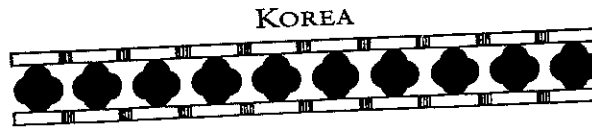


The Tiger's Whisker



*A*fter many years in battle, a fierce warrior returned home so somber that it seemed to his wife as if his spirit had been killed in battle and that only his flesh and bones walked through the door. Although she welcomed him with great embraces and tears of joy, he did not respond to her touch. His icy eyes did not meet her gaze. He seated himself at the table and stared out the window.

The wife tried to engage him in conversation, but he did not reply. She prepared a huge, tasty meal, which he barely ate. She hovered over him like a mother bird over a new brood and chattered on, telling him jokes and the news of events he had missed in his absence. At night she affectionately curled her arms over his shoulder and smothered his head with kisses. But he turned away and slept with his back to her, pulling the covers tightly around his body.

The wife became distraught at his coldness. She scolded him for being so cruel and hardhearted. "How can you treat me this way!" she wailed. "I have waited so long for your return and suffered in my loneliness!" She dashed out the door and ran until she came to the house of a wise old man, who was known to make potions and magical charms.

Tearfully she pleaded, "Please, give me a love potion that will make my husband love me again. He has returned home from war with no love left in his heart."

The old man listened carefully to her complaint and finally replied,

"There is a special charm needed in a situation like this. I can help you win back your husband's love, but to make the potion, I will need the whisker of a fierce tiger. If you can bring me such a whisker, I can help you win back your husband's love."

The woman's mouth dropped open, and her eyebrows arched in surprise. "A tiger's whisker!" she exclaimed. "That will be impossible to obtain!"

The old man replied, "If you truly want to win the love of your husband, then you will bring me what I ask."

The woman walked away from the old man's house, deep in thought. Her heart ached. She could not bear the situation as it was, so she went to the market to buy a chunk of meat.

Carrying the meat, she traveled into the jungle until she saw the cave of a tiger. Hiding at a distance, she saw that the huge beast was peacefully asleep in the sun. The woman could not help but notice its sharp claws. She sat as still as a stone and watched the tiger's belly move as he breathed. At last, she left the meat on the spot where she had been sitting and went home.

Each day, the woman returned to the tiger's cave with the meat. Each day, she left the meat a few inches closer and patiently watched the animal. After several weeks, the tiger allowed her to approach and place the meat in front of him. More time passed, and the tiger allowed her to sit beside him as he ate. He would then stretch himself and sleep with his head near her lap. The first time she reached out and touched his sleek fur, a tremble ran through her body. The tiger purred like a giant house cat and slept on.

Many days later, as she sat beside the huge, napping creature, she took tiny scissors from her pocket and carefully snipped a whisker.

She slipped away with the hard-won treasure in her pocket. When she was out of the jungle, she burst into a run that took her all the way to the old man's house. Clutching the tiger's whisker in her hand, she held it up and cried out with joy, "Here it is! I have the tiger's whisker! Now, make me the love potion that will win me back my husband's love."

The old man took the whisker and examined it carefully. "It is truly what you say it is. Tell me, how did you obtain it?"

The woman replied, "I was very patient. I approached the beast carefully and gently, leaving my offerings at a great distance. Each day, I came just a bit closer. After a long time, when I was certain that the creature trusted me, I moved closer still. Finally, I was able to reach out and touch him, for, at long last, he was not afraid."

The old man nodded as the woman unfolded her tale. "That is very interesting," he said, tossing the whisker into the fire.

The woman shrieked with alarm. "After all my effort you have thrown away the special ingredient you need to make the love potion!"

The old man smiled gently and replied, "You do not need a love potion. Any woman who can tame a ferocious tiger can certainly win the love of her husband. Go home, dear woman, and be patient with your husband. Trust that the magic charm to win his heart is already within you."

The woman returned home with new understanding. She stopped scolding. She stopped demanding love. With great patience and the gentle warmth that had tamed a tiger, she melted the icy heart of her warrior husband.