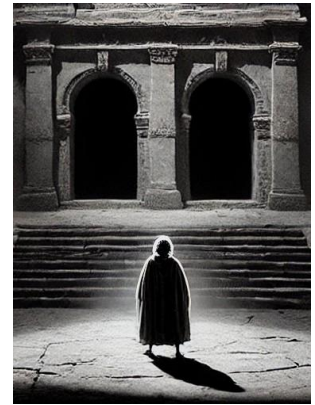


The Lady, or the Tiger

Frank R. Stockton



Once upon a time there lived a half-**barbaric** king. His ideas were sometimes **progressive** and sometimes violent, and cruel. He had absolute control over his land and whatever he wanted, he got. When everything in his country moved smoothly, he was happy and calm; but, whenever there was a little problem, he was even happier, because nothing pleased him more than to see justice done. One of his favorite forms of justice was the public **arena**, in which, men and tigers fought. When someone was accused of a serious crime which interested the king, the **subject** would enter the arena. In this public arena crime was punished, or **virtue** rewarded, and the judge in this arena was **impartial** and incorruptible **chance**.

When all the people were in the viewing galleries, and the king sat high up on his throne, he gave a signal, a door beneath him opened, and the subject stepped out into the arena. Directly opposite him, were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. The person **on trial** had to walk directly to these doors and open one of them. He could open either door. If he opened one, there came out of it a hungry tiger, the wildest and most violent that could be found, which immediately **tore him to pieces** as a punishment for his guilt. But, if the accused person opened the other door, there came out from it the finest and most beautiful lady the king could find. To this lady the **accused** person was immediately married, as a reward of his innocence. It didn't matter if he already had a wife and family; the two had to be married at once. Another door opened beneath the king, and a **priest** walked to where the pair stood, side by side, and the wedding was performed. Then the bells rang, the people shouted, and the man took his bride home.

This was the king's semi-barbaric method of justice. Its perfect fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know out of which door would come the lady; he opened one, without having any idea whether, in the next instant, he was to be eaten or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on some out of the other. The accused person was instantly punished if found guilty, and, if innocent, he was rewarded on the spot. There was no escape from the judgments of the king's public arena. The form of justice was a very popular one. When the people **gathered** together on one of the great trial days, they never knew whether they were going to see a bloody death or a wonderful wedding. As a result, everyone was entertained and pleased.

This half-barbaric king had a beautiful and independent daughter. As is usual in such cases, she was **the apple of his eye**. Among the King's soldiers, however, was a young man. The princess had taken this man as her lover, because he was handsome and brave. This love affair continued happily for many months, until one day the king discovered its existence. The young man was immediately thrown into **prison**, and a day was chosen for him to enter the king's public arena. This, of course, was an especially important event. Never before had this happened; never before had a subject been in love with the daughter of the king. The wildest tiger was selected for the arena; a beautiful woman was found in case the young man selected the door that would lead to marriage. Everyone knew that the young man was guilty. He had loved the princess, but the king would not allow this fact to stop the trial in the arena. No matter what happened, the young man would no longer be a problem.

The day arrived and from far and near the people gathered at the arena. The king was in his place, opposite the door. Everything was ready and the signal was given. Another door opened, and the lover of the princess walked into the arena. He was tall and beautiful. No wonder the princess loved him! As the young man came into the arena he **bowed** to the king, but his eyes were looking at the princess, who sat to the right of her father. From the moment her lover was caught, she had thought of nothing, night or day, but the arena. In the end, she had done what no other person had ever done - she had learned the secret of the doors. She knew in which of the two rooms stood the tiger, and in which waited the lady. Her love and gold had brought the secret to her. And not only did she know in which room the lady stood, but she knew who the lady was. It was one of the **fairest** and loveliest ladies; and the princess hated her. Often, she had seen, or imagined that she had seen, this lady looking at her lover, and sometimes she thought these looks were even

returned. Now and then she had seen them talking together. The girl was lovely, but she had raised her eyes to the loved one of the princess, and the princess hated the woman who was behind that door.

When her lover turned and looked at her, and his eye met hers, he saw, by that power given to those whose **souls** are one, that she knew behind which door waited the tiger, and behind which stood the lady. He had expected her to know it. Then, with his eyes, he asked her the question: "Which?" It was as obvious to her as if he shouted it from where he stood. She raised her hand, and made a small, quick movement toward the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye but his was on the man in the arena. He turned and walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was upon that man. Without any hesitation, he went to the door on the right and opened it. Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady? The more we think about this question, the harder it is to answer. We need to study the human heart of someone in love. The princess had lost him, but who should have him?

How often had she cried, as she thought of her lover opening the door on the other side of which waited the teeth of the tiger! But to see him at the other door and married to this other, beautiful woman! Would it not be better for him to die at once, and go to wait for her in heaven? And yet, that awful tiger, that blood! Her decision had been made after days and nights of terrible **deliberation**. She had known she would be asked, she had decided what she would answer, and, without the slightest **hesitation**, she had moved her hand to the right. The question of her decision is an important one, and so I leave it with all of you: Which came out of the opened door - the lady, or the tiger?

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think the lady, or the tiger came out of the door? What evidence can you give to support your opinion?
2. If you were the princess, would you tell the man in the arena to open the door with the tiger or the door with the lady behind it?
3. If you were the man in the arena, would you open the door that the princess tells you to open, or would you open the other one?
4. What do you think about the author's decision to leave the end of the story **open to interpretation**?