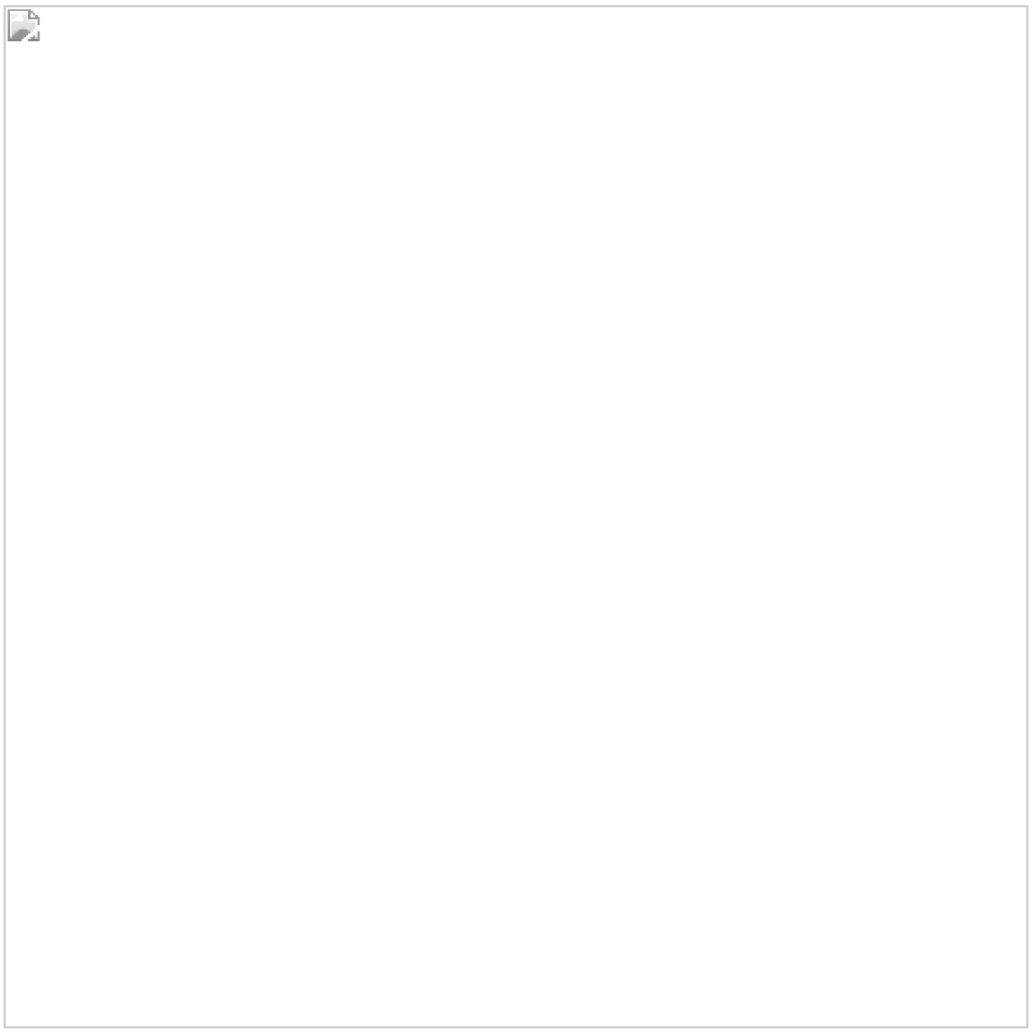
COLORING THE CLASSICS

The Nodding Tiger

A Tale from China



Just outside the walls of a Chinese city lived a young woodcutter named T'ang and his old mother, a woman of seventy. They were very poor and had a tiny one-room shanty of mud and grass.

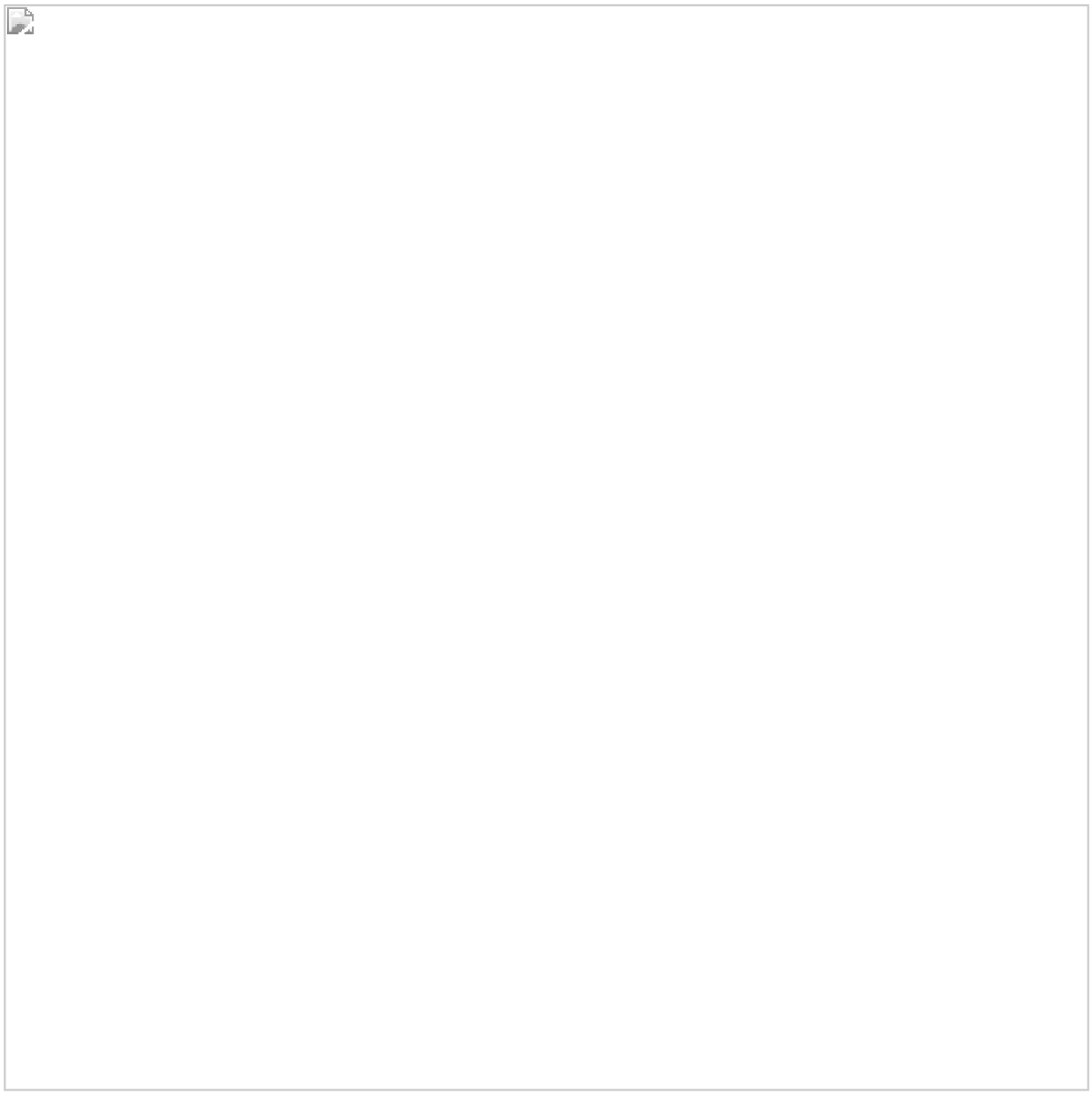
Every day T'ang went up on the mountain to cut firewood to sell in the city. Though the two were poor, they were very happy, for the young man loved his mother dearly, and the old woman thought there was no one like her son in all the world.

TALK ABOUT IT

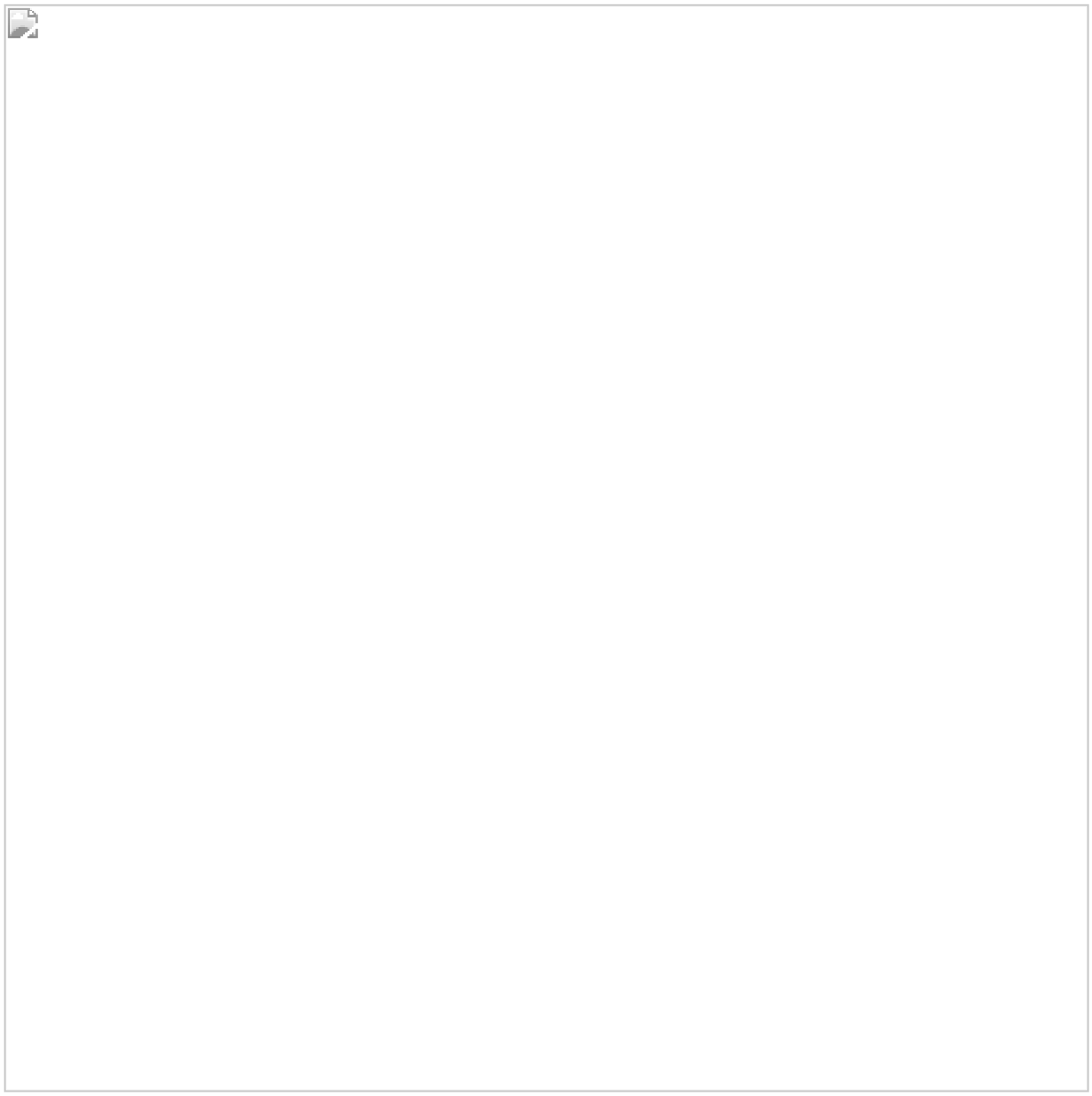
T'ang and his mother were poor and happy. What makes a home happy?

This book belongs to _____

The Nodding Tiger · another picture



The Son Who Did Not Come Home



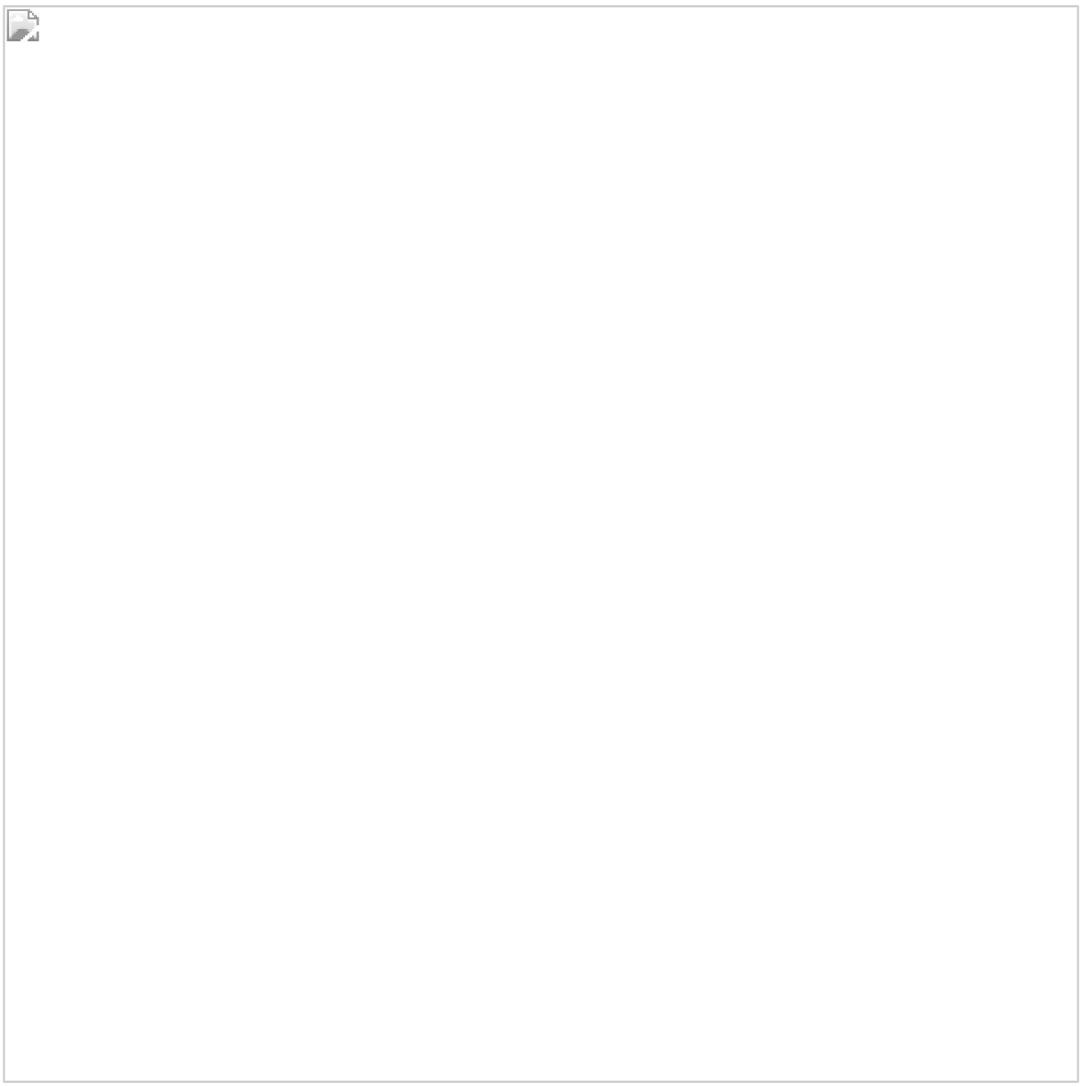
One day T'ang started for the hills before daylight, his axe on his shoulder. He told his mother he would be back early with a heavier load of wood than usual, for the morrow would be a holiday.

All day long Widow T'ang waited, saying over and over, “The good boy, the good boy, how he loves his old mother!”

In the afternoon she watched for him. The sun sank lower and lower. “My poor son!” she muttered. “Something has happened to him.” She took her crutch and limped off to beg a neighbour to look for him.

TALK ABOUT IT

T'ang's mother waited and waited. Have you ever waited for someone who was late? How did it feel?

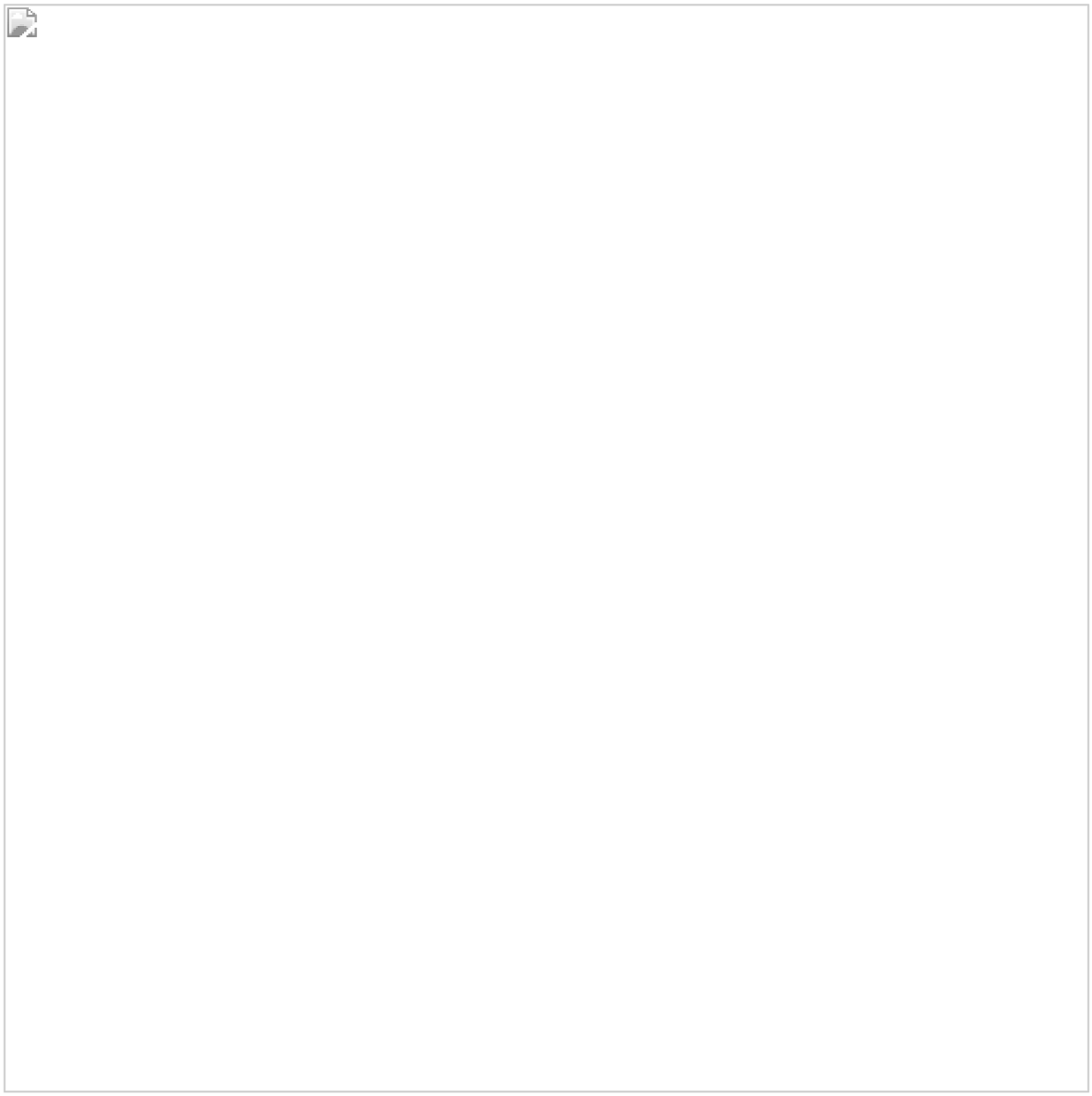


Think about it

1. What did T'ang do for work?

- ○ He cut firewood
- ○ He fished
- ○ He kept sheep

The Axe on the Path



The kind-hearted neighbour walked up the mountain path. Half way up the slope he found T'ang's torn clothing, and his axe lying at the side of the path with his carrying pole and some rope. There could be no mistake: a tiger had carried the young man off.

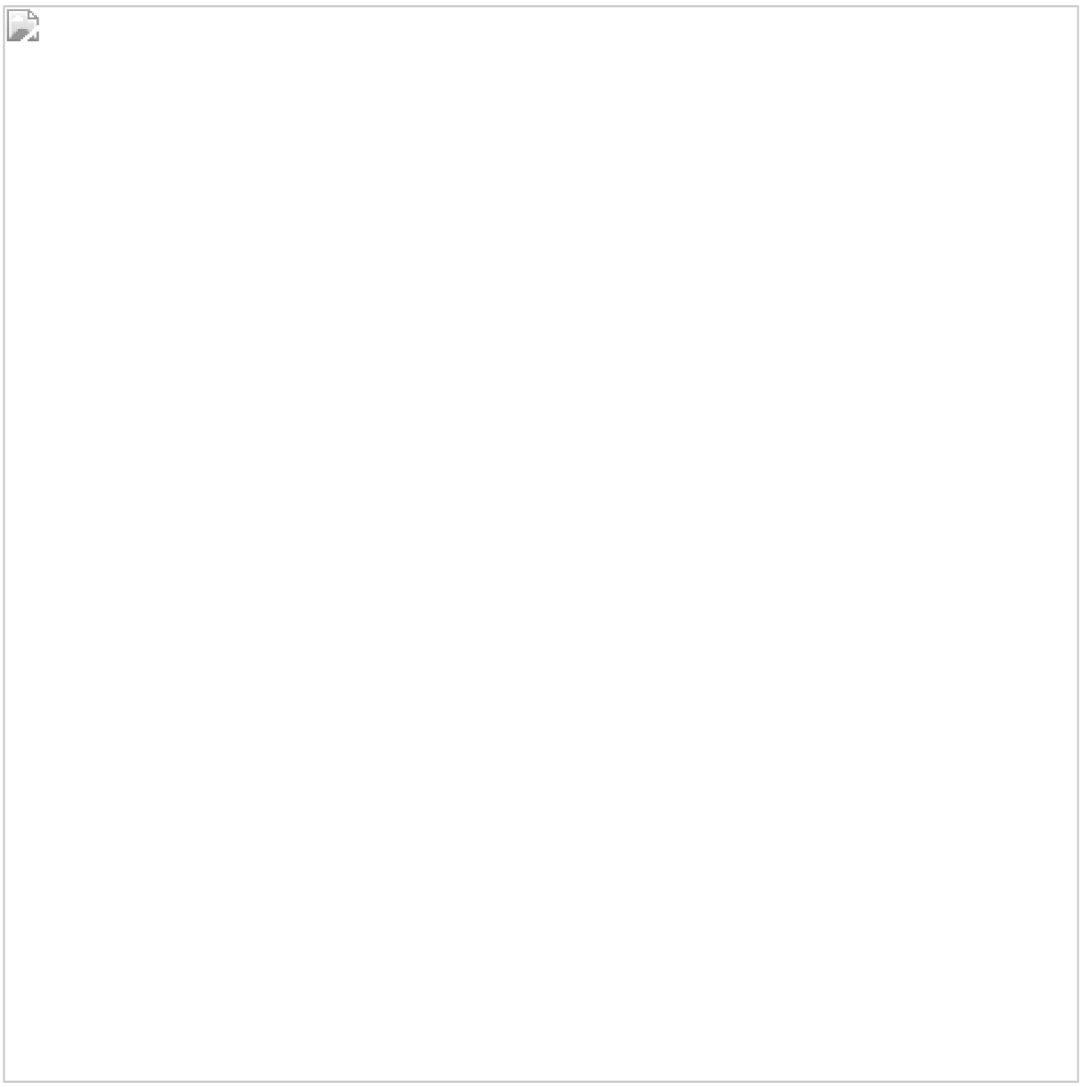
The man went sadly down the hill. At the foot of the mountain the old woman saw what he was carrying, and did not need to be told.

“Alas!” she cried, “of what use is it to live? He was my only boy. Who will take care of me in my old age?”

TALK ABOUT IT

The neighbour was sad too. How do you think it helped her to have a kind friend near?

The Axe on the Path · another picture

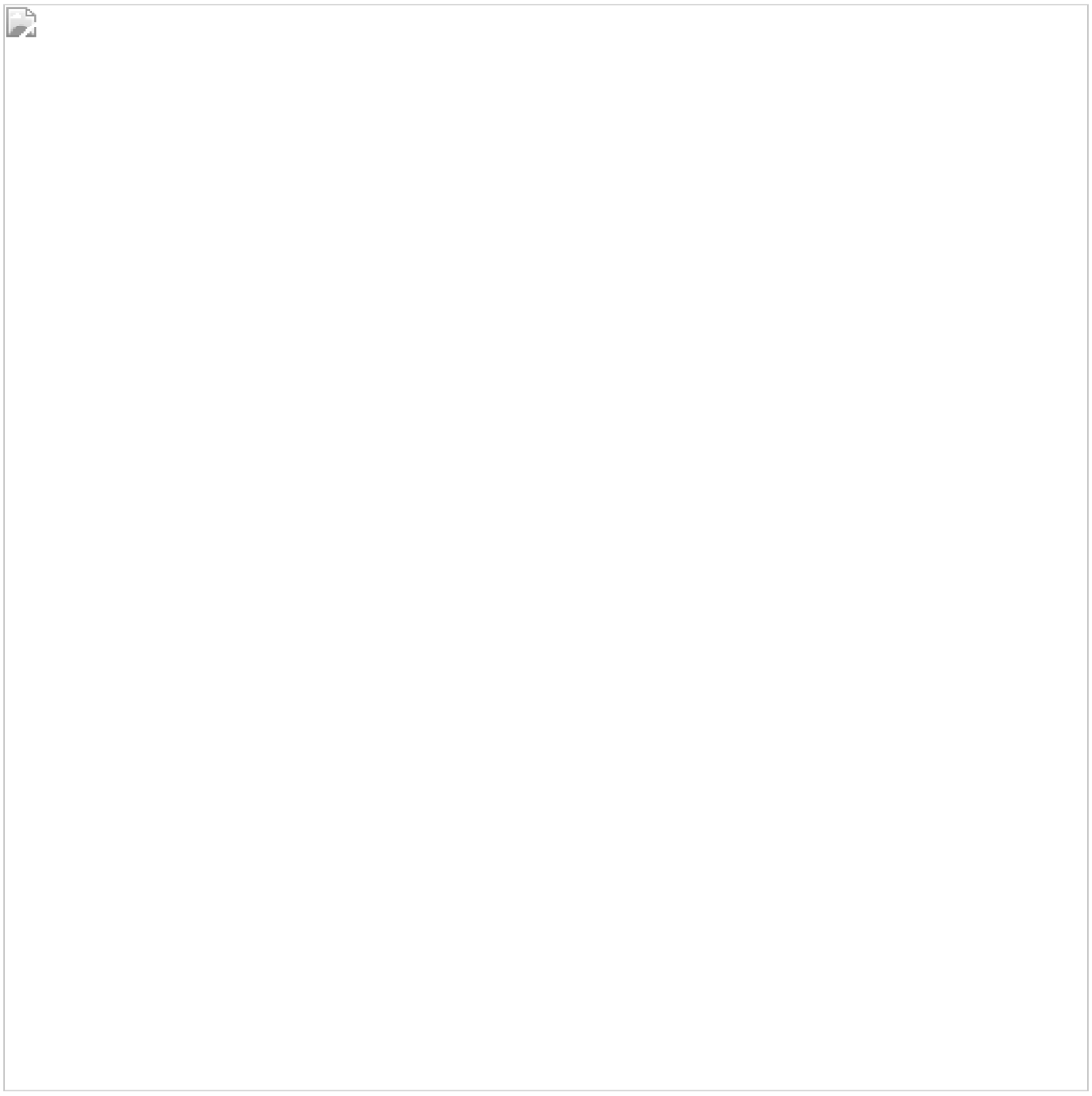


Think about it

1. What did the neighbour find on the path?

- ○ A deer
- ○ T'ang's axe
- ○ A tiger's cave

The Old Woman and the Judge



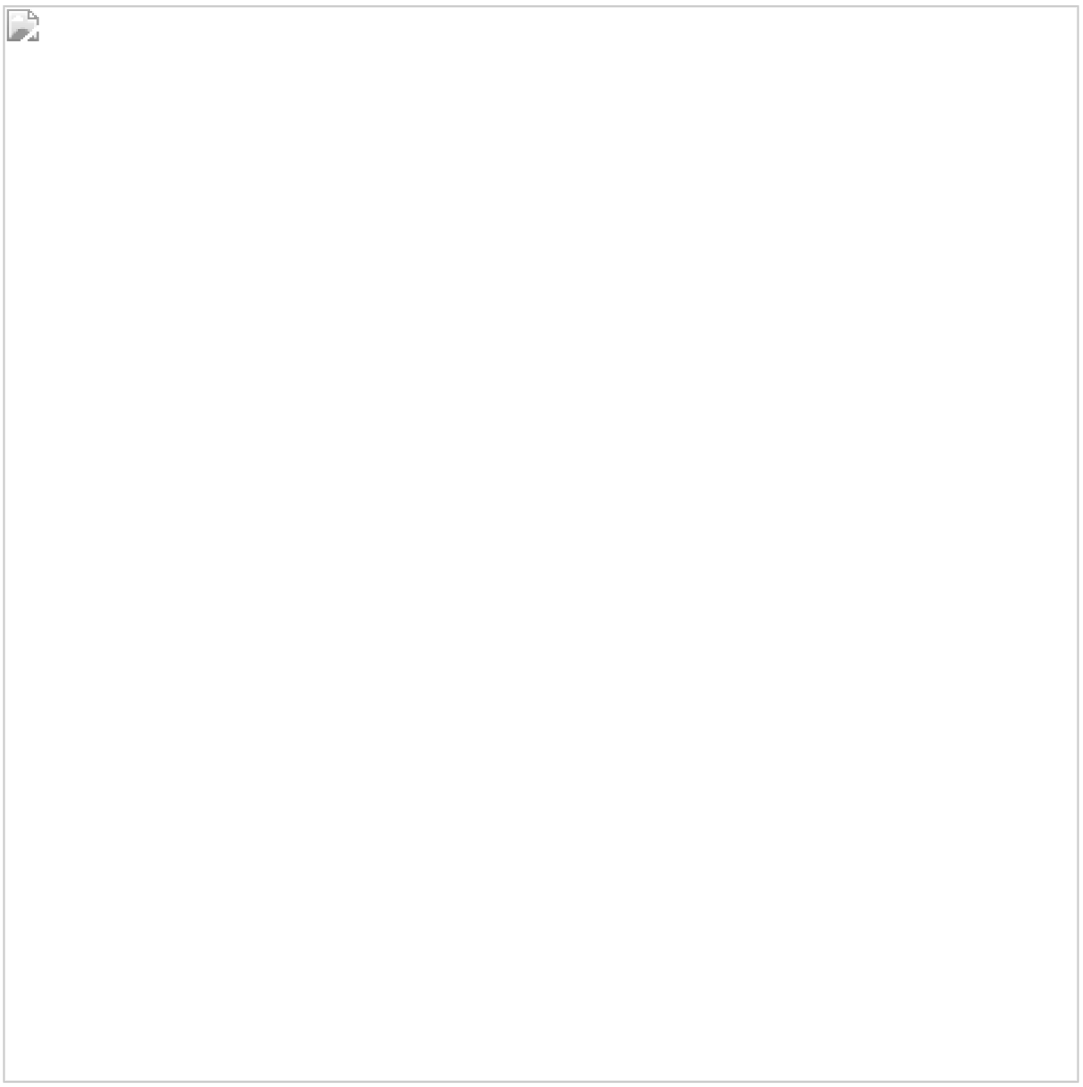
The next day she set out for the city, slowly, with her crutch. “See! the poor old soul has no one to help her!” everyone said.

She knelt at the gate of the public hall and told of her sorrow. The mandarin, or city judge, had her let in.

“I am old and feeble,” she began. She had no money, and had depended on her only son. “A mountain tiger carried him off,” she said. “My bleeding heart cries out for justice.” She asked him to punish the tiger that had taken her son.

TALK ABOUT IT

She went to the judge for help, though it seemed hopeless. When might it be brave to ask for help?

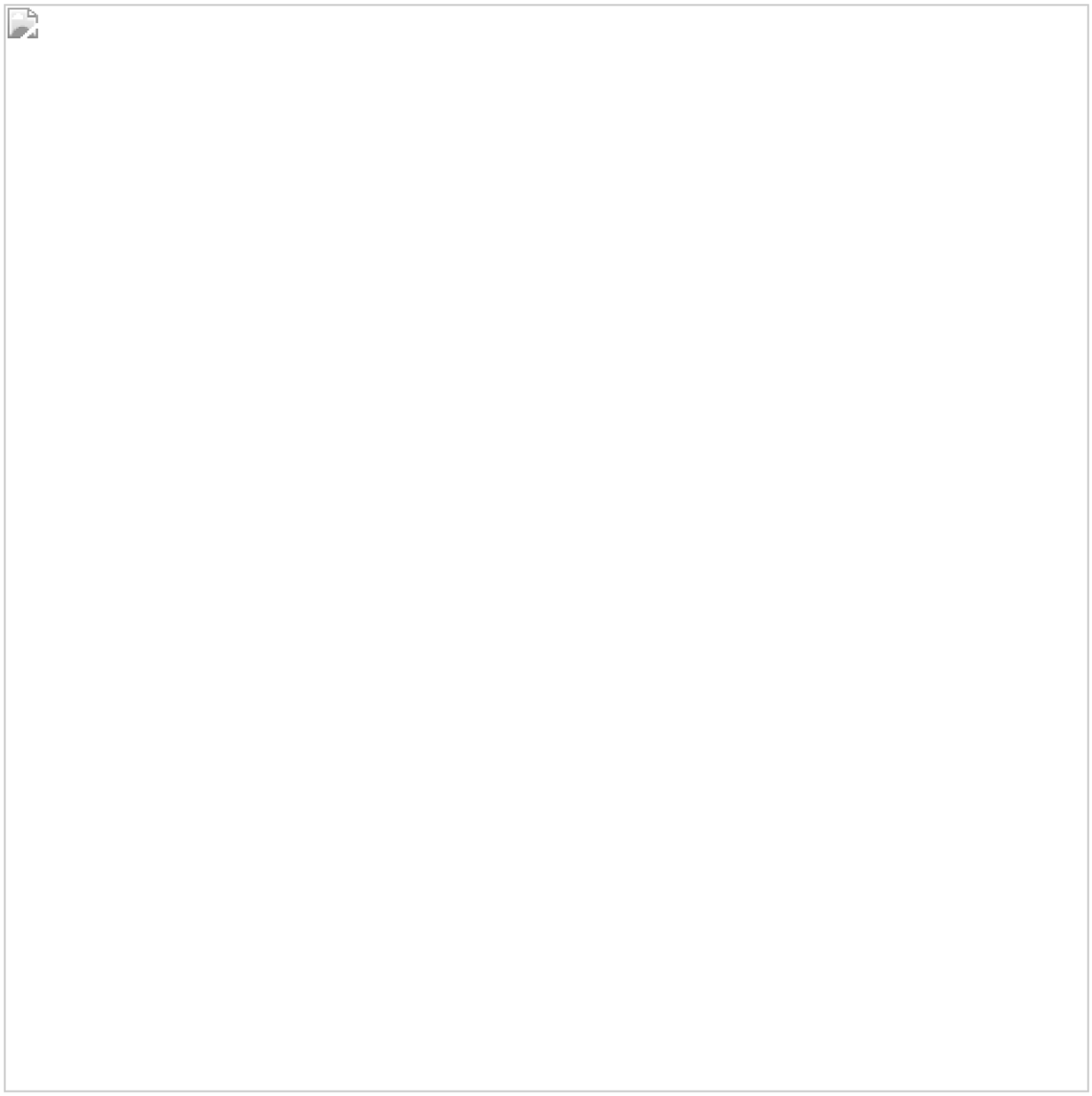


Think about it

1. Who did the old woman ask to punish the tiger?

- ○ A shepherd
- ○ The city judge
- ○ Her neighbour

A Warrant for a Tiger



“But, woman, are you mad?” cried the mandarin, laughing loudly. “How can a tiger be brought to justice?”

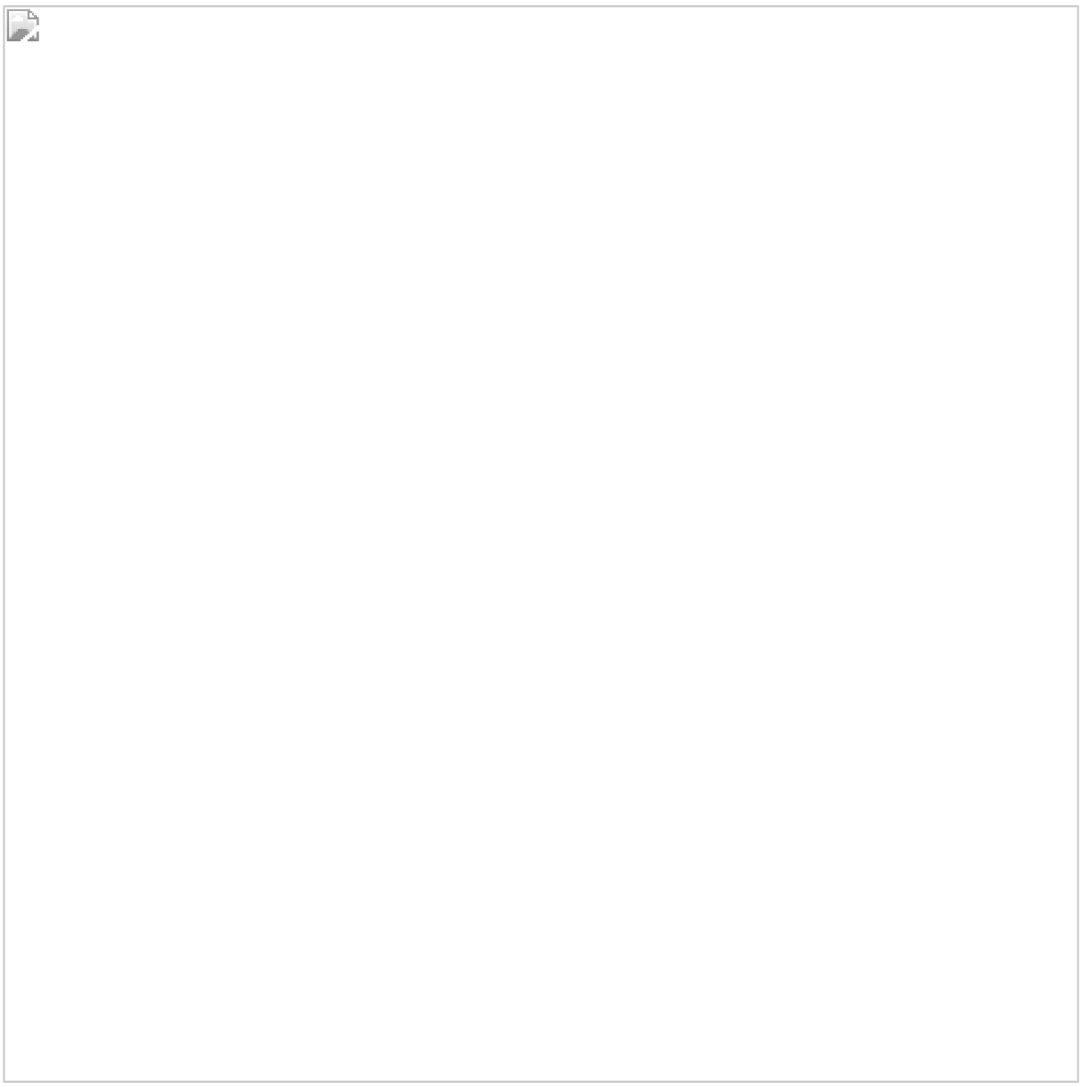
At last he said, “I will do what you ask. Only go home and wait.” But the old woman was too sharp for him. “No, I cannot go,” she answered, “until I have seen you sign the order for that tiger to be caught.”

So the judge asked who would go after the tiger. His assistant Li-neng, half asleep against the wall, had not heard. A friend poked him in the ribs, and he stepped forward. “I, Li-neng, can go and do the will of your worship.”

TALK ABOUT IT

The judge only wanted the old woman to go away, but she stayed until he did what he promised. What do you think of that?

A Warrant for a Tiger · another picture

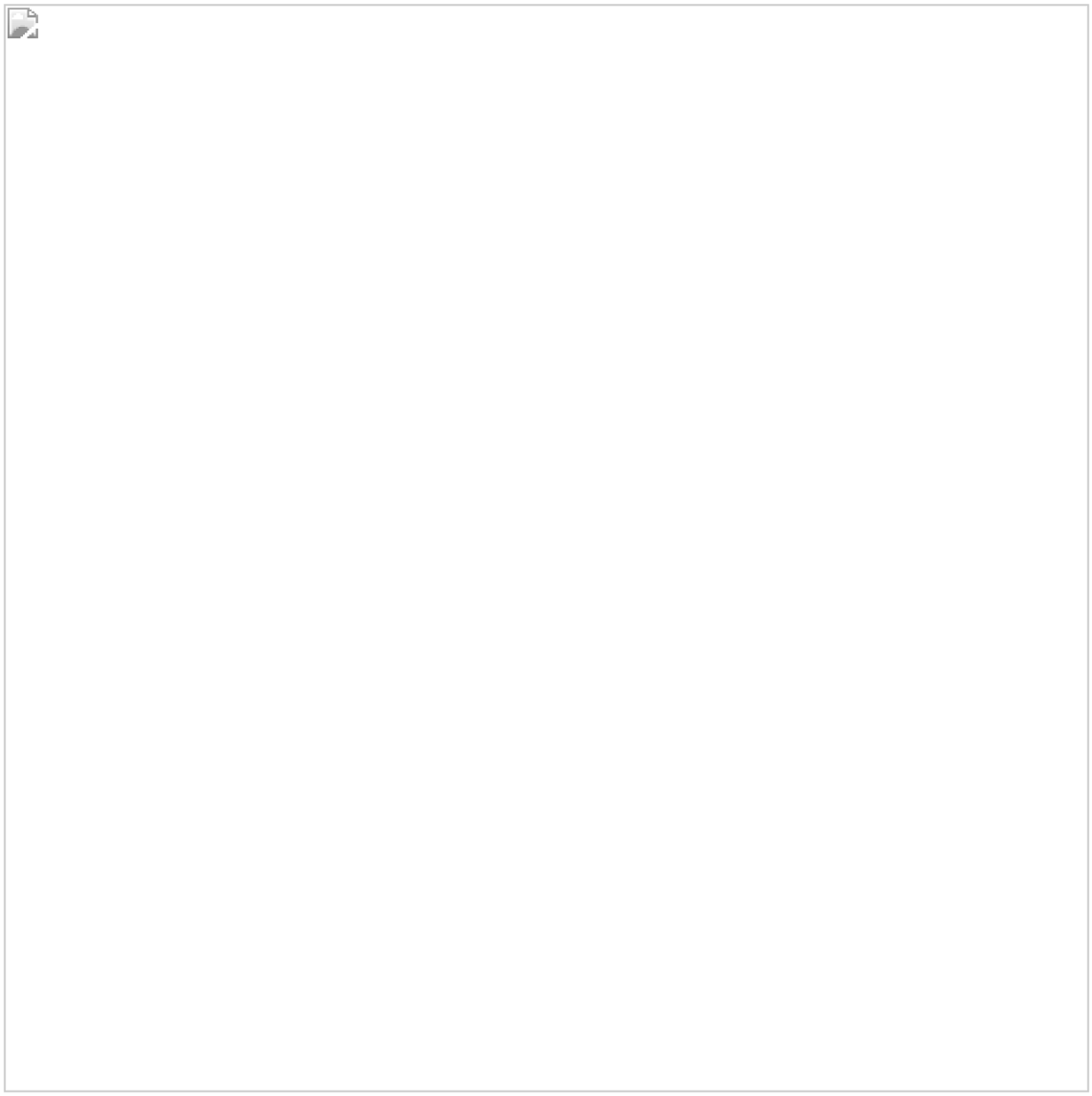


Think about it

1. Who agreed to go after the tiger?

- ○ Li-neng
- ○ T'ang
- ○ The shepherd

Li-neng's Trouble



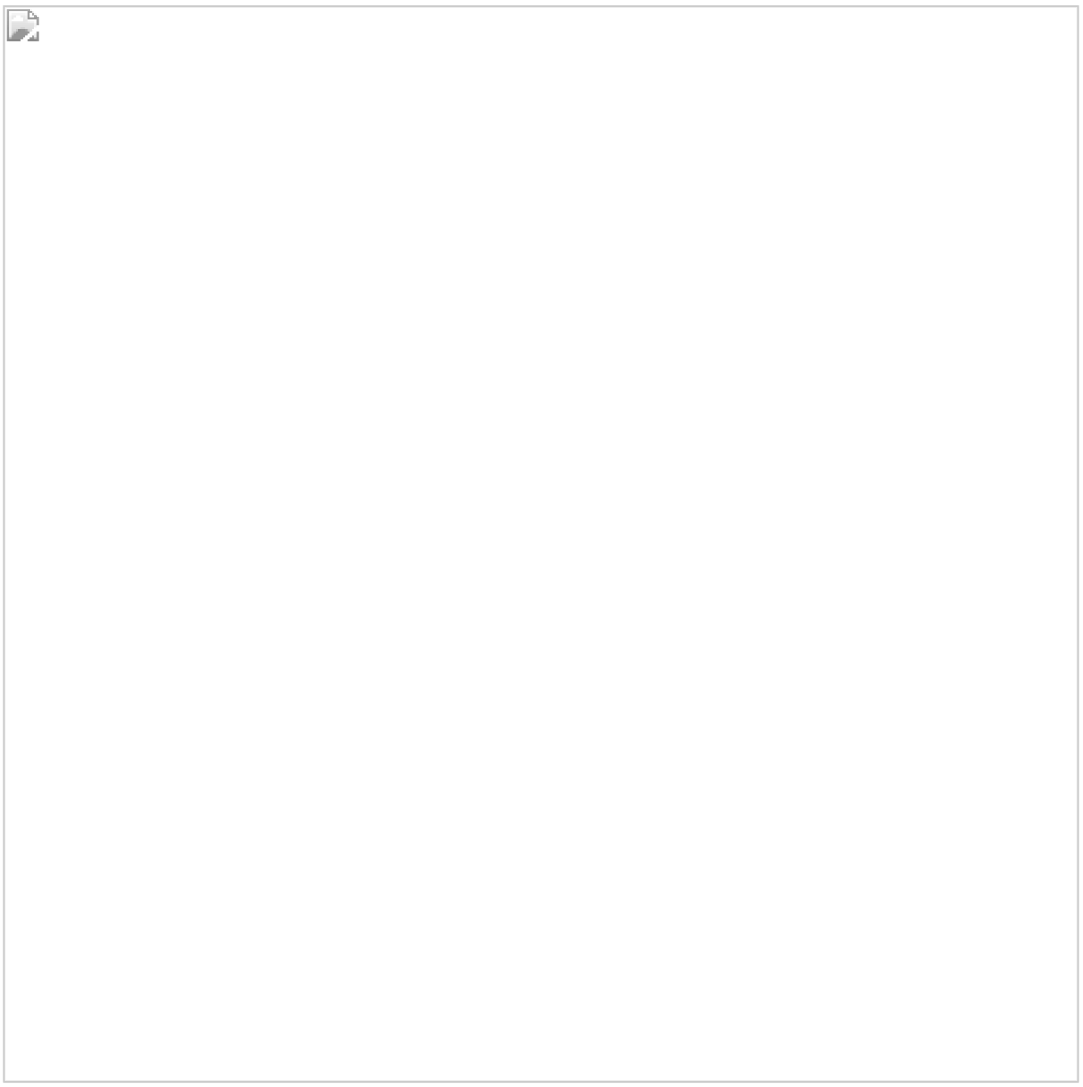
Outside, Li-neng's friends crowded round. “Drunken sot!” they laughed; “do you know what you have done?” He had promised to arrest a man-eating tiger!

He told the judge the tiger could not be found. But the judge was in no mood for joking. “I give you five days,” he said. If Li-neng failed, he would be beaten.

Li-neng hired the best hunters and searched night and day, but found nothing. He was beaten, and every five days for six weeks it was the same. His friends said, “Why don't you flee the country?” But he would not leave his family for ever.

TALK ABOUT IT

Li-neng made a promise he had not thought about, and he stuck to it. Why might that be hard?

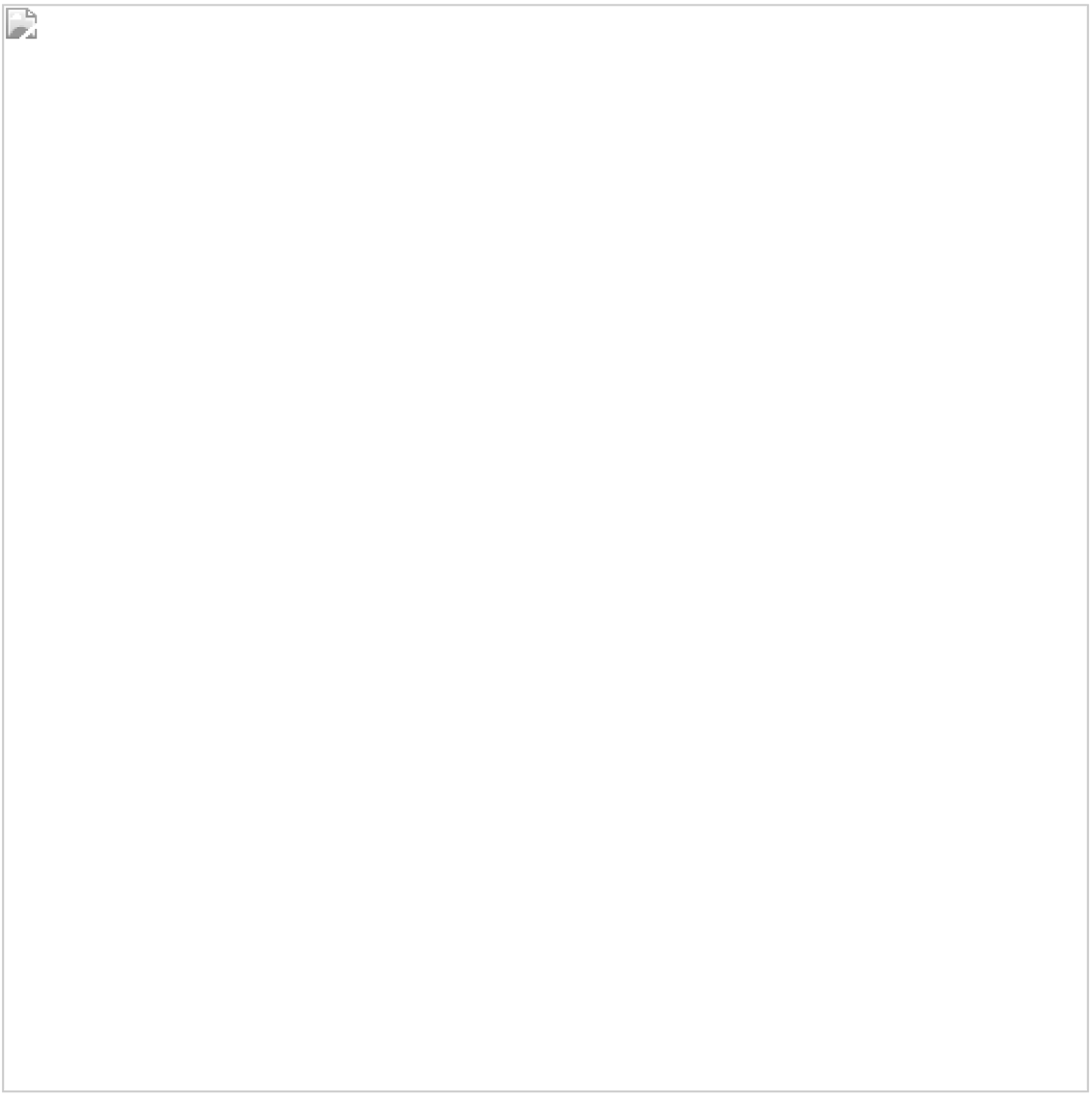


Think about it

1. How many days did the judge give Li-neng?

- ○ One
- ○ Five
- ○ Twelve

The Tiger at the Temple



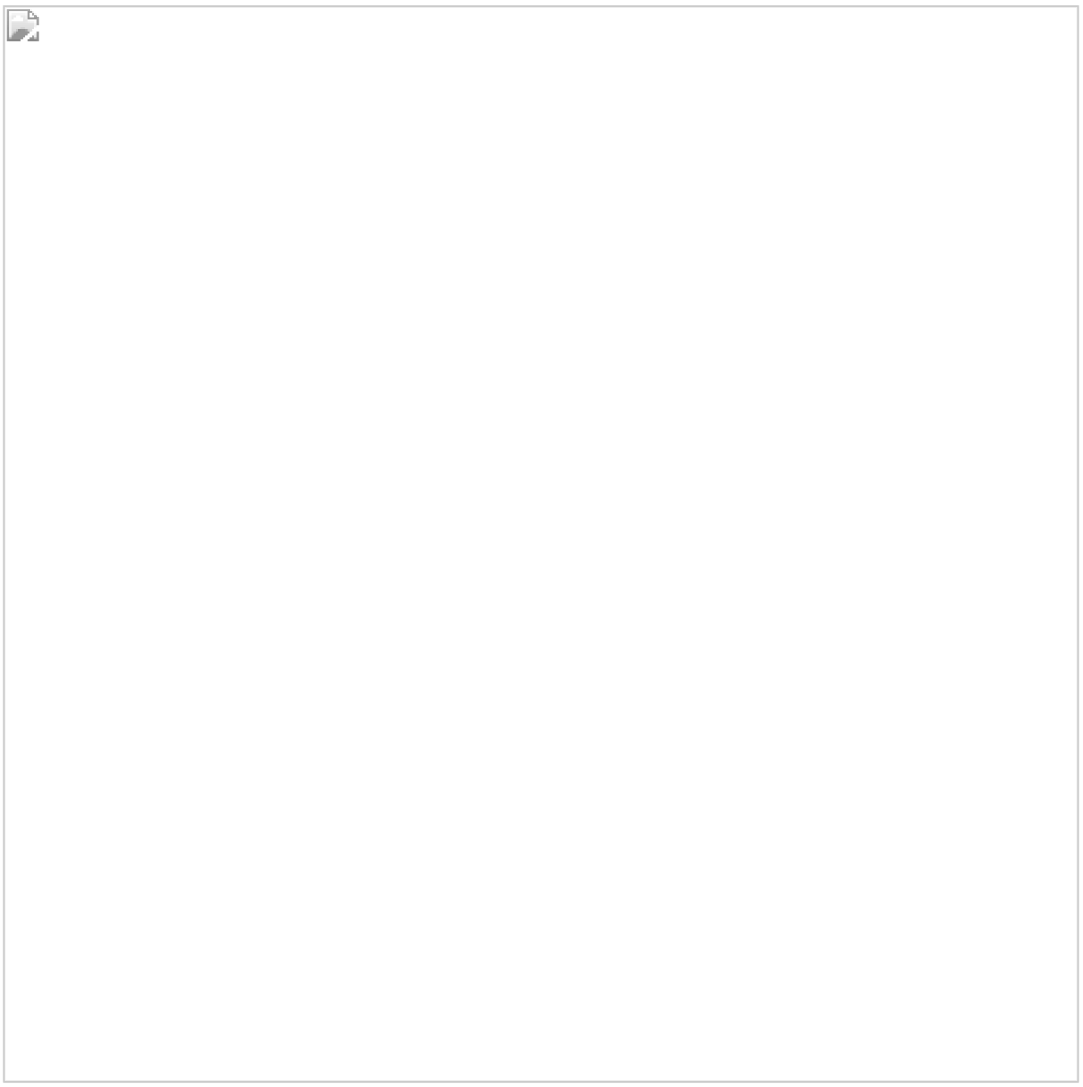
One day, when all the hunters had given up, Li-neng went into a mountain temple to pray. “Alas! I am a dead man!” he moaned. “Would that I had never touched a drop of wine!”

Just then he heard a rustling. He looked up and saw a huge tiger standing at the temple gate. But Li-neng was no longer afraid of tigers.

“Ah,” he said, looking the great cat straight in the eye, “you have come to eat me, have you?” He told the tiger about the woodman, the old mother, and the warrant. “You must come with me to the city and answer the charge of killing the woodman.”

TALK ABOUT IT

Li-neng spoke bravely to a tiger. What do you think made him so brave?

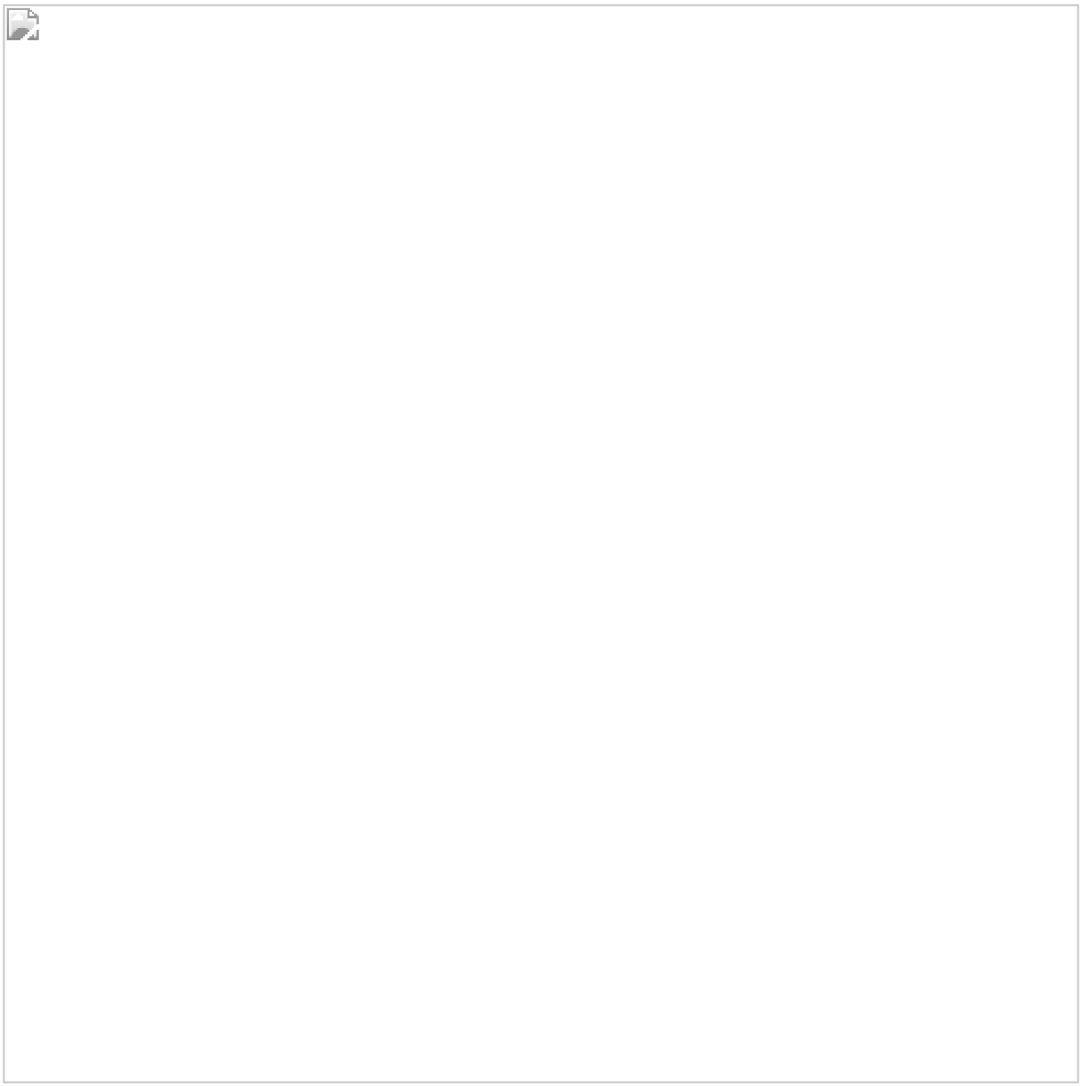


Think about it

1. Where did Li-neng meet the tiger?

- ○ At a mountain temple
- ○ In the city market
- ○ By the river

The Tiger in Court



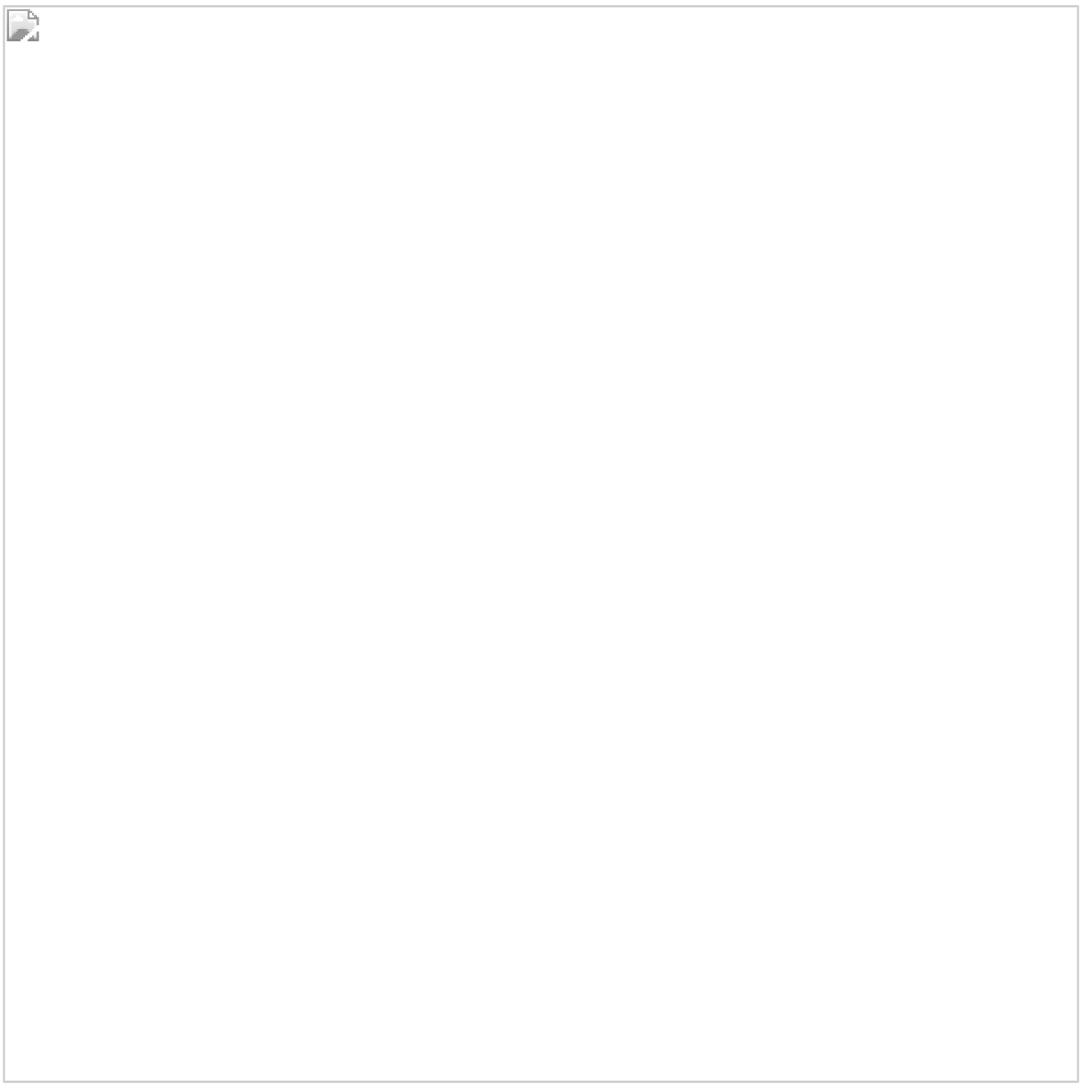
The tiger listened closely. He made no effort to escape. He bent his head forward and let Li-neng slip a strong chain over it. Then he followed the man quietly down the mountain and through the crowded streets into the court room.

“The man-slaying tiger has been caught,” shouted the people. When the judge walked in, every one became as quiet as the grave.

The tiger sat down in front of the mandarin, for all the world like a huge cat. “Tiger,” said the judge, “did you eat the woodman whom you are charged with killing?”

The tiger gravely nodded his head.

TALK ABOUT IT
The tiger listened and nodded. Have you ever been asked a hard question where you had to tell the truth?

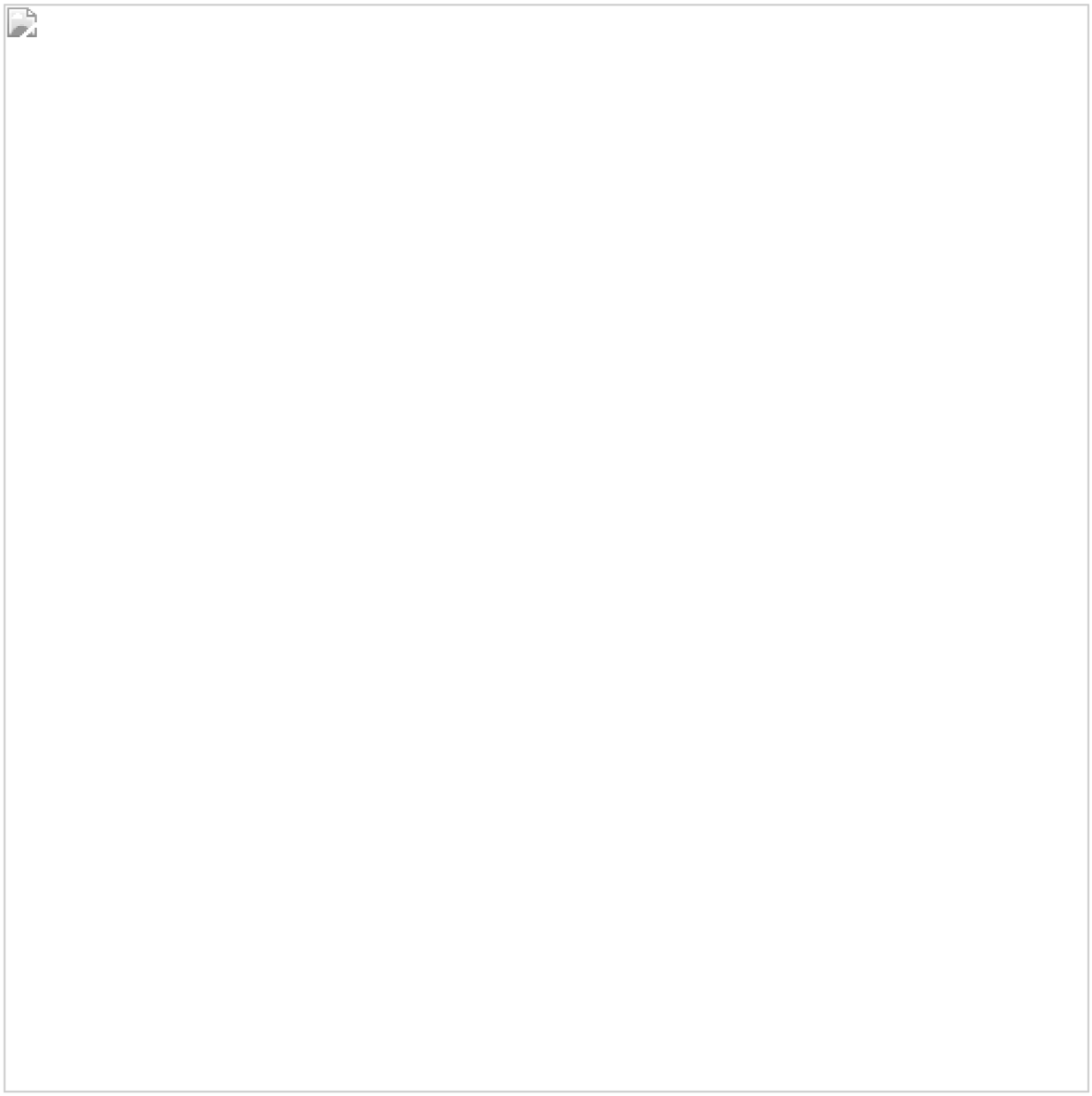


Think about it

1. What did the tiger do when the judge asked his question?

- ○ He roared
- ○ He nodded his head
- ○ He ran away

The Judge's Offer



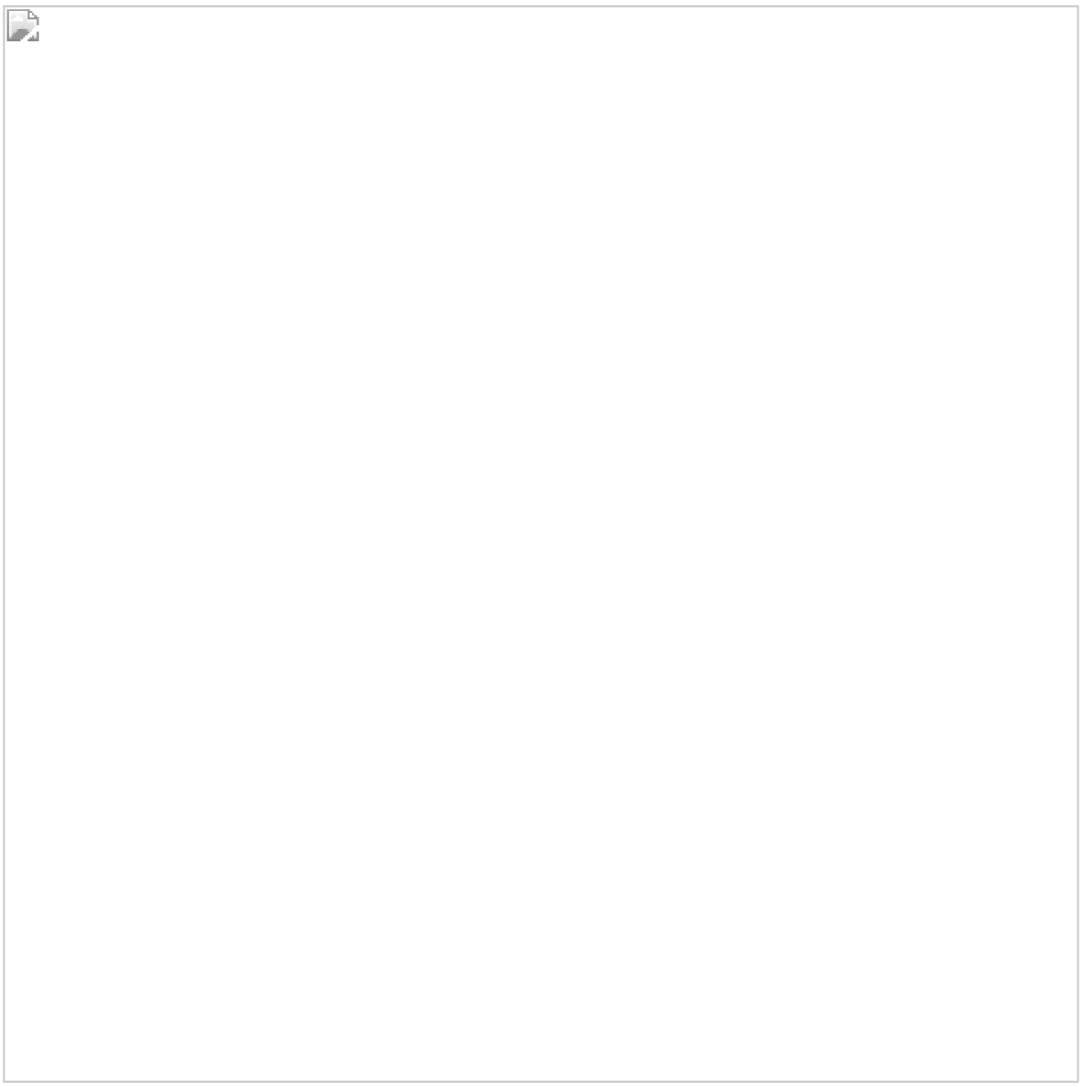
“Yes, he killed my boy!” screamed the aged mother.

“A life for a life is the law of the land,” said the judge, looking the tiger in the eye. “However, I am not a cruel judge.” If the tiger would promise “to take the place of this widow's son and support the woman in her old age,” he would be spared. “What say you, will you accept my offer?”

Once more the people were surprised to see the savage beast nod his head in silent agreement. The chains were taken off, and the great animal walked out of the court and away toward his mountain cave.

TALK ABOUT IT

The judge asked the tiger to take the place of the son. What do you think of his idea?

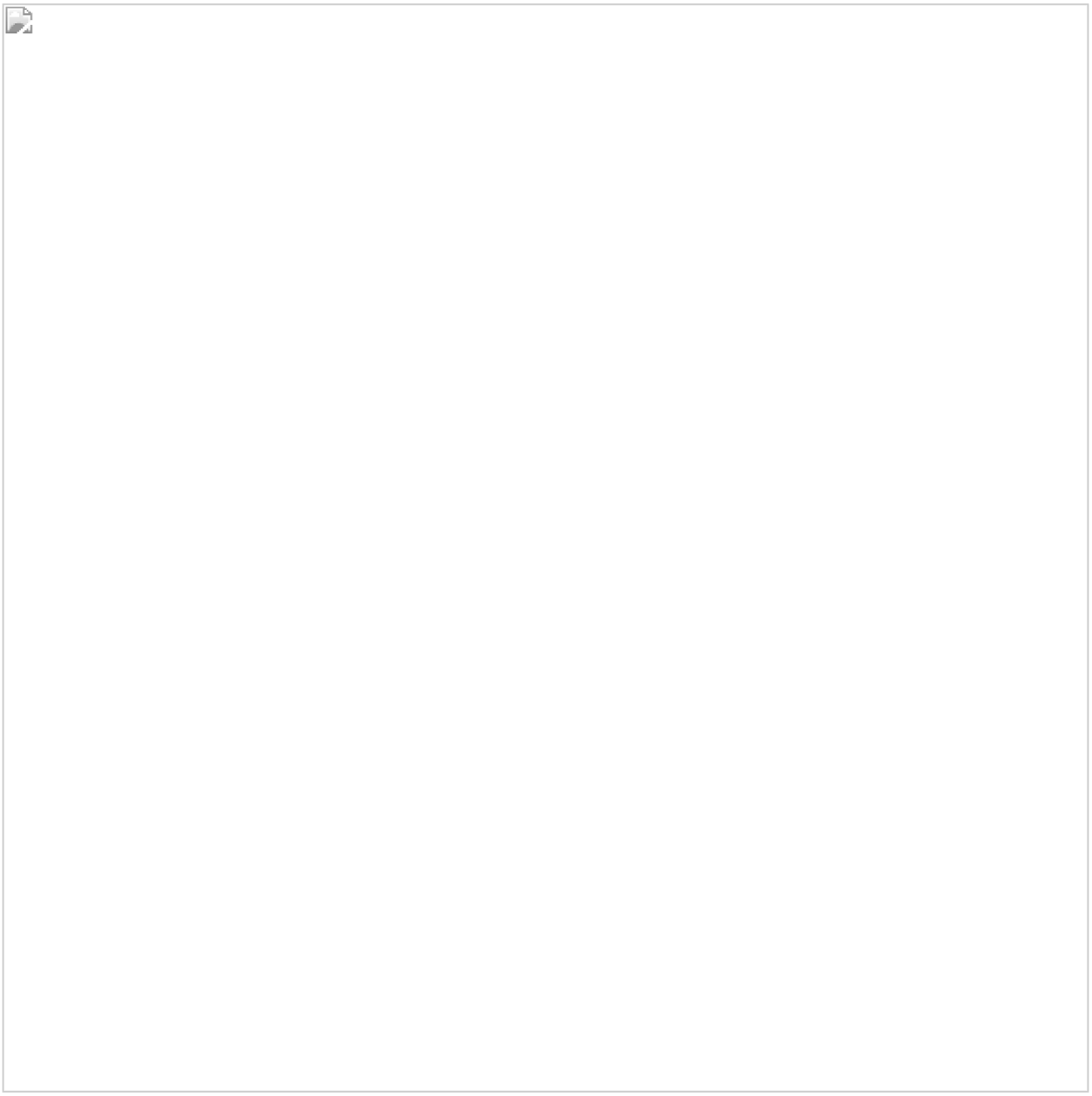


Think about it

1. What did the judge ask the tiger to do?

- ○ Leave the country
- ○ Take the place of the widow's son and support her
- ○ Carry the judge's wood

The Old Woman Is Angry

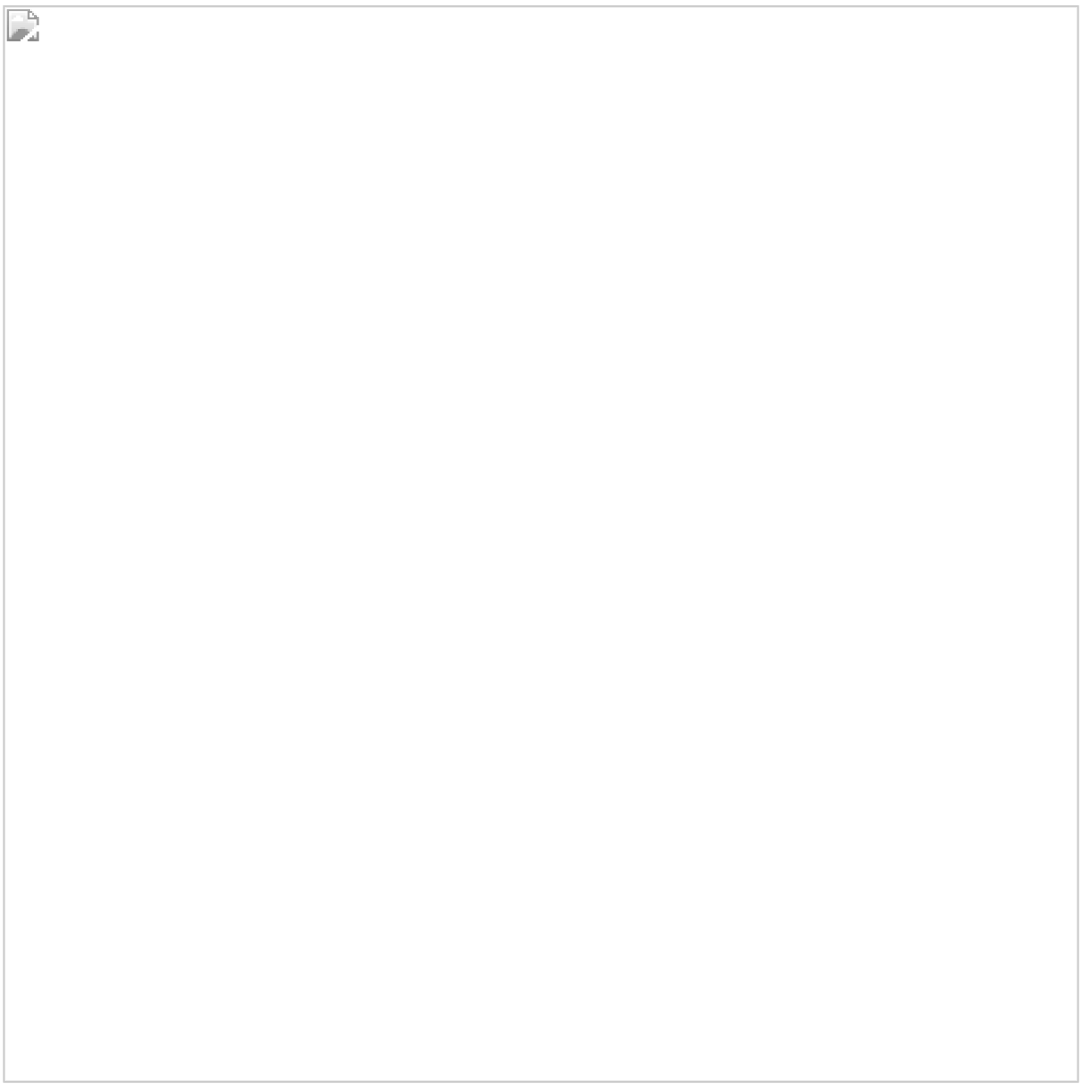


The old woman was very angry. As she hobbled from the room, she muttered over and over, “Who ever heard of a tiger taking the place of a son? A pretty game this is, to catch the brute, and then to set him free.”

She went home almost broken-hearted. Her neighbours shook their heads. “She cannot live long,” they said. “She has nothing to live for.”

TALK ABOUT IT

She did not think the judge's plan was fair. What would you have wanted if you were her?



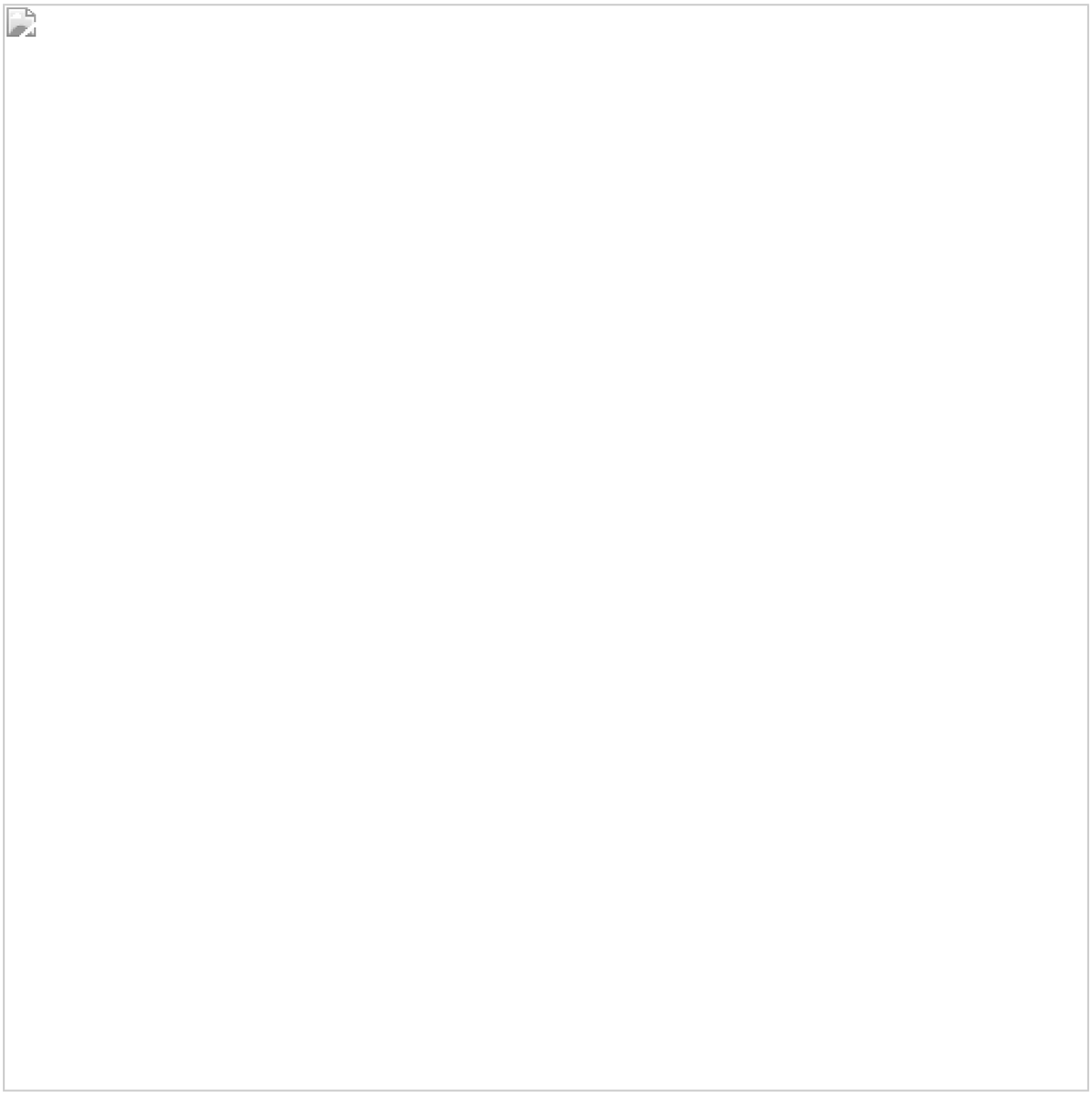
Think about it

1. How did the widow feel about the tiger going free?

- ○ Glad
- ○ Very angry
- ○ Asleep

2. Do you think the widow was right to be angry? Why?

The Gifts at the Door



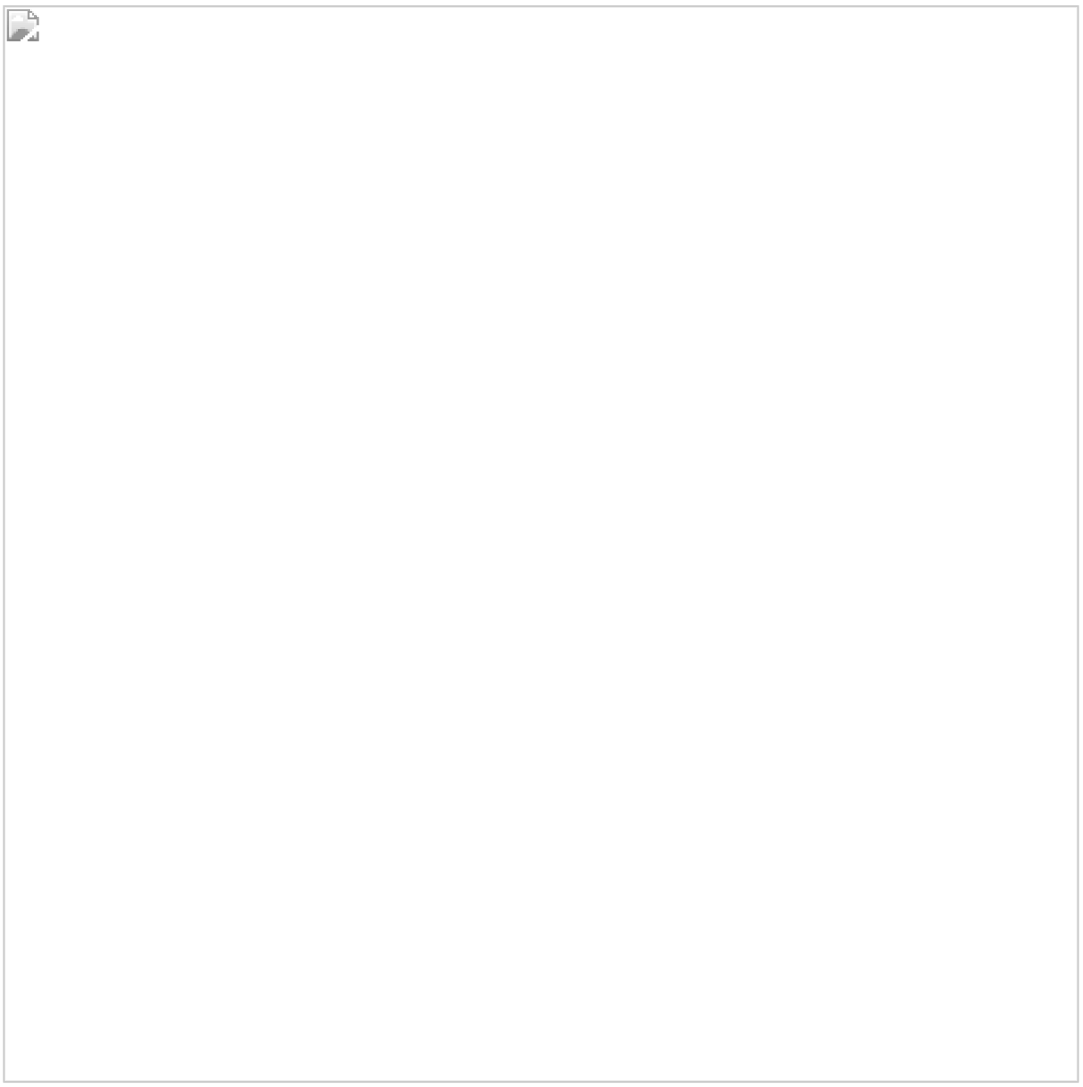
But they were mistaken. Next morning the old woman found a newly killed deer in front of her door. Her tiger-son had begun to keep his promise. She sold the meat and skin in the city for a handsome sum.

A week later the tiger came with a roll of cloth and some money in his mouth. He dropped them at her feet and ran off without waiting for her thanks.

Now the Widow T'ang saw that the judge had acted wisely. She stopped grieving, and began to love the handsome animal that had come to take her son's place.

TALK ABOUT IT

The tiger kept his promise even though no one was watching. What does it take to keep a promise like that?

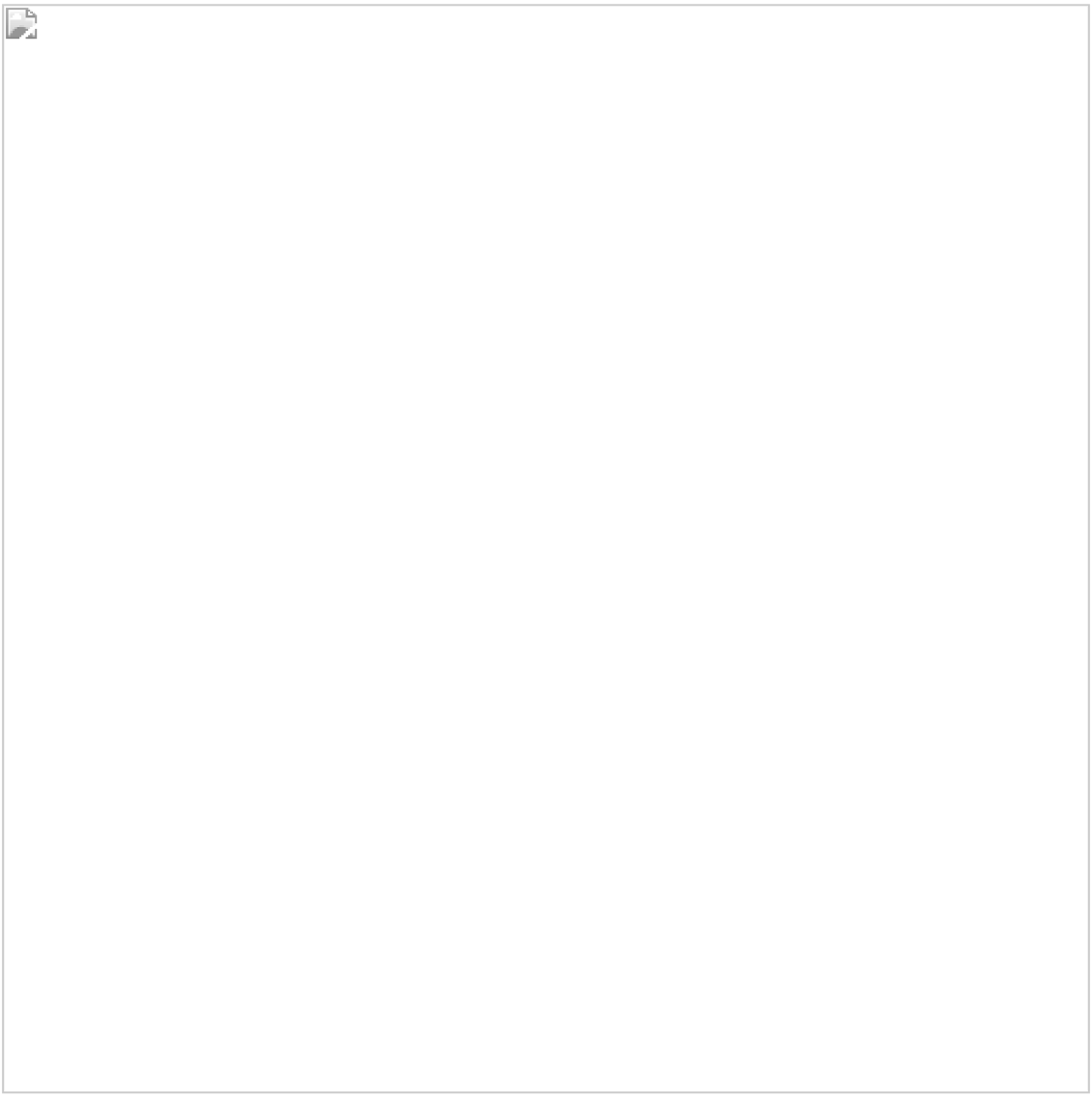


Think about it

1. What was the first gift the tiger brought?

- ○ A roll of cloth
- ○ A newly killed deer
- ○ A bag of rice

The Tiger-Son



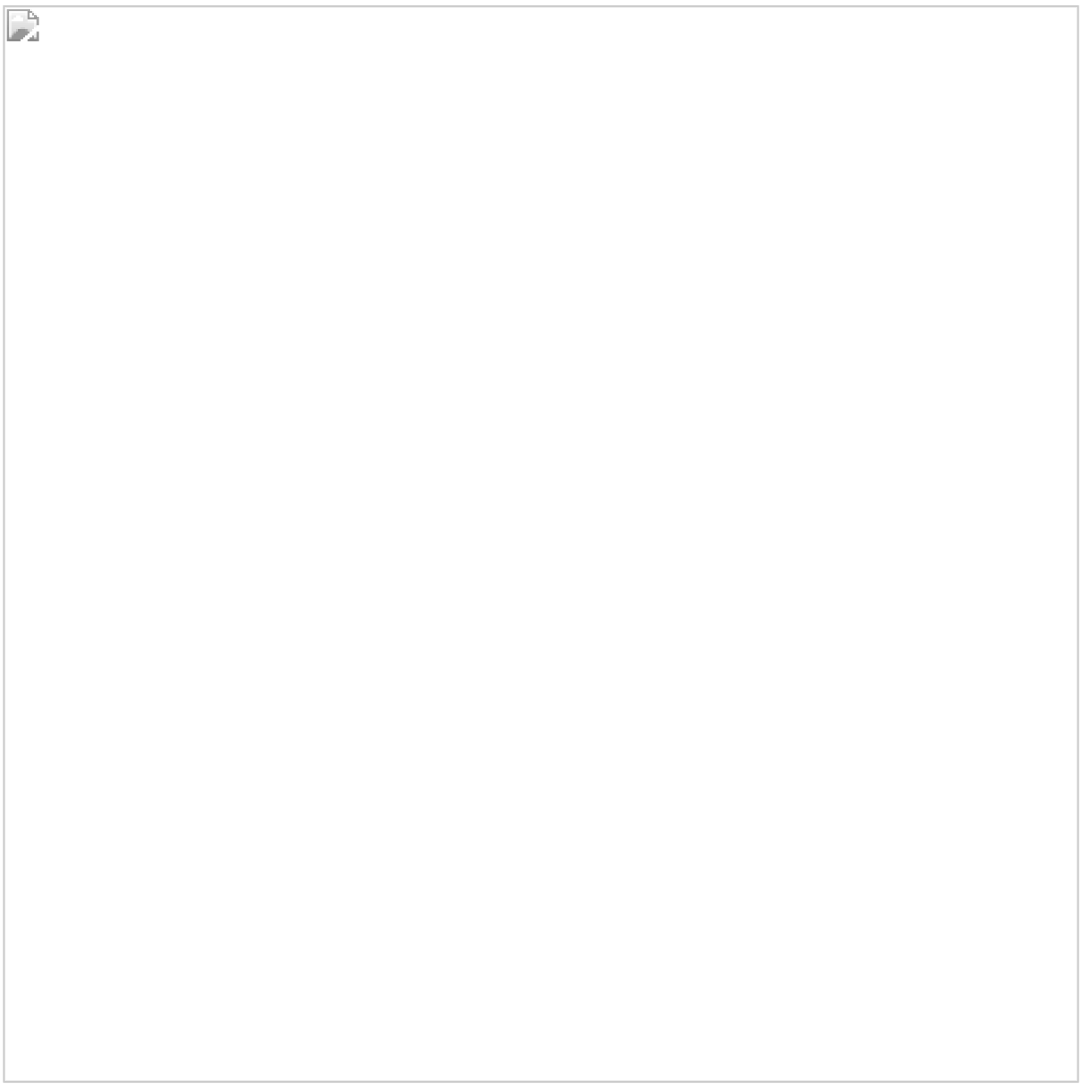
The tiger grew much attached to his foster-mother. He often purred outside her door, waiting for her to stroke his soft fur. Year after year he brought his gifts, until she wanted for nothing.

At last the good old soul died, and her story was written on a handsome tombstone. The faithful tiger lay on her grave, wailing like a child that had lost its mother.

One night he vanished, and no one has seen him since. Some say he died of grief in a secret cave. Others say he was taken to the Western Heaven, to be rewarded for his deeds of virtue.

TALK ABOUT IT

Which ending do you like better for the tiger, and why?



Think about it

1. Where did the tiger wail for his foster-mother?

- ○ On her grave
- ○ At the judge's hall
- ○ In the temple

2. Who showed kindness in this story? How?

“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

— Yeshua HaMashiach

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