

The Man–Tiger

Anonymous

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There was once a young man who when a boy had learnt witchcraft from some girl friends; he was married but his wife knew nothing about this. They lived happily together and were in the habit of paying frequent visits to the wife's parents. One day they were on their way together to pay such a visit and in passing through some jungle they saw, grazing with a herd of cattle, a very fine and fat bull calf. The man stopped and stripped himself to his waist cloth and told his wife to hold his clothes for him while he went and ate the calf that had stirred his appetite. His wife in astonishment asked him how he was going to eat a living animal; he answered that he was going to turn into a tiger and kill the animal and he impressed on her that she must on no account be frightened or run away and he handed her a piece of root and told her that she must give it him to smell when he came back and he would at once regain his human shape.

So saying he retired into a thicket and took off his waist cloth and at once became a tiger; then he swallowed the waist cloth and thereby grew a fine long tail. Then he sprang upon the calf and knocked it over and began to suck its blood. At this sight his wife was overwhelmed with terror and forgetting everything in her fear ran right off to her father's house taking with her her husband's clothes and the magic root. She arrived breathless and told her parents all that had happened. Meanwhile her husband had been deprived of the means of regaining his own form and was forced to spend the day hiding in the jungle as a tiger: when night fell he made his way to the village where his father-in-law lived. But when he got there all the dogs began to bark and when the villagers saw that there was a tiger they barricaded themselves in their houses.

The man-tiger went prowling round his father-in-law's house and at last his father-in-law plucked up courage and went out and threw the root which the wife had brought under the tiger's nose and he at once became a man again. Then they brought him into the house and washed his feet: and gave him hot rice-water to drink; and on drinking this he vomited up lumps of clotted blood. The next morning the father-in-law called the villagers and showed them this blood and told them all that had happened; then he turned to his son-in-law and told him to take himself off and vowed that his daughter should never go near him again. The man-tiger had no answer to make but went back silently and alone to his own home.