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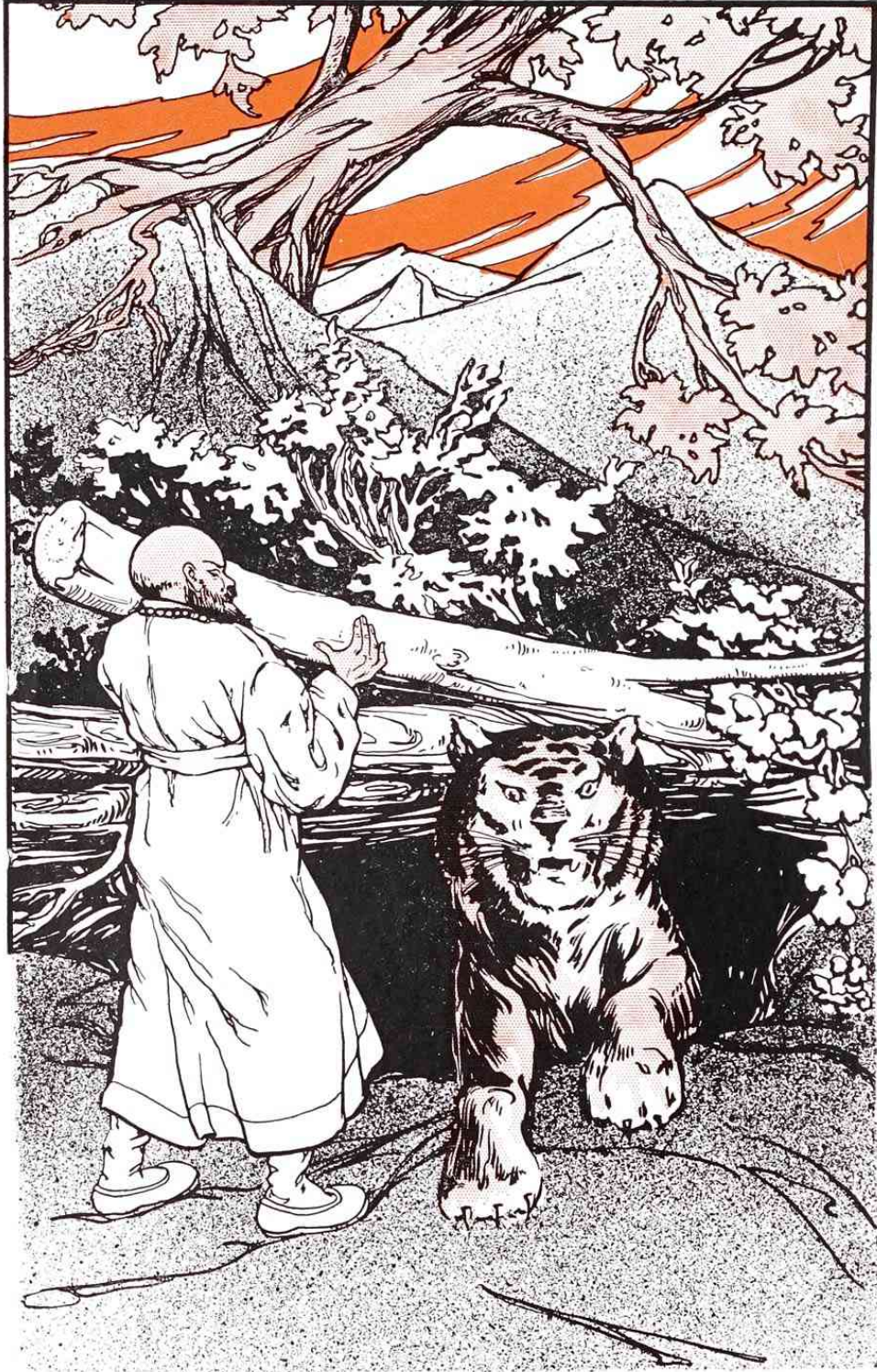


**KOREAN
FAIRY TALES**

WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS

Korean Fairy Tales

William Elliot Griffis



The tiger climbed up and out.

A NOTE TO THE FRIENDS OF KOREA

Everywhere on earth the fairy world of each country is older and perhaps more enduring than the one we see and feel and tread upon. So I tell in this book the folk lore of the Korean people, and of the behavior of the particular kind of fairies that inhabit the Land of Morning Splendor. Yet, if I live long enough, I shall write the wonderful history of the Korean nation and civilization, which once so enriched Asia, and made possible the modern Japan such as we know today, of which fact the literature and art of both countries bear ample witness.

W. E. G.

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THE UNMANNERLY TIGER

“Mountain Uncle” was the name given by the villagers to a splendid striped tiger that lived among the highlands of Kang Wen, the long province which from its cliffs overlooks the Sea of Japan. Hunters rarely saw him, and among his fellow-tigers the Mountain Uncle boasted that, though often fired at, he had never been wounded; while as for traps—he knew all about them and laughed at the devices used by man to catch him and to strip him of his coveted skin. In summer he kept among the high hills and lived on fat deer. In winter, when heavy snow, biting winds, and terrible cold kept human beings within doors, old Mountain Uncle would sally forth to the villages. There he would prowl around the stables, the cattle enclosures, or the pig pens, in hopes of clawing and dragging out a young donkey, a fat calf, or a suckling pig. Too often he succeeded, so that he was the terror of the country for leagues around.

One day in autumn, Mountain Uncle was rambling among the lower hills. Though far from any village, he kept a sharp lookout for traps and hunters, but none seemed to be near. He was very hungry and hoped for game.

But on coming round a great rock, Mountain Uncle suddenly saw in his path some feet ahead, as he thought, a big tiger like himself.

He stopped, twitched his tail most ferociously as a challenge, showed fight by growling, and got ready to spring. What was his surprise to see the other tiger doing exactly the same things. Mountain Uncle was sure there

would be a terrible struggle, but this was just what he wanted, for he expected to win.

But after a tremendous leap in the air he landed in a pit and all of a heap, bruised and disappointed. There was no tiger to be seen, but instead a heavy lid of logs had closed over his head with a crash and he lay in darkness. Old Mountain Uncle was caught at last. Yes, the hunter had concealed the pit with sticks and leaves, and on the upright timbers, covered with vines and brushwood, had hung a looking-glass. Mountain Uncle had often beheld his own face and body in the water, when he stooped to drink, but this time not seeing any water he was deceived into thinking a real tiger wanted to fight him.

By and by, a Buddhist priest came along, who believed in being kind to all living creatures. Hearing an animal moaning, he opened the trap and lifting the lid saw old Mountain Uncle at the bottom licking his bruised paw.

“Oh, please, Mr. Man, let me get out. I’m hurt badly,” said the tiger.

Thereupon the priest lifted up one of the logs and slid it down, until it rested on the bottom of the pit. Then the tiger climbed up and out. Old Mountain Uncle expressed his thanks volubly, saying to the shaven head:

“I am deeply grateful to you, sir, for helping me out of my trouble. Nevertheless, as I am very hungry, I must eat you up.”

The priest, very much surprised and indignant, protested against such vile ingratitude. To say the least, it was very bad manners and entirely against the law of the mountains, and he appealed to a big tree to decide between them.

The spirit in the tree spoke through the rustling leaves and declared that the man should go free and that the tiger was both ungrateful and unmannerly.

Old Mountain Uncle was not satisfied yet, especially as the priest was unusually fat and would make a very good dinner. However, he allowed the man to appeal once more and this time to a big rock.

“The man is certainly right venerable Mountain Uncle, and you are wholly wrong,” said the spirit in the rock. “Your master, the Mountain Spirit, who rides on the green bull and the piebald horse to punish his enemies, will certainly chastise you if you devour this priest. You will be no fit messenger of the Mountain Lord if you are so ungrateful as to eat the man who saved you from starvation or death in the trap. It is shockingly bad manners even to think of such a thing.”

The tiger felt ashamed, but his eyes still glared with hunger; so, to be sure of saving his own skin, the priest proposed to make the toad a judge. The tiger agreed.

But the toad, with his gold-rimmed eyes, looked very wise, and instead of answering quickly, as the tree and rock did, deliberated a long time. The priest’s heart sank while the tiger moved his jaws as if anticipating his feast. He felt sure that Old Speckled Back would decide in his favor.

“I must go and see the trap before I can make up my mind,” said the toad, who looked as solemn as a magistrate. So all three leaped, hopped, or walked to the trap. The tiger, moving fast, was there first, which was just what the toad, who was a friend of the priest, wanted. Besides, Old Speckled Back was diligently looking for a crack in the rocks near by.

So while the toad and the tiger were studying the matter, the priest ran off and saved himself within the monastery gates. When at last Old Speckled Back decided against Mountain Uncle and in favor of the man, he had no sooner finished his judgment than he hopped into the rock crevice, and, crawling far inside defied the tiger, calling him an unmannerly brute and an ungrateful beast, and daring him to do his worst.

Old Mountain Uncle was so mad with rage and hunger that his craftiness seemed turned into stupidity. He clawed at the rock to get at the toad, but Speckled Back, safe within, only laughed. Unable to do any harm, the tiger flew into a passion of rage. The hotter his temper grew, the more he lost his wit. Poking his nose inside the crack he rubbed it so hard on the rough rock that he soon bled to death.

When the hunter came along he marveled at what he saw, but he was glad to get rich by selling the tiger's fur, bones, and claws; for in Korea nothing sells so well as a tiger. As for the toad, he told to several generations of his descendants the story of how he outwitted the old Mountain Uncle.

TOKGABI AND HIS PRANKS

Tokgabi is the most mischievous sprite in all Korean fairyland. He does not like the sunshine or outdoors, and no one ever saw him on the streets.

He lives in the sooty flues that run under the floors along the whole length of the house, from the kitchen at one end of it to the chimney hole in the ground at the other end. He delights in the smoke and smut, and does not mind fire or flame, for he likes to be where it is warm. He has no lungs, and his skin and eyes are both fire-proof. He is as black as night and loves nothing that has white in it. He is always afraid of a bit of silver, even if it be only a hairpin.

Tokgabi likes most to play at night in the little loft over the fireplace. To run along the rafters and knock down the dust and cobwebs is his delight. His favorite game is to make the iron rice-pot lid dance up and down, so that it tumbles inside the rice kettle and cannot easily be got out again. Oh, how many times the cook burns, scalds, or steams her fingers in attempting to fish out that pot lid when Tokgabi has pushed it in! How she does bless the sooty imp!

But Tokgabi is not always mischievous, and most of his capers hurt nobody. He is such a merry fellow that he keeps continually busy, whether people cry or laugh. He does not mean to give any one trouble, but he must have fun every minute, especially at night.

When the fire is out, how he does chase the mice up and down the flues under the floor, and up in the garret over the rafters! When the mousies lie dead on their backs, with

their toes turned upward, the street boys take them outdoors and throw them up in the air. Before the mice fall to the ground, the hawks swoop down and eat them up. Many a bird of prey gets his breakfast in this way.

Although Tokgabi plays so many pranks, he is kind to the kitchen maids. When after a hard day's work one is so tired out that she falls asleep, he helps her to do her hard tasks.

Tokgabi washes their dishes and cleans their tables for good servants; so when they wake up the girls find their work done for them. Many a fairy tale is told about this jolly sprite's doings—how he gives good things to the really nice people and makes the bad ones mad by spitefully using them. They do say that the king of all the Tokgabib has a museum of curiosities and a storehouse full of gold and gems and fine clothes, and everything sweet to eat for good boys and girls and for old people that are kind to the birds and dumb animals. For bad folks he has all sorts of things that are ugly and troublesome. He punishes stingy people by making them poor and miserable.

The Tokgabi king has also a menagerie of animals. These he sends to do his errands rewarding the good and punishing naughty folks. Every year the little almanac with red and green covers tells in what quarter of the skies the Tokgabi king lives for that year, so that the farmers and country people will keep out of his way and not provoke him. In his menagerie the kind creatures that help human beings are the dragon, bear, tortoise, frog, dog and rabbit. These are all man's friends. The cruel and treacherous creatures in Tokgabi's menagerie are the tiger, wild boar, leopard, serpent, toad and cat. These are the messengers of the Tokgabi king to do his bidding, when he punishes naughty folks.

The common, every-day Tokgabi plays fewer tricks on the men and boys and enjoys himself more in bothering the girls and women. This, I suppose, is because they spend more time in the house than their fathers or brothers. In the Land of Rat-tat-tat, where the sound of beating the washed clothes never ceases, Tokgabi loves to get hold of the women's laundry sticks which are used for pounding and polishing the starched clothes. He hides them so that they cannot be found. Then Daddy makes a fuss because his long white coat has to go without its usual gloss, but it is all Tokgabi's fault.

Tokgabi does not like starch because it is white. He loves to dance on Daddy's big black hat case that hangs on the wall. Sometimes he wiggles the fetich, or household idol, that is suspended from the rafters. But, most of all, he enjoys dancing a jig among the dishes in the closet over the fireplace, making them rattle and often tumble down with a crash.

Tokgabi likes to bother men sometimes too. If Daddy should get his topknot caught in a rat hole, or his head should slip off his wooden pillow at night and he bump his nose, it is all Tokgabi's fault. When anything happens to a boy's long braid of hair, that hangs down his back and makes him look so much like a girl, Tokgabi is blamed for it. It is even said that naughty men make compacts with Tokgabi to do bad things, but the imp only helps the man for the fun of it. Tokgabi cares nothing about what mortal men call right or wrong. He is only after fun and is up to mischief all the time, so one must watch out for him.

The kitchen maids and the men think they know how to circumvent Tokgabi and spoil his tricks. Knowing that the imp does not like red, a young man when betrothed wears clothes of this bright color. Tokgabi is afraid of shining

silver, too, so the men fasten their topknots together, and the girls keep their chignons in shape, with silver hairpins. The magistrates and government officers have little storks made of solid silver in their hats, or else these birds are embroidered with silver thread on their dresses. Every one who can afford them uses white metal dishes and dresses in snowy garments. Tokgabi likes nothing white and that is the reason why every Korean likes to put on clothes that are as dazzling as hoar frost. Tons and mountains of starch are consumed in blanching and stiffening coats and skirts, sleeves and stockings. On festival days the people look as if they were dipped in starch and their garments encrusted in rock candy. In this manner they protect themselves from the pranks of Tokgabi.

EAST LIGHT AND THE BRIDGE OF FISHES

Long, long ago, in the region beyond the Everlasting White Mountains of Northern Korea, there lived a king who was waited on by a handsome young woman servant. Every day she gladdened her eyes by looking southward, where the lofty mountain peak which holds the Dragon's Pool in its bosom lifts its white head to the sky. When tired out with daily toil she thought of the river that flows from the Dragon's Pool down out of the mountain. She hoped that some time she would have a son that would rule over the country which the river watered so richly.

One day while watching the mountain top she saw coming from the east a tiny bit of shining vapor. Floating like a white cloud in the blue sky it seemed no bigger than an egg. It came nearer and nearer until it seemed to go into the bosom of her dress. Very soon she became the mother of a boy. It was indeed a most beautiful child.

But the jealous king was angry. He did not like the little stranger. So he took the baby and threw it down among the pigs in the pen, thinking that this would be the last of the boy. But no! the sows breathed into the baby's nostrils and their warm breath made it live.

When the king's servants heard the little fellow crowing, they went out to see what made the noise, and there they beheld a happy baby not seeming to mind its odd cradle at all. They wanted to give him food at once but the angry king ordered the child to be thrown away, and this time into

the stable. So the servants took the boy by the legs and laid him among the horses, expecting that the animals would tread on him and he would be thus put out of the way.

But no, the mares were gentle, and with their warm breath they not only kept the little fellow from getting cold, but they nourished him with their milk so that he grew fat and hearty.

When the king heard of this wonderful behavior of pigs and horses, he bowed his head toward Heaven. It seemed the will of the Great One in the Sky that the boy baby should live and grow up to be a man. So he listened to its mother's prayers and allowed her to bring her child into the palace. There he grew up and was trained like one of the king's sons. As a sturdy youth, he practiced shooting with bow and arrows and became skilful in riding horses. He was always kind to animals. In the king's dominions any man who was cruel to a horse was punished. Whoever struck a mare so that the animal died, was himself put to death. The young man was always merciful to his beasts.

So the king named the youthful archer and horseman East Light, or Radiance of the Morning and made him Master of the Royal Stables. East Light, as the people liked to say his name, became very popular. They also called him Child of the Sun and Grandson of the Yellow River.

One day while out on the mountains hunting deer, bears, and tigers, the king called upon the young archer to show his prowess in shooting arrows. East Light drew his bow and showed skill such as no one else could equal. He sent shaft after shaft whistling into the target and brought down both running deer and flying birds. Then all applauded the handsome youth. But instead of the king's commending East Light, the king became very jealous of him, fearing

that he might want to seize the throne. Nothing that the young man could do seemed now to please his royal master.

Fearing he might lose his life if he remained near the king, East Light with three trusty followers fled southward until he came to a great, deep river, wide and impassable. How to get across he knew not, for no boat was at hand and the time was too short to make a raft, for behind him were his enemies swiftly pursuing.

In a great strait, he cried out:

“Alas, shall I, the Child of the Sun and the Grandson of the Yellow River, be stopped here powerless by this stream?”

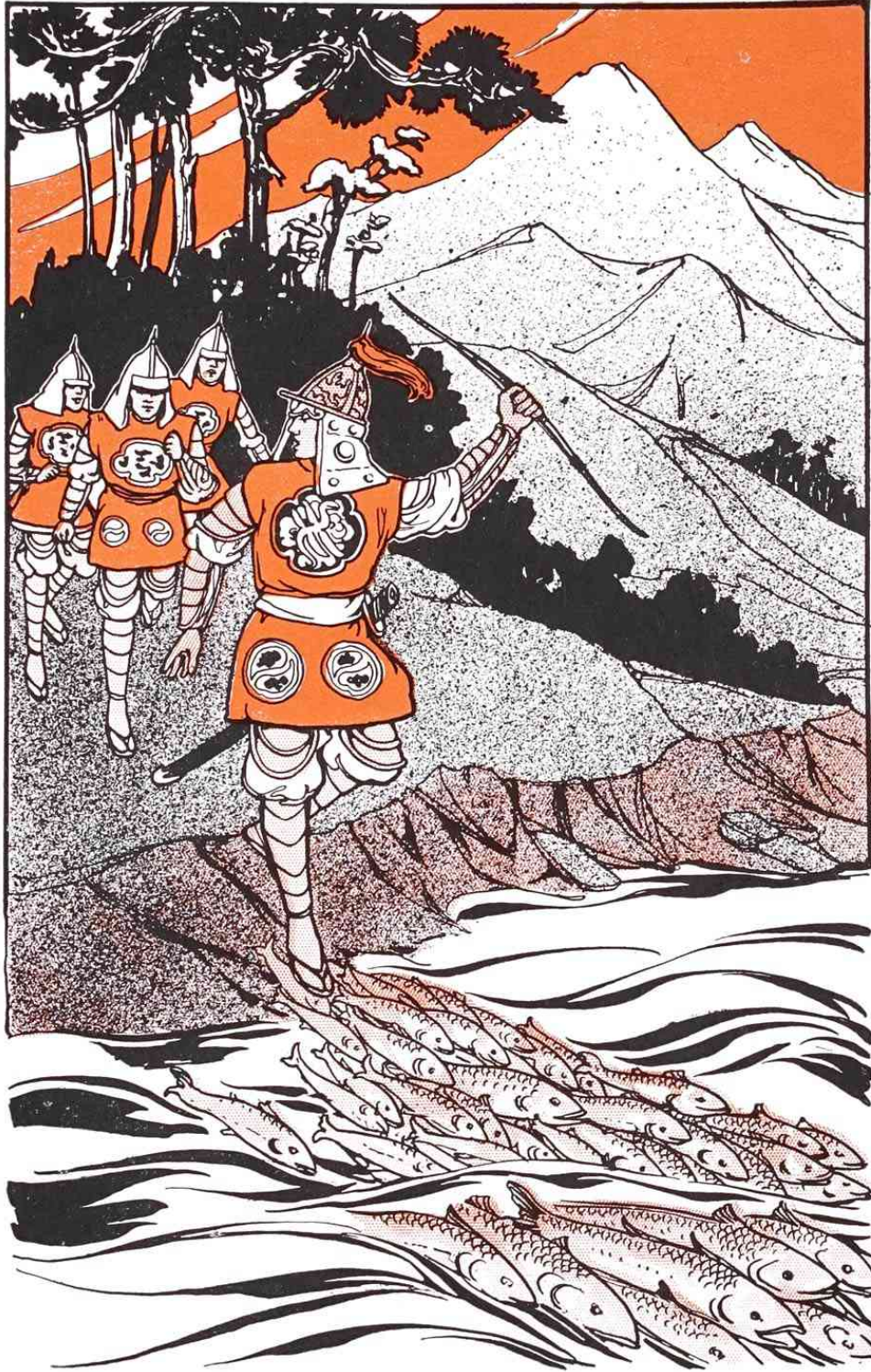
Then as if his father, the Sun, had whispered to him what to do, he drew his bow and shot many arrows here and there into the water, nearly emptying his quiver.

For a few moments nothing happened. To his companions it seemed a waste of good weapons. What would their leader have left to fight his pursuers when they appeared, if his quiver were empty?

But in a moment more the waters appeared to be strangely agitated. Soon they were flecked and foaming. From up and down the stream, and in front of them, the fish were swimming toward East Light, poking their noses out of the water as if they would say:

“Get on our backs and we’ll save you.” They crowded together in so dense a mass that on their spines a bridge was soon formed, on which men could stand.

“Quick!” shouted East Light to his companions, “let us flee! Behold the king’s horsemen coming down the hill after us.”



Shouted East Light, "Let us flee!"

So over the bridge of fish backs, scaly and full of spiny fins, the four young men fled. As soon as they gained the

opposite shore, the bridge of fishes dissolved. Yet scarcely had they swum away, when those who were in pursuit had gained the water's edge, on the other side. In vain the king's soldiers shot their arrows to kill East Light and his three companions. The shafts fell short and the river was too deep and wide to swim their horses over. So the four young men escaped safely.

Marching on farther a few miles, East Light met three strange persons who seemed to be awaiting his coming. They welcomed him warmly and invited him to be their king and rule over their city. The first was dressed in seaweed, the second in hempen garments, and the third in embroidered robes. These men represented the three classes of society; first fishermen and hunters; second farmers and artisans; and lastly rulers of the tribes.

So in this land named Fuyu, rich in the five grains, wheat, rice, and millet, bean and sugarcane, the new king was joyfully welcomed by his new subjects. The men were tall, brave and courteous. Besides being good archers, they rode horses skilfully. They ate out of bowls with chop-sticks and used round dishes at their feasts. They wore ornaments of large pearls and jewels of red jade cut and polished.

The Fuyu people gave the fairest virgin in their realm to be the bride of King East Light and she became a gracious queen, greatly beloved of her subjects and many children were born to them.

East Light ruled long and happily. Under his reign the people of Fuyu became civilized and highly prosperous. He taught the proper relations of ruler and ruled and the laws of marriage, besides better methods of cooking and house-building. He also showed them how to dress their hair. He