

THE LADY OR THE TIGER?



PART ONE

Long, long ago there lived a king who was **crude** and very much like a **savage**. He had learned some manners from his Latin neighbors, but mostly he was **barbaric**, loud, and **gruff**. He had none of the grace and polish of his neighbors. He was a man of great **fancies** and even greater enthusiasm. Because he had so much authority as a king, he was able to force some of these fancies into reality. Or at least he tried to.

His personality was normally calm when everything was in order. When there was a little **hitch**, however, he was **exultant** and happy. He loved it when things went wrong because that meant that he could then correct them. He loved to make the crooked straight, to crush down the uneven places in life.

He decided that there should be a way to add culture to the lives of his subjects. His method was the public **arena**. There, humans and beasts performed before audiences. But his fancies asserted themselves here. The arena that he built was not for the honor and glory of **gladiators**. It was not for beasts to fight each other to the finish. It was not even for throwing religious **heretics** to the lions. It was, he believed, for the purpose of widening and developing the mental energies of his people. It was a vast **amphitheater** with encircling galleries, mysterious vaults, and unseen passages. It was to be a means for poetic justice. It was to be a place where crime was punished or virtue rewarded-all by chance.

When the king was interested in people and their crimes, he would dictate that their fate should be decided in the arena. This king knew no traditions from other kingdoms. His only **allegiance** was to himself and his own fancies. This fancy, the chance-fate decision in the arena, came about because of his romantic, yet barbaric, idealism.

When all the people had gathered in the galleries and the king was seated on his throne high up on one side of the arena, he would give a signal. A door beneath him

would open, and the accused person would step out into the amphitheater. Directly opposite the accused there were two doors, exactly alike and side by side. The person on trial had to walk over to these doors and open one of them. He could open whichever door he wanted; he was subject to no pressure from the king or his court. The only influence was that of fate or luck.

If the accused opened one door, a hungry tiger came out. It was the fiercest and most cruel that could be found, and it immediately jumped on him and tore him to pieces as a punishment for his guilt. When the fate of the criminal was thus decided, sad iron bells were rung, and great wails went up from the hired **mourners** who were posted outside the arena. The audience went home with bowed heads and **doleful** hearts, sad that one so young and fair (or so old and respected) should have merited such a fate.

If he opened the other door, a lady came out. The king always chose the ladies himself. He made sure that each was of the same age and station as the accused and that she was beautiful. The rule was that the accused was to marry her immediately. It didn't matter if he were already married and had a family. The lady was a sign of his innocence, so if the accused already loved another, that other was to be forgotten. It was the king's way. He allowed nothing to interfere with his design. Indeed, immediately after the lady appeared, another door beneath the king opened, and out came a priest, musicians, singers, and a troupe of dancers. In a procession, they all cheerfully marched and sang for the couple standing in the middle of the arena. The bells rang, the audience shouted its approval, and the innocent man, preceded by children **strewing** flowers in the couple's path, led his new bride to his home.

This was the king's semibarbaric method of **administering** justice, and its fairness is obvious. The criminal could not know which door the lady was behind. He opened whichever door he wanted to without knowing whether in the next instant he was to be eaten or married. On some occasions the tiger came out of one door, and on other occasions it came out of the other. In this system, there was instant punishment for guilt and **instant** reward for innocence-whether the accused wanted the reward or

not. There was no escape from the judgment of the king's arena.

The institution was a popular one. When the people gathered together on one of the trial days, they never knew whether they were to witness a bloody **slaughter** or a **festive** wedding. This element of uncertainty usually made the occasion more interesting than it would have been otherwise. The people were entertained, and no one doubted that justice was being served. All believed that the accused had his fate in his own hands.

PART TWO

The semibarbaric king had a daughter whom he loved deeply. She was as **passionate**, fanciful, and strong as her father and was devoted to him. As is the case in many fairy tales, this daughter, the apple of her father's eye, was in love with a young man who was below her in station. He was a commoner. He was also brave, handsome, and daring, and he loved the royal daughter with all his being. The princess had enough barbarism in her that their love affair was dramatic ... too dramatic. It was a secret for months, but then the king found out about it.

The king didn't hesitate for a minute. He sent the young man to prison and set a date for his trial in the arena. When the date arrived, everyone in the kingdom wanted to attend. They all knew of the king's interest in the case, and there was excitement in the air.

The king's men searched for the **fiercest** tiger in the **realm**. They also searched for the fairest **maiden** in the land so that he could have a fitting bride in case he were found innocent. Of course, everyone knew that he had committed the "crime" of loving the princess, but the king did not allow the facts of the case to **alter** his decision. The trial would go on as planned. The youth would be gone no matter what happened; he would either be dead or married. The king could enjoy the proceedings for the sport of it.

The day arrived. The people were standing in every corner of the arena. All was ready when the moment came. A signal was given and the door opened, allowing the princess' lover to enter. The crowd gasped. He was handsome. Half the audience did

not know that one so attractive had lived among them; no wonder the princess loved him! How terrible for him to be there!

The princess had thought about this trial day and night for a long time. She knew she couldn't bear to miss the **spectacle**, but there was another reason for her being there. She had such power, influence, and force of character (as well as plenty of gold) that she did what no one had ever done before; she found out the secret of the doors for that day. She knew in which room stood the hungry tiger and in which waited the lady. She knew, too, that the doors were so thick that there was no way anyone could ever hear some hint from behind them. If she were going to warn her lover, she would have to do it by signal.

She also knew something which made the whole process more complicated. She knew that the lady was one of the most beautiful maidens in the whole country, and the thought of her young man living with this woman **enraged** her. She hated the lady and hated what might happen.

When the accused bowed to the royal box, as was the custom, he looked only at the princess, and immediately he knew. He had expected her to find out the secret of the doors, and now he knew that she had the answer. It was only left for her to tell him.

His quick glance at her asked, "Which?" It was as plain as if he had shouted it. There was no time to lose; the quick question had to be answered just as quickly so that the king would not suspect.

Her right hand was resting on a pillow in front of her. She raised it slightly and made a small, fast movement to the right. No one but her lover saw her. Every eye in the arena was fixed on him.

He turned, and with a firm and rapid step he walked across the empty space. Every heart stopped beating, every breath was held, every eye was upon him. Without hesitation, he went to the door on the right and opened it.

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. It involves a study of the human heart which leads to mazes of passion, love, hate, and excitement.

Do not answer this for yourself, but put yourself in the place of the princess.

She was hot-blooded and semibarbaric, and her soul burned with the twin desires of longing and jealousy. She knew that she had already lost him. But to whom?

How often she had lain awake at night imagining the horror of her lover being killed by a tiger! Even in her dreams, she had covered her face with her hands to hide from the cruelty.

But how much more often had she seen him at the other door! In her mind she had screamed and torn her hair when she saw his happy face at opening the door to the lady. Her soul burned in agony as she saw him rush to that woman and then be wedded in the next moment, when all about her were joyous. She lived through the misery of the procession, the happy couple, the singing and dancing, the shouts of the crowd, the laughter of the wandering children. Her tears, of course, were lost in all the joy.

Would it be better for him to die at once? Then he could go to the place after death and wait for her.

And yet, that awful tiger, those shrieks, that blood!

Her decision had been made in the instant that she moved her hand. She had known that he would ask, but she had put off her decision until the last moment. She finally decided, and without hesitation, she indicated the right-hand door.

This is not a question to be taken lightly. Her decision was serious for her, so I do not presume to answer for her. I leave it to all of you. Which came out of the opened door-the lady or the tiger?

- Frank R. Stockton

About the Author :

Frank Richard Stockton (April 15, 1834 - April 20, 1902) was an American writer and humorist, best known today for a series of innovative children's fairy tales that were widely popular during the last decades of the 19th century.

About the Text :

The Lady or the Tiger ? was published in 1882. While the first half of the story provides a glimpse of a semibarbaric king whose method of giving judgements was

fancful, the remaining half touches upon the psychology of human behaviour. As Stockton himself has written, this story “involves a study of human heart which leads to mazes of passion, love, hate, and excitement.” The charm of the story lies in the suspense left at the end which is likely to arouse a chain of curiosities in readers.

GLOSSARY

crude (adj)	:	not having grace or refined manners
savage (n)	:	a primitive man, an uncivilised person
barbaric (adj)	:	rough and rude, uncivilised
gruff (adj.)	:	rude, having no decent manners
fancies (n)	:	remot ideas
hitch (n)	:	obstacle, disorder
exultant (adj.)	:	joyful, hilarious
arena (n)	:	a particularly designed place for fighting
gladiators (n)	:	(in Ancient Rome) men trained to fight with weapons at public shows in an arena
heretics (n)	:	persons condemned for not supporting orthodox beliefs (in religion)
amphitheater (n)	:	(in ancient times) round / oval unroofed building with rows of seats rising behind and above each other round an open space used for public games and amusements
allegiance (n)	:	loyalty, faith
mourners (n)	:	persons expressing sorrow by weeping
doleful (adj)	:	sad
strewing (v)	:	throwing
administering (v)	:	handling, giving
instant (adj)	:	immediate
slaughter (n)	:	murder, killing
festive (adj)	:	joyful, jubilant

passionate (adj)	:	easily moved by passion
fiercest (adj)	:	most violent
realm (n)	:	kingdom
maiden (n)	:	girl
alter (v)	:	change
spectacle (n)	:	wonderful event
enraged (v)	:	made angry
mazes (n)	:	labyrinth, a narrow, confusing and misleading, path
put off (phr v)	:	postponed, cancelled

ACTIVITY 1 : COMPREHENSION :

A. Choose the correct alternative from the options given below :

1. The king was full of
 - (a) wisdom
 - (b) emotions
 - (c) fancies
 - (d) good manners
2. The king was happy when
 - (a) things went right
 - (b) things went wrong
 - (c) people came with suggestions
 - (d) people gave him gifts
3. The princess loved the youngman who was
 - (a) equal to her in status
 - (b) above her in status
 - (c) below her in status
 - (d) a semibarbaric fellow

B. Say whether the following statements are true or false . Write T for true and F for false in brackets :

1. The arena was meant for gladiators. []
2. The fate of the criminals was decided in the courts of law. []
3. Justice, good or bad, was always delayed. []
4. The ladies to be kept behind the door were selected through beauty contests. []
5. When the criminal was killed by the tiger, the songs of joy used to be sung. []
6. Quite often the beasts were also brought to the arena for fighting together. []
7. The princess was as barbaric as her father. []
8. The princess was free from jealousy. []
9. The mind of the princess was full of conflict. []
10. The lover of the princess was killed by the tiger. []

C. Answer the following questions in about 30-40 words each :

1. How was the king different from his neighbours ?
2. Why was the king happy when things went wrong ?
3. How did the king use the arena ?
4. If the accused chose the door with the tiger what happened ? How did the people react ?
5. If the accused chose the door with the lady, what happened ? How did the people react ?

D. Answer the following questions in about 60 words each :

1. Describe the character of the princess.
2. Why was the audience surprised when the young man entered the arena ?
3. What had the princess discovered about the doors ?
4. What did the princess feel when she imagined her lover opening the door that hid the tiger ?

5. What did she feel when she imagined her lover opening the door that hid the lady ?
6. “The princess had enough barbarism in her that their love affair was dramatic ----- too dramatic” Explain .
7. How could the princess find the secret of the doors ?
8. Comment on the king’s method of dealing out justice.
9. What do you think came out of the opened door - the lady or the tiger ? Give reasons.
10. What deeper message has been communicated to us in the story ?

ACTIVITY 2 : VOCABULARY :

A. Find from the lesson one word substitutes for the expressions given in brackets. The initial letters have been provided as hints:

1. The king was uncivilized and much like a **s** _____. (a primitive man)
2. In ancient Rome, the **g** _____ were forced for the bloody fights. (those who fought with swords)
3. The fate of criminals was decided in the **a** _____. (unroofed arena for fights)
4. The princess was as **s** _____ as her father. (partly civilized and partly rude)
5. Great wails went up from the hired **m** _____ who were posted outside the arena. (persons expressing sorrow by weeping)

B. Fill in the blanks with appropriate choice from the words given below : hungry, glory, arena, judgement, traditions, hated

1. In the public _____ humans and beasts performed before audiences.
2. From the gate a _____ tiger would come out and kill the accused.
3. The arena built by the king was not for the _____ of gladiators.
4. The king knew no _____ from other kingdoms.
5. There was no escape from the _____ of the king’s arena.

C. Fill in the blanks with nouns derived from the verbs given in brackets :

1. At last the princess took _____ to deal with the situation. (decide)
2. The _____ would go as planned. (try)

3. The tiger tore the accused to pieces as _____ for his guilt. (punish)
4. The king allowed no _____ with his design. (interfere)
5. The bells rang and the audience shouted its _____. (approve)

ACTIVITY 3 : GRAMMAR

In the lessons 1-4 you studied about tenses, word formation and active/passive voice. Complete the following paragraphs by using the correct forms of verbs given in brackets:

1. The king was semibarbaric. People _____ (afraid of) him. His method of (give) justice was funny. But the (terrify) people (have) no courage (speak) against him. The life of the accused absolutely (depend) on the trick of fate. People (know) well that if they (interfere), they (meet) the same fate as the common criminals. So they (choose) (keep) silent.
2. The princess was beautiful and extremely (like) by her father. One day the king (discover) that his daughter (fall) in love with a young and handsome man of his kingdom. The man (arrest) and (send) to prison. (Hear) this, the mind of the princess (become) (occupy) with strange thoughts. She (know) to the King's method of justice. On the one hand she (want) (save) him, on the other she (shock) (think) about the possibility of the lady (come) out of the gate instead of the tiger!

3. **Complete the following paragraph choosing nouns, adjectives or adverbs from the list given below:**

[decisions, knowledge, fury, arena, brutish, judgements, distance, savage, whimsical, stroke, ferocious, advisor, glamorous, grace]

The King's behaviour was _____ and he looked like _____. People were well known to his _____ nature and thought it better to keep _____. As no person dared to become his _____, his _____ were self-made. But the most frightening ones were his _____ dealt out to criminals. There were two gates in the public _____. Behind one gate hid a _____ tiger and behind the another the most _____ girl of the land. But nobody had _____ as which

gate hid the tiger and which gate hid the girl. It was only the _____ of fate that decided whether the accused would have the _____ of the girl or _____ of the tiger.

ACTIVITY 4 : SPEECH ACTIVITY

Imagine that a dialogue took place between the king and the accused, beginning like this :

The King : You are a criminal.

The accused : Your majesty, what is my crime ?

The King : So you are fearless ! How dare you talk to me ?

The accused : Me lord, I humbly want to know about my crime.

The King : How dared you see my daughter !

Complete the dialogue.

ACTIVITY 5 : COMPOSITION

1. Write a paragraph in about 150 words on judicial system of India.
2. Write a paragraph in about 100 words on importance of the rule of law.
3. Write a paragraph in about 100 words comparing the king in the lesson with the Indian King Chandragupta Maurya. You may take help of a history teacher.