

The Emperor's Tiger

- OR -

A PESSIMIST'S FAIRY TALE

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The EMPEROR'S TIGER -OR- A PESSIMIST'S FAIRY TALE

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A great Emperor ruled over a vast landscape.

In his youth he had been a daring and ingenious warrior...

... sweeping fearlessly across the plains and conquering nations near and far..

Now, years later, his empire had grown to its uppermost limit, and he was no longer a soldier but an administrator.

Although his rule was firm and he remained in good health, his dukes and barons were jealous of his power, and his foreign enemies remained as bitter against him as ever.

As a result, the Emperor consumed no meal without several poison tasters first confirming the safety of each dish;

if he wished to walk in his palace's sprawling gardens, he did so wearing armor and in the company of a dozen guards.

Each night he slept in a different bed in a different room of the palace, and even his manservant did not know until minutes before which chamber would be chosen.



At long last, the emperor's precautions had grown so many that he was no longer able to eat, leave his chambers, or sleep at all.

At last he confessed to his third wife - the wisest, if not the most beautiful...

that unless his worries were somehow relieved, he would do away with his troubles by falling on his sharpest sword.

At the very least my enemies would be robbed of credit for my death.

My husband...

if you give me leave to depart the palace for ten days, I will go into the forest...

...and return with something that will make you forget such terrible thoughts.

It was an anxious wait for the Emperor. The forest was known to be dark and full of criminals and dangerous beasts.

He wasted away still more, and the dark circles beneath his eyes deepened.

His imperial duties languished, and the court began to whisper that he could not live much longer.



The tenth day came and passed into evening...

... but his wife did not return.



Then..





He cannot harm us at this moment.

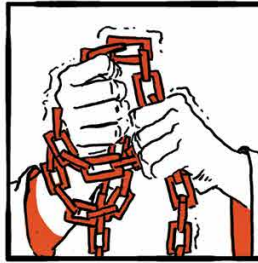
I have trained him to be docile so long as this chain holds him.

The links of the chain are thick and strong...

But I see that they are covered in rust.

Someday they will no longer be proof against this creature's rage.

"Beloved
husband,"



said his third wife
- the wisest, if not the
most beautiful,



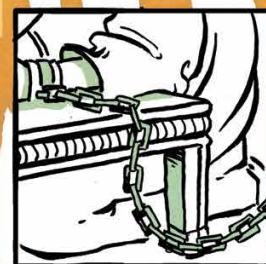
"I advise you to retire
alone to the summer house
for ten days, keeping this
tiger by your side."



"If, at the end, you are not
rid of your anxieties, I will
return him to the jungle, and
we shall be no worse off."



"If you are killed, we
shall prepare the funeral
rites as we would have
done before."



For ten days
the court waited
on his return.


Many courtiers
hatched plots for their
own enthronement...

... and the two other imperial wives
wailed and cursed
the third wife for condemning their husband to a grisly
death and leaving their children fatherless.

On the evening of the
tenth day, many in the court
were taking out their mourning
rags - all except for the third
wife, who waited patiently in
her chamber.


An hour after the setting of the sun,
the Emperor's voice was heard outside
the palace doors, demanding to be
given entrance.





The next morning, the Emperor held court as usual, only with the tiger by the side.

His subjects were astonished to find him at the peak of health, with a cheerful and calm demeanor, despite the presence of the terrible predator.




He took his first meal of the morning before it even had the chance to pass the inspection of his tasters, and this before the entire court.

"My Lord Emperor,"

cried a courtier (who had conspired often against him),

"surely you have taken leave of your senses. The links of the chain are thick and strong, but we see that they are covered in rust."



"Someday they will no longer be proof against this creature's rage. You shall be devoured! "

It is certainly likely...



But with the tiger here, I find I am no longer concerned about my death by any other method.



For if I die by poisoning,



or by ambush,



or even in battle,
in my final moments
I shall think:




At least I have not died in the tiger's jaws.

And I shall be happy.

And if it is by the tiger that I meet my end, in my final moments I shall think:

At least I have not died at the hands of my enemies.

And I shall be happy.



And if I die a natural death, I shall be very happy indeed, and know that I have lead a blessed life.

And with that, he took up the tiger's chain by one hand,

and with the other, he took the hand of his third wife - the wisest, if not the most beautiful -



and retired for the evening to his usual bedchamber.

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