forest trying to catch other animals and complaining about how difficult his life had become. 'I'm the king of this forest,' he would say. 'I shouldn't have to hunt for my own food. I should have people to bring me my food.'

And then Tiger had an idea. He called a meeting of all the animals in the forest. They came to the clearing where Tiger lived and when the animals had all gathered around Tiger stood before them and he announced, 'I am not going to hunt you anymore.' Well, the other animals were astonished. 'Tiger's not going to hunt us anymore!' they said turning to one another. 'Well, that's good!'

'No,' said Tiger. 'I am the king of this forest and I shouldn't have to hunt for my food. From now on I want one of you to come to this clearing each day at lunchtime when the sun is high in the sky and I will eat you.'

The other animals all turned to one another in disbelief. 'He can't do that,' they said. 'He's a tiger. He's supposed to hunt us. That's his job!'

'And in case you're thinking,' said Tiger 'that I can't do this then just remember how sharp my claws are and just remember how sharp my teeth are. Now, go away and draw up a list and make sure that tomorrow at midday when the sun is high in the sky one of you is here to be my lunch.'

The other animals went off. 'He's right you know,' they said. 'He is the king of the forest and we don't have any choice. But, while the other animals drew up their list for Tiger's lunch they noticed that Hare was skipping away. 'Hey, Hare!' they said. 'Come over here and put yourself on Tiger's list.'

'No,' said Hare. 'I'm not bothered with all that nonsense.'

'But you have to go on the list,' said the other animals. 'It's only fair. Our names are all on the list.'

'If Tiger wants to eat me for his lunch then he can jolly well catch me,' said Hare and he skipped away into the forest.

The next morning Tiger woke up and he sat on his grass bed in the clearing where he lived and he waited to see if his plan would work. As the sun rose to the highest point in the sky a little deer skipped into the clearing and it ran up to Tiger and Tiger ATE HIM UP! And Tiger was very pleased with himself.

The next morning Tiger got up a little later. He could have a lie-in if his lunch was going to arrive every day at noon. As the sun rose to the highest point in the sky a little monkey swung down from the trees and it ran up to Tiger and Tiger ATE HIM UP!

This went on day after day and week after week. Every day Tiger would have a lie-in and get up late and stretch and yawn and sit on his grass bed and wait for his lunch to arrive.

Now, one day Hare was skipping along through the forest when he noticed a small huddle of other animals and they were nudging each other and pointing at him and giggling. Hare went up to them and he said, 'What's the matter with you lot?'

'He doesn't know!' said one of the other animals.

'What don't I know,' said Hare.

'He doesn't know!' said another one of the animals.

'What don't I know,' said Hare, getting more and more cross.

'Tomorrow,' said one of the animals. 'Tomorrow it is your turn to be Tiger's lunch.'

'Oh, I'm not bothered with all that nonsense,' said Hare.

'But you have to go,' said the other animals. 'It's your turn.'

'No, I'm not going,' said Hare. 'If tiger wants to eat me for his lunch then he can jolly well catch me.' And he skipped away.

The next morning Tiger woke up late and he stretched and he yawned and he sat on his grass bed in the clearing where he lived and he waited for his lunch to arrive. As the sun rose high into the sky Tiger licked his lips. Who would he be having for lunch today? But as the sun reached the highest point in the sky no one arrived in the clearing to be Tiger's lunch. Tiger waited and he waited. The sun began to sink into the afternoon, but still there was no sign of Tiger's lunch. Tiger began to pace up and down. Now he was worried. That night Tiger went to bed hungry for the first time in a long time. And he didn't sleep: he was so worried about what had happened.

The next morning Tiger was up early and he was pacing up and down across his clearing waiting to see if anyone would arrive at noon to be his lunch.

As the sun rose to the highest point in the sky Hare came running into the clearing. He ran round the clearing and he ran up to Tiger and he said, 'Oh, Mr. Tiger, Mr. Tiger, I'm so sorry I'm late!'

'Late!' roared Tiger. 'What do you mean late? You're a day late and I'm hungry. Why weren't you here yesterday?'

'Oh, Mr. Tiger, Mr. Tiger, I'm so sorry. You see yesterday I was on my way here when another tiger started chasing me!'

'What do you mean another tiger? I'm the only tiger in this forest!'

'Not anymore,' said Hare. 'This other tiger, he's bigger than you and he's fiercer than you and he chased me all afternoon. I called out to him that I was your lunch, but he said that you're a rubbish tiger!'

'What does he mean, I'm a rubbish tiger? Show me where this other tiger lives. I'll show him who's king of this forest.'

'Oh, please don't make me go there Mr. Tiger. Please don't make me go there. He's such a big and fierce tiger. Please don't make me go there.'

'Show me where he lives,' roared Tiger.

And so Hare set off hopping through the forest followed by the tiger. They came to the edge of the forest and looked out over the fields where the men grazed their cattle.

'You see that low hill?' said Hare. 'Over that hill there is a wall and over that wall there is a hole and in that hole is where the other tiger lives, but please don't make me go there, Mr. Tiger.'

'Wait here while I go and deal with this other tiger. I'll be hungry when I get back.'

And Tiger set off prowling across the field. He came to the low hill and he came to the wall and he pulled himself up onto the wall and he looked down into the hole. There below him he saw the face of a tiger staring up at him. He let out a great roar and another great roar came right back at him from the hole. Tiger pounced into the hole and he fell down, down, down, down, SPLOSH! And he drowned!

And that is the story of how one very clever hare tricked one very greedy tiger.

Now, what do you think Tiger saw when he looked into that hole? And what do you think Tiger heard when he roared into that hole? That's right! He saw his own reflection and he heard the echo of his roar.

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