

DIRECTIONS: Here is the story that presents you with a very puzzling problem. Read “the Lady of the Tiger?”

The Lady or the Tiger?

By Frank R. Stockton

Long ago, there lived a savage, cruel king, who believed that he was a brilliant and reasonable sovereign. He also believed that justice was best served in his arena, for he felt it improved the minds of his subjects. In this arena, crime was punished and virtue was rewarded without the aid of judges or juries. A person’s guilt or innocence was decided by mere chance. When a subject was accused of a crime, public notice was given that on an appointed day the fate of the accused would be determined in the king’s arena.

On the appointed day, the king gave a signal, and the accused stepped out into the arena. Directly opposite him were two identical doors. It was the duty of the subject to open one – he could open either door. From one, a ferocious tiger might spring upon him as a punishment for his guilt. From the other, a beautiful lady might step out and, as a reward of his innocence, immediately marry the man. It was of no consequence that he might already be wed. The king permitted no such arrangements to interfere with his magnificent plan of punishment and reward.

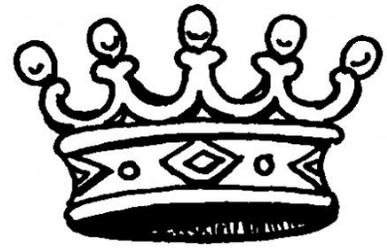
This merciless king had a beautiful daughter – but she was as arrogant and proud as her father was. Among the king’s servants was a handsome young man. It was not long before the princess fell deeply in love with him. They met for many months until, one day, the king learned of their love. He immediately threw the young servant into prison and set a day for his trial.

The king chose a most savage tiger to crouch behind one door and a beautiful servant girl to stand behind the other. The young man would die or marry – in either case, the king was rid of him. The trial day arrived, and the king gave the signal. The young man walked into the arena and bowed to the king, but the youth’s eyes were fixed upon the princess.



From the moment of his arrest, the princess thought of nothing but this hour. For she had done what no other person had done – she had discovered the secret behind the doors. She knew behind which door the tiger paced and behind which the lady waited. The princess was familiar with the lady, who was one of the fairest and loveliest of the court – and the princess hated her. Often the princess had seen, or imagined that she had seen, the lady look with affection upon the young man, and the princess feared that the young man returned this look to the lady. Occasionally, the princess had seen them talking together – just for a moment or two – but the princess was jealous.

As the young man looked at the princess, he could tell she knew the secret. He had expected her to know, for she was his only hope. As their eyes met, the princess knew his question: "Which?" There was not an instant to be lost. The question was asked in a flash; it must be answered in another. She raised her hand, and made a slight, quick movement toward the right. No one but the young man saw it, and he walked rapidly across the empty space. He went directly to the door on the right and opened it.



Now, the point of the story is this: Did the tiger come out of that door, or did the lady?

The answer involves a study of the human heart. She had lost him, but who should have him? Often she cried out as she imagined her lover opening the door to meet the cruel fangs of the tiger! But how much oftener she imagined him opening the other door. Oh, how it pained her when she saw his look of delight as he met the lady! Her thoughts tortured her. She knew the young man would ask her, and she knew she would answer. And without the slightest hesitation, she had moved her hand to the right.



So, fair reader, which came out of the opened door – the lady or the tiger?