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# *Korean Folktales*



Pyongyang, Korea

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## Editor's Note

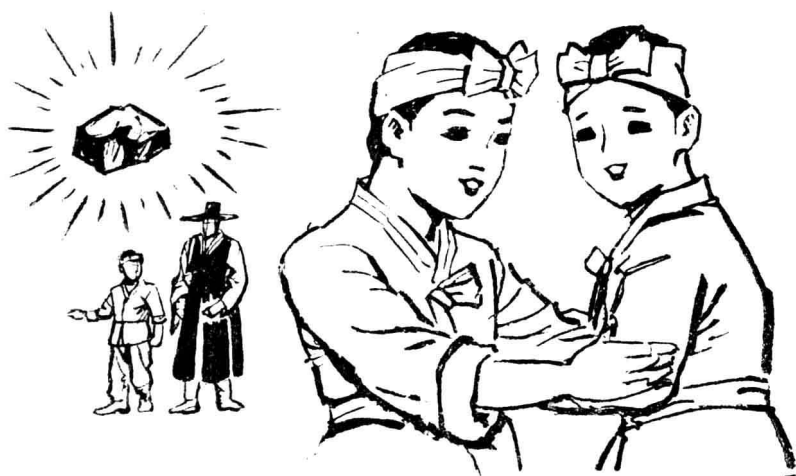
Our country with a long history and brilliant culture has many books handed down from time immemorial.

Carried in these books are tales the import of which is that honesty and excellent virtue cope with wickedness.

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## A Boy and A Lump of Gold

Once upon a time a poor peasant lived in a village far back in the mountains.

One day the starving ten-year-old eldest son said to his father:

"Father, let me leave home and earn money. When I return home I'll bring a lump of gold as big as my fist."

The son's idea was very childish and not worth listening to, but it cut the peasant to the heart.

"How painful it must have been for him to broach such a subject with me."

The son tried to persuade his father.

"Daddy, I assure you I can make money."

The peasant thought it better the son leave home and get bread by the sweat of his brow than starve to death at home. So he let him do as he wanted.

The boy left home taking nothing to eat on the way. He set out in search of a gold mine, anxious to get a lump of gold at any cost.

He travelled for several days begging for food from people and reached a gold field. Many gold miners worked there.

"What have you come here for?" asked one of gold miners.

"I have come here to work. I won't return home until I get a lump of gold."

After laughing loudly, the man remarked:

"Do you think digging for gold is so easy? Don't be ridiculous. Go home at once. You're too weak to do this work."

But the boy didn't give in to him.

"I won't return home. At home my family are starving. I may be little, but I can do anything you do."

The man pitied the boy and saw to it that he got a job there. Years passed and the boy worked like a beaver but the lump of gold remained a dream.

Commiserating with the boy, gold miners gave him all they had got there. When the

gold was put together it made a lump as big as his fist.

Although the boy stubbornly refused to accept it, the kind people finally got him to take their gold.

"Uncles, a thousand thanks to you..."

Tears filled his eyes. After working for five years he could return home carrying a lump of gold with him. What a great happiness!

Now another worry gnawed at his heart, whether his starving parents and brothers were alive or not at home.

"May they be alive."

The boy hurried to get home. One day he stopped overnight at an inn.

The next morning he went to the well to wash up. The gold which he had been keeping inside his jacket got in the way, so the boy took it out and put it on a rock. When he finished washing the sun was already high in the sky. He left the inn right after eating breakfast. His mind was filled with the thought that he should get back home as soon as possible.

Because of this, he forgot that he had put the gold on the rock by the well.

It was only when he had gone a little distance from the inn that his thoughts turned again to the gold. Instinctively his

hand went to his breast, but the gold was not there. His heart sank into his boots.

"Where could I have dropped it?"

He retraced in his mind what he had done that morning.

"I know, I put it down by the well..."

The boy ran lickety-split back to the inn. But the gold was not by the well. He asked the innkeeper, "Have you seen my lump gold?"

"A lump of gold? ..."

The innkeeper had hidden it but pretended that he knew nothing of it.

The boy begged him to give it back to him, clinging to his arm.

"Master, I got it only after five-year-long hard toil at a gold-field. The gold diggers pitied me and gave me all they had.

"At home my starving parents and brothers are waiting for me. Pray return it to me. Please, have mercy."

Tears streamed down his cheeks.

The innkeeper was reluctant to lose the gold but the miserable plight of the boy moved him.

When the boy got the gold back he jumped up and down with joy and thanked the innkeeper time and again praising him as if he was an almsgiver.

The boy quickened his pace, keeping the

gold inside his jacket and reached a big river. He was going about here and there, trying to cross the river when a sudden cry for help came from upstream.

The boy rushed there to find a child struggling in the water.

He didn't know what to do. Nobody was around and he couldn't swim himself.

"He's drowning! Rescue him, please!"

The boy shouted himself hoarse, stamping his feet, yet no one came.

Then a peddler appeared walking along the river. The boy ran up to him and said:

"Uncle, a child is drowning there. Save him, please," the boy begged tugging his sleeve.

"I can't swim a stroke," said the peddler and went on his way.

The child was now too exhausted to kick any more and was going down beneath the surface of the water.

Just then a nobleman passed by there. The boy rushed up to him.

His response to the boy's appeal was the same.

If he refused to rescue him, the child would drown. Without a second thought, he took the gold from inside of his jacket and said:

"If you rescue the child, you can have his gold. Save him at once!"



The nobleman's eyes popped out at the sight of the gold.

"Is it a real gold?" asked the man, looking at the boy dubiously.

"Of course, it's real. I have worked five years for it."

After having tapped the lump of gold on the surface of a rock, the young nobleman said: "Hum, you're right!"

He jumped into the stream without taking off his clothes, and, a few minutes later, he came out, carrying the child in his arms.

"Well? I've saved his life so now the gold is mine. Keep your word."

The nobleman put the gold into his bundle and went away.

The boy laid the child, face down on the ground to get the water out of him. Before long the child revived.

"Thank you very much for having saved my life!" said the child, gazing up at him, his eyes full of tears.

"To tell the truth, gold saved your life. If I hadn't had it, you would have drowned. Well, go home now."

The boy parted with the child. The boy felt sad, going home with nothing in his hand. He had dreamed of making his parents and brothers happy with the gold. But he was happy at the thought that he had rescued

the child.

"Human life is dearer than gold."

One could feel this only when one had done such a virtuous deed. Now his pace was springy though he had no gold any longer.

He returned home to find that everyone was all right. His family was eking out a scanty livelihood growing crops in small patches his father had cleared in the mountains.

He told them how he had worked at a gold mine the past five years and what had happened on his way home.

After listening to him, his parents said: "You did the right thing. A man behaves like that. If one knows nothing but money one does not deserve to be called human being. The best thing is that we are reunited."

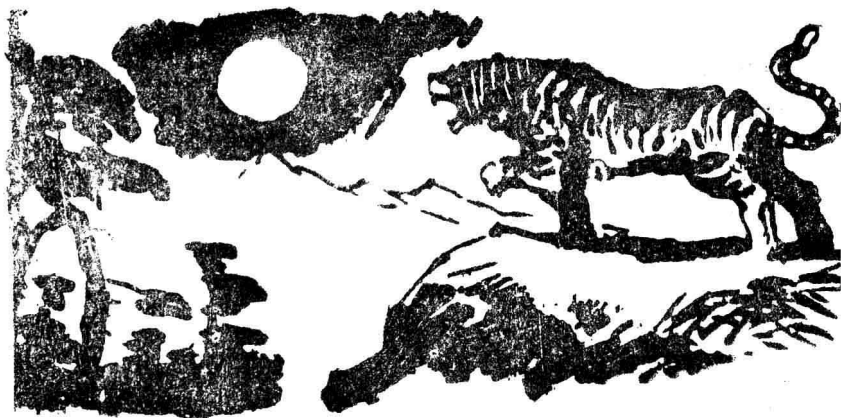
In the meantime, the child who had narrowly escaped drowning told his family that he had been saved by a boy who had a piece of gold.

He was the son of the inn where the boy had stayed overnight.

The innkeeper thought to himself that had he not returned the gold to the boy, he would have lost his only son and that he was right in giving it back to the boy.

He gathered a large sum of money and hurried off to where the boy lived. It was a big sum, twice as much as what the gold was worth. Although the boy and his parents stubbornly refused to accept it, the innkeeper didn't leave the house till they did accept it.

With the money the boy's family bought some plots and an ox and worked diligently so that they were able to live a life of plenty.



## The Sun and the Moon

Once upon a time a widowed mother lived with little son and daughter. The father of the children had passed away long ago.

The mother had to work every day to support the destitute children.

One day the mother went to the house of a wealthy family beyond the hill to weave hemp cloth for them.

Leaving home, the mother said to her children, worried: "No matter who comes, you must not open the door until I return home. Understand?"

"Yes, mom," answered both of them.

The mother left home after seeing that the door had been locked inside.

The weaving job at the house of the rich family took all day long and it was late at night when she was returning home. At the foot of the pass, a big tiger suddenly appeared and made a whistling sound.

"I want to eat you."

The mother fell heavily on her buttocks in surprise.

"Have mercy, spare my life for the sake of my poor children," the mother said to the tiger.

"No, I won't," said the tiger and ate her.

And the tiger changed into the mother's dress and held her basket under his arm. Tasty smelling parched beans were in the basket. The mother was taking them home to give to her children. Then the tiger walked to the house of the children at the base of the pass. The door of the house was locked tight.

"Rap, rap, rap."

The tiger knocked on the door.

"My dears, open the door. Mummy's come."

At the knocking sound the sister cried, "Oh, mummy's come," and rushed to the door to unlock it. But the brother grabbed her

by the sleeve and said, "It doesn't sound like mother's voice."

The boy said to the caller:

"Our mother has clear voice. Why is yours so husky?"

"Because I wove hemp cloth all along," answered the tiger deceitfully.

But the boy did not believe it and said:

"Then, show me your hands. I'll see whether they are mummy's or not."

The tiger thrust a hairy, sooty foreleg into the door, tearing the window paper.

The children were surprised at it.

"This is not mummy's. There's no hair on mother's hand."

"Don't be foolish. That's from weaving hemp cloth. Open the door quickly. Mummy has brought parched beans for you," said the tiger deceitfully.

The tiger thrust the pack of parched beans through the hole in the window paper.

"Oh, mummy's brought parched beans for us."

Out of joy the sister hastily unlocked the kitchen door.

They were engrossed in eating the beans, and the disguised tiger was in the kitchen as if it was cooking supper.

As soon as they had eaten up the beans, they looked into the kitchen and were

startled. In the kitchen was not their mother  
But a tiger in their mother's clothes.

"Oh, my!"

They became confused. The brother was  
about to make off through back door with  
his sister who had turned pale with fright.

But they were discovered by the tiger.

"Where are you going?" asked the tiger  
from the kitchen.

"Er... we're going outside to the out-  
house," answered the boy.

"Use the chamber pot," said the tiger.

"I'm a big girl. I'm embarrassed to use  
a chamber pot," the sister cried to the  
kitchen.

"I see. Don't stay long. They say a  
fierce tiger is around here," said the disgu-  
ised tiger like their mother.

"Yes. We'll be back in a minute."

Outdoors, they did not know where to  
go. It was plain that they would be caught  
by the tiger at once if they tried to run  
away from him.

Luckily there was a big poplar tree by  
the well. They climbed up the tree hoping  
to escape death.

Meanwhile the tiger who was waiting for  
the children to return to the house realized  
that he had been deceived by them.

"You hateful brats!"

The tiger was furious and dashed out of the door to eat the children. He went about the yard looking for them but couldn't find them. Finally he looked into the well. He saw their faces reflected in the water of the well.

"Ha, ha ha... You little rogues, there you're. Do you think you can baffle me?"

Seeing the tiger lift a leg to jump into the well, the sister couldn't help laughing.

"Ha, ha ha! That foolish tiger is about to jump into the well!"

Frightened, the tiger raised his head. The voice didn't come from within the well but from above. When he looked up from where the voice had come, he saw the children at the top of the poplar.

"Hum, you went up there to get away from me."

The tiger tried to climb the tree but in vain.

"Good children! How did you get up there? I want to play with you on the tree."

"Grease the tree with sesame oil before you come up," the boy cried to the tiger.

Delighted, the tiger got some oil in the kitchen and greased the tree but that didn't help. The oiled tree was so slippery that he plopped down on the ground with a thud every time. The innocent sister was so



amused by the folly of the tiger that she thoughtlessly slipped out:

"Make notches on the tree with an axe, then it's easy to climb..."

The brother put his hand on her mouth, but it was too late.

The tiger started climbing up the tree cutting the notches with axe as it went.

The brother and sister were in great danger. They reached the topmost branch of the tree, and the tiger was coming after them. They could climb no higher.

The brother prayed to God for help:

"Pray have mercy on us. If you wish to save our lives, send down a strong rope, otherwise a rotten one."

The tiger was now near enough to touch their feet.

Just at that moment, a rope came down from the heaven.

The brother and the sister grabbed the rope and ascended to heaven.

The tiger was infuriated at having failed to catch the children.

The tiger prayed to God.

"Pray send me down a rope. If you wish to save my life, send down a rotten rope, otherwise a strong one."

The tiger prayed as the boy did but turned it around.