

The Tiger's Decoy

The Chinese Fairy Book

Chinese

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That the fox borrowed the terror he inspired from the tiger is more than a simile; but that the tiger has his decoy is something we read about in the story books, and grandfathers talk about a good deal, too. So there must be some truth in it. It is said that when a tiger devours a human being, the latter's spirit cannot free itself, and that the tiger then uses it for a decoy. When he goes out to seek his prey, the spirit of the man he has devoured must go before him, to hide him, so that people cannot see him. And the spirit is apt to change itself into a beautiful girl, or a lump of gold or a bolt of silk. All sorts of deceptions are used to lure folk into the mountain gorges. Then the tiger comes along and devours his victim, and the new spirit must serve as his decoy. The old spirit's time of service is over and it may go. And so it continues, turn by turn. Probably that is why they say of people who are forced to yield themselves up to cunning and powerful men, in order that others may be harmed: "They are the tiger's decoys!"

Note: This tale is traditionally narrated.

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