

The Lady or the Tiger?

By Frank Stockton

Chapter One

The Kingdom of Strange Justice

A long time ago, there was a powerful king who ruled a big and rich country. He was a strong man with great energy. He loved beautiful things, but he also loved control. He was not a fair man, but not completely cruel either. He was half-barbaric. That means he was part wild, part civilized.

He had strange ideas about justice. When someone broke the law, he did not give a normal punishment. Instead, he built a large public arena. In this arena, a person accused of a crime would face two doors. Behind one door, there was a tiger — fierce and hungry. Behind the other, there was a lady — young, beautiful, and ready to marry.



The accused would stand in front of the two doors and choose one. No one knew which was which, not even the king. If the person opened the door with the tiger, he would be eaten in front of everyone. That meant he was guilty. If he opened the door with the lady, he would marry her immediately — even if he already had a wife or didn't love her. That meant he was innocent.

To the king, this was fair. There was no trial. There were no arguments. It was all up to fate.

People from all around the country came to watch these events. They loved the drama, the surprise, the sudden deaths, or quick weddings. It was entertainment. But the king saw it as justice.

And so, the arena became part of life in the kingdom. People feared it, but they also celebrated it.

Then one day, the king faced a new problem — one that touched his heart deeply.

Chapter Two

The Princess and the Young Man

The king had a daughter — the princess. She was beautiful, like a summer morning. Her hair was dark and long, and her eyes shone like stars. But she was also strong, proud, and full of passion. She was her father's child — clever, bold, and yes, half-barbaric, just like him.

In the royal palace, many young men worked. One of them was a handsome young man with a kind heart and brave spirit. He was not a prince. He had no title, no money, and no famous family. But he had something special — a dreamer's soul and a smile that made people feel warm inside.

The princess saw him one day in the garden.

He was helping the old gardener move flowers.

She looked at him.

He looked at her.

And in that moment, love began.

They did not speak much at first. A few smiles, quiet glances, short greetings. But soon, they met in secret places. They talked, laughed, and dreamed. The princess felt happy, alive, full of hope. The young man felt lucky. He loved her deeply.

They were careful. No one knew.

Or so they thought.

One day, the king discovered their secret. He became very angry. His daughter — a royal princess! — had fallen in love with a common man.

To the king, this was not love. It was a crime.

The next morning, the young man was taken by soldiers. The king ordered that he be sent to the arena. He would face the two doors, just like every other man who broke the law.

But this case was different.

The people were surprised. "This man is not a criminal!" they said. "He hurt no one."

But the king was firm. "He broke the law of the crown," he said. "Let fate decide."

The day of the trial was chosen.

The arena was prepared.

The two doors were ready.

And the princess?

She was broken inside.

She cried in silence. She stayed up at night. She loved this man with all her heart. But she knew what would happen if he opened the wrong door — the tiger.

Worse, if he opened the other door, he would marry another woman.

And not just any woman.

The king had chosen the most beautiful lady in the land — someone from the royal court. The princess hated her. That woman had looked at the young man before, smiled at him. And he had smiled back. Just once. But it was enough to burn the princess's heart.

Now the princess had a terrible decision to make.

She knew she could find out what was behind each door. She had her ways. Servants talked. Gold helped. And she was smart.

So she made a plan.

And she found the answer.

She now knew exactly which door had the tiger and which had the lady.

But what would she do with that knowledge?



Chapter Three

The Day of the Trial

The sun rose brightly on the day of the trial. The sky was clear and blue. People filled the streets, excited to see what would happen. It was not every day that a trial like this was held — and certainly not one involving the princess's lover.

In the great arena, thousands of people gathered. They sat high in the stone seats, talking and guessing.

“Which door will he choose?”

“Will he marry the lady?”

“Or will the tiger end his life?”

Trumpets sounded. The doors opened. Soldiers came in. Then, the **young man** walked into the arena.



He looked straight ahead, proud and calm. He was not afraid. He stood tall, like a man with nothing to hide. But in his heart, he was thinking of one person only — the princess.

She sat next to her father, high above the arena, dressed in fine clothes. But her heart was not fine. It was heavy, full of fear, love, and confusion.

Their eyes met.

In that one look, they said a thousand words.

He did not speak.

She did not speak.

But he knew — she had the answer.

He trusted her.

She loved him. He knew that. And he believed she would save him.

He looked at her, waiting for a sign.

The princess raised her right hand — just for a moment. Very quickly. No one else saw it.

But the young man saw.

She pointed, ever so slightly, to the door on the right.

There was no time to think.

No time to ask questions.

He trusted her completely.

Without hesitation, he walked across the arena to the right door.

He put his hand on the handle.

The crowd was silent. You could hear the wind. You could feel the tension. The king leaned forward. The princess held her breath.

And the young man — opened the door.

What happened next?

No one knew.

Chapter Four

Fire in Her Heart

The door opened wide.

But before anything came out, the princess closed her eyes.

She could not watch.

In that single moment — the moment before truth — her whole soul burned inside her. She had made a choice. But now, standing there above the crowd, she asked herself:

Was it the right one?

Let's return to the night before the trial.

That night, the princess sat alone. Her room was dark, and the candles burned low. She did not sleep. She walked back and forth, her heart heavy.

In one hand, she held love — a deep, true love for the young man.

In the other hand, she held jealousy — sharp and dangerous.

She had found out what was behind each door.

She knew which door hid the tiger — large, angry, hungry.

She knew which door hid the lady — beautiful, graceful, ready to marry the man she loved.

And the princess hated that woman.

The lady had once looked at the young man with soft eyes. The young man had smiled back. It was a small thing, but to the princess, it felt like a knife in her heart.

She imagined them standing together, holding hands, saying vows, living a happy life.

A life that should have been hers.

Could she really send her lover into another woman's arms?

But the other choice was cruel.

The tiger.

Death.

Pain.

Blood.

Could she really send him to die, just to stop her heart from breaking?

She thought all night. She cried. She whispered to herself, again and again.

Finally, she made a decision.

And she stood by it.

In the morning, her face was calm, her body still. But her heart? It was fire.

Back in the arena, she had made the signal — a soft, secret movement with her hand.

She had pointed to the door on the right.

Now, the door stood open.

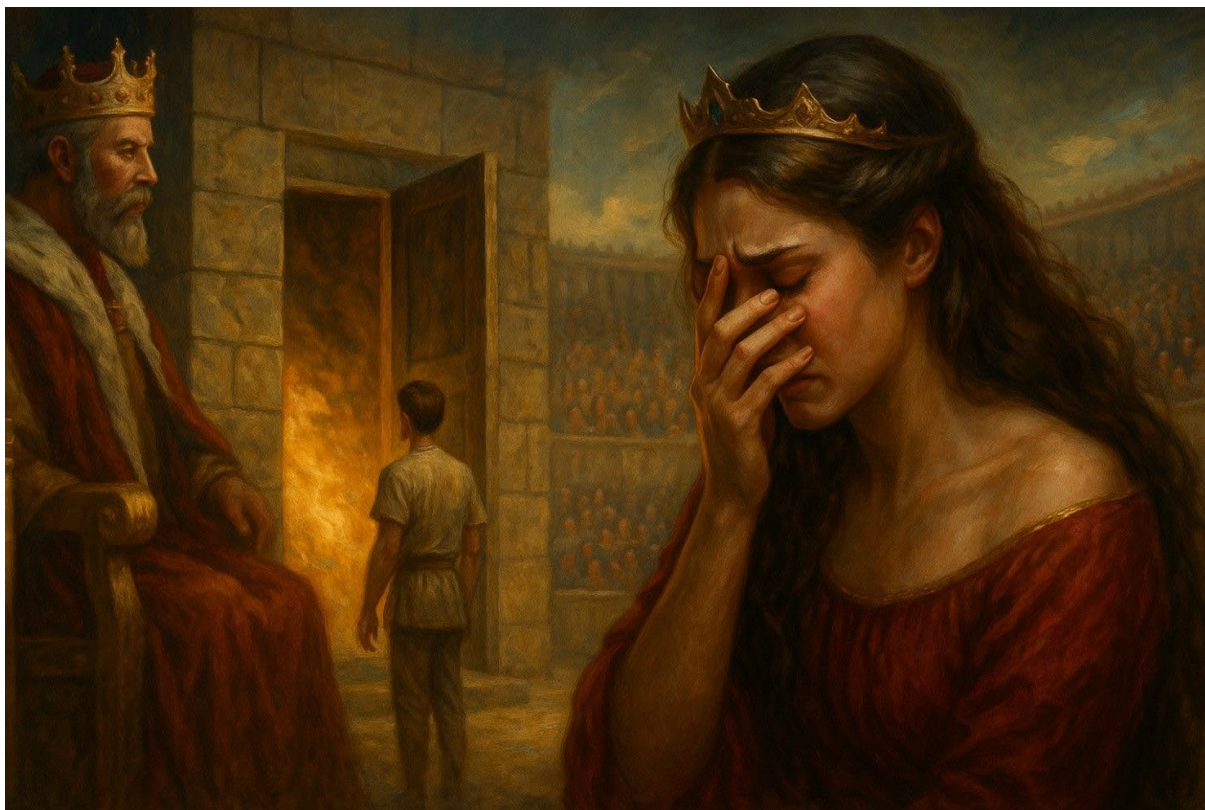
The crowd leaned forward.

The young man stood still.

The king looked pleased.

And the princess...

She did not open her eyes.



Chapter Five

The Question with No Answer

The door stood open.

But the story does not tell us what came out.

Not a sound. Not a scream. Not music. Not a roar. Just silence.

We do not know if the lady stepped forward with a smile on her face...

Or if the tiger leaped out with fire in its eyes.

Because this is not a story with a clear ending.

This is a story with a question.

A question for you.

Let's look again at the princess.

She was not like other girls. She was not soft and quiet. She was born in a palace of power, raised by a king who ruled with fire and fear. Her heart was wild. She loved deeply. But she could also hate deeply.

She loved the young man.

Yes.

But she hated the woman behind the other door.

Even more.

She had dreamed of marrying that man. She had held his hand in the gardens, laughed with him in the moonlight. His voice, his smile — they were hers.

But now, if he opened the lady's door, he would become someone else's husband.

Could her heart take that?

Could she watch him smile at another woman — the woman she despised?

Or...

Was it better that no one had him?

Better that he die quickly — and never love another?

The princess had to decide.

And she did.

She pointed to the right door.

But what was behind it?

The lady?

Or the tiger?

The king didn't know.

The crowd didn't know.

Even the young man didn't know — until that last moment.

And now the writer asks you:

What do you think?

Was the princess's love stronger than her jealousy?

Or was her jealousy stronger than her love?

Only you can decide.

And maybe — that is the true beauty of the story.

— THE END —