

The STORY of THE TIGER

By Harney Rennolds.

Some years ago there appeared a short story in the Century Magazine (November, 1882), that agitated and set actively guessing the whole literary world. The answer to the question propounded could be merely problematical; not so as to the success of its author, for Frank R. Stockton has been famous ever since. He was besought from all sides to relieve the intense, burning speculation, as to the fate meted to her lover by the young princess, but discreetly refused to open either door. The veil has been lifted by another hand, and here is the sequel. And now arises another witching question: is the following narrative the answer from the male or female point of view?

THE soft summer day lured me from my room, and following its pleasant beckoning, I strolled on regardless of distance until I found myself in the Zoological Garden.

Only the night before, in looking over some old magazines, I had come across and read "The Lady or the Tiger." The quaint literary conceit had greatly interested me—it now lingered in my mind, clothing the Bengal prisoner with a fresh fascination; and after I had made a tour of the grounds I found myself the second time in his neighborhood. This, I concluded, should be the end of my stroll; here I would spend the remainder of my afternoon, and seating myself on one of the rustic chairs near the cage, I fell to contemplating with an interest largely mixed with speculation the poor captives it confined.

Near the center, a beautiful, sleek tigress surrounded by her cubs, lay basking in the sun, while the male, a large, muscular creature, imposing in his striped regalia, paced back and forth at the farther end like a faithful sentinel. Long and intently I regarded them, thinking, concerning them, things that had never before entered my mind. I wondered if they had been born and reared in durance? If, in the content of ignorance, they spent their days oblivious of space unlimited by bars; or if, in some way, had come down to them legends of the woods, jungles and rocky caves that are their natural haunts? Somehow I thought there were memories and longings in the great wide-opened eyes of the restless sentinel as he lifted them and gazed away toward the horizon.

After a while his pace slackened and the far-off look was replaced by one of present interest as he turned towards the family group.

"Ah, my little cubs," she said, crouching down among them, "how my heart bleeds when I think of the dreary life you now live, and the desolate future that awaits you. How I long to tear away these bars and fling you back into the great broad world through which I once roamed at will, that you might revel, if but a day, in its glories—that you might view if but once its towering mountains, swelling streams and sandy deserts and take one long sweet draught of freedom! You eat flesh thrown you by the keeper, yea gloat upon its flavor, but what know you of the taste of blood—the warm, rich blood of prey you have yourself captured? Many a time have I stood upon a rocky height and watched the cattle browsing on the plains, and singled out the best of them pursued it to its death; or crouching in the lush grasses by the river's bank waited the coming of the thirsty deer and springing on the fleetest, throttled him to suffocation." His whole frame seemed to dilate and quiver with his fierce pent up longing. "What power was once mine! What strength lay in this!" he continued, stretching out to its full length his long sinewy limb. "How the beasts of the earth feared me? I had but to roar and the strongest of them fled trembling to their dens and jungles!"

"Oh! why then are we here?" whined one of the cubs, "why do you not go back—why do you not go back and take us with you to that broad beautiful world?"

"Ah! my little cubs, I am not the prisoner of beasts. I would trample their brute force in the dust and scorn their fetters and devices. It is man who has mastered me—man who was made my lord. The bounds he sets me I must keep—the shackles he forges I must wear. By him I was outwitted and ensnared—his prisoner I live—his prisoner I must die!" This he said with a groan that shook the bars in his cage. After a long silence he continued: "There was great rejoicing throughout the length and breadth of the land, when it was known that I had been taken; for I had been for many years the terror of the neighborhood, nay of the whole kingdom, and people flocked from far and near to gaze at me and

gloat on my captivity. In a little while orders came from court that I should be conveyed to the capital and there placed among the royal tigers. There was of course some comfort in that. These royal tigers were strong, fierce beasts (the strongest and fiercest that could be found) and kept by this barbaric king caged in his garden ready to be brought when needed to the arena to fight with the condemned criminals. I had been in my new home but a few days when I learned by a conversation of my keeper with his fellows, that within less than a week the services of one of the strongest and fiercest of our number would be in requisition at the arena. A strange trial was there to take place—the strangest that had ever appeared on the nation's record. A trial in which the criminal's ignorance would be the proof on which the

Tomorrow would be the trial. So said the keepers to one another, and fell to speculating how vast would be the crowd. "To-morrow is the trial," I repeated to myself, "and one of us must die." The long, eventless sultry day drifted into a hot, pulseless night. Group after group the courtiers disappeared from the garden walks; song after song died away in the palace; cry after cry of the practicing athletes subsided, until silence reigned instead of merriment; a silence only broken by the restless yawning of my fellow captives, and the hourly call of the watchman. It was after midnight when soft, low voices fell on my ear, voices that grew more and more distinct as two lovers arm in arm came slowly towards the cages. Step by step deeply absorbed in each other and their tender words, they advanced, the bright moonlight portraying in accurate curves and faithful coloring their wondrous beauty.

"I have bribed the keeper," said the woman, as they paused in front of my cage. "My father has unbounded confidence in him and will never once suspect his treachery. He is to tell me which room is yours, and which the tiger's. I will hold your life in my hands, and by a motion of my scarf, too slight to be observed, by any eyes but



"He Himself came to the Garden to Select the Tiger"

scales of justice would be poised. Two apartments exactly alike, with doors opening on the arena, had been built in the amphitheater under the tiers of seats opposite those set apart from the king and his court. Behind one of these doors was to be a lady, whom the criminal must marry should he enter it; behind the other would crouch a tiger with whom, should he in his blindness select it, he must contend for life.

The princess was beloved by a man of unkingly blood, and the infuriated king in racking his mind for punishment in keeping with the enormity of his guilt, had selected this for the young courtier, who had dared to love his daughter, the princess.

He himself came to the garden to select the tiger for this contest. It was not his custom, but the crime was heinous and his wrath intense.

"A powerful beast I must have," he said, "a beast fierce of grasp and strong of sinew—a beast that can crush a man as a wolf a kid! This—this great tawny monster will do!" he exclaimed, when his eye fell on me. He rubbed his hands in a transport of barbaric glee, and throwing back his head made the air ring with wild laughter.

yours, I will direct you which door you must enter."

"And which will you direct—to which

will you consign me, the lady or the tiger?"

His lips were bloodless, his words came thick and slow. He said nothing more, but leaning down until his eyes were close to hers he looked into them with a love deep and intense—too deep and intense for speech, a love that silently appealed to her for life.

"Oh! you must not die—you shall not die!" she cried clasping her arms about his neck and covering with warm, fond kisses his cold, white brow. "You cannot for a moment think that I would resign you to the tiger? Never—never! I would sooner die myself—would sooner be torn into atoms by his cruel claws!" and leaning her head on his breast close-clasped in his arms, she gave way to the grief that throbbled from her breast in sobs and fell from her eyes in tears.

"But—if you live, you marry the woman I hate!" she hissed between her clenched teeth, and thrusting him from her stood wringing her hands in a wild frenzy. "What! shall I give you the signal that marries you to her? No, no—the tiger—the tiger," she cried, and turning towards me revealed a face transformed with anger, whose eyes were filled with a glare like that which leaps into ours when baffled and enraged. "The tiger, the tiger!" she repeated and rushing forward threw herself with outstretched arms against my bars as if from me imploring help.

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