

Camp Tiger

By Susan Choi

It's September, the end of the summer. As soon as we get back from camping we go to school. We have a campsite on the far side of the pond, with the big mountain starting behind it.

While we're working on the tent, everything gets really still. My mom puts out her hand in a way that means *don't move* and *don't talk*.

A tiger steps silently out of the woods and stands next to the stone fireplace. The tiger is orange with black stripes and has a stern face and big, heavy paws. But it seems smaller than a tiger should be. It's still big—like our neighbor's German shepherd that scares me sometimes on the sidewalk—but for a tiger, it's small. It doesn't scare me. It also looks thin. And talks.

"Do you have an extra tent?" asks the tiger. "I have a cave, but I still feel cold."

I know that we do. It's a two-person tent that we brought as a place for me and my brother to play if it rains. "Yes," my dad finally says while my mom stares at him. "We'll set it up when we finish this one."

We set up the two tents in silence. I notice that, while we're working, the tiger starts acting like a cat—a more regular cat. He sits down and grooms himself slowly, especially cleaning his paws. I don't see claws. He must have pulled them in. I think he's cleaning himself to make us feel more comfortable with him. It works. My mom keeps looking over at him, and I can tell that she thinks he's beautiful.

When we're done, my dad holds out his arm in that goofy way of his that means *voila!*

"Can you unzip it for me?" the tiger asks. I look at his huge, heavy paws.

My dad does, and the tiger lowers his head and steps in carefully. I follow before my parents can stop me.