

Eunja Nam

### **Filial Tiger**

Once upon a time, there lived a young man and his elderly mother. One day, just like any other day, this young man went deep into the mountains behind his village to cut firewood. Each day he had to go deeper and deeper into the mountains to get enough wood. Finding the right spot with plenty of dead wood to cut, he busied himself felling, cutting, and gathering wood. Suddenly Tiger with large fierce slanted eyes, full of venom appeared before the young man. After giving the young man a good stare, Tiger gave a loud roar, shaking the whole valley. Thinking, "you would make a perfect dinner for me," Tiger started walking slowly toward the young man. The young man's death appeared a sure thing.

In a split second, he remembered his mother's words, "Stay alert, and you will find a way to survive even in a fatal crisis." The young man thought he could not allow himself to be so easily devoured without trying to save himself. "Where there is a will there is a way." Gathering up his courage and putting on a pleasant friendly face, he knelt down on the ground giving Tiger a big bow. Surprised, Tiger stepped a couple of steps backward. "Oh my long lost Big Brother, I am so happy to finally meet you," said the young man.

"What you called me Big Brother? I am a tiger. You are human. How could we possibly be brothers?" Tiger's loud roaring sound once again shook the whole valley.

Trying his utmost to maintain his composure, with a happy smile, the young man slowly started explaining. "My mother has previously warned me that you couldn't possibly remember what had really happened to you. When you were a little baby, you were lost in the deep forest, she told me. She believed you had been killed by a fierce beast. But, strangely, you kept appearing in her dreams and told her that a very kind mother tiger had saved you. She nursed you and raised you like a baby of her own. So you grew up to be a tiger. In my mother's dream, you kept telling her how much you missed her, and me, your brother. You kept telling her how much you wished that we could one day meet each other and live all together in one house. So my mother would say to me, "If you ever meet a handsome tiger, he must be your brother. Call him Big Brother and tell him this whole story."

Tiger thought that this was an incredible story, but somehow he felt good. Everyone he

had previously met in his life had become scared of him, hated him, and had run away from him, if they didn't try to shoot him. No one was ever happy to see him, greeting him with such a warm respectful welcome. The big bow especially meant a lot to him. He tried to remember his early childhood, all in vain. He wanted to believe that the story was true. He could have been born human. How sad his mother would have been to lose her dear baby son. Tiger felt a deep sympathy for his human mother and brother. By then, the thought of devouring this young man was long gone. He told his human brother in a soft, kind voice, "I'm happy to hear my childhood story. I'm also happy to know you are my brother. But, I have already put on a tiger's appearance and it would be impossible for us to live together in human society. Go home and tell our mother that I'm well. Tell her not to worry about her long lost son." Tears welled up in Tiger's eyes. From now on, I will bring you a wild boar once every 15 days. You serve our mother good meals."

The young man reluctantly said goodbye to Tiger and came down the mountain. From then on, precisely once every 15 days, the young man found a freshly killed boar at the gate. He and his mother lived happily ever after.