

Tiger Skins

Grandfather hunted tigers.
Father sold tiger skins.

Before being sold,
Those tiger skins were hung before the house.
And as pregnant ewes crossed the courtyard one by one
Their lambs were lost.
Hung behind the house, those skins,
And the pears and peach trees withered one by one.

On the prairie of my dreams Father
Strode among the crowds
Clothed in a tiger skin.
As shouts of, "A tiger's coming" rang throughout
The stone walls of the village,
They cracked,
And rocks rolled like scrambling goats.
The last was Mother, chased by the tiger to wood's end;
There she died, yet was brought to life again.

Before being sold, the tiger skins
Were the skins of sky
The skins of earth
The skins of water
The skins of rock.
When turned into windows on the wall
Those tiger skins would reveal my person.
Should I be seen it would be seen with
Hunting gun on shoulder.

When deciding to make a sacred drum of tiger skin,
One fears only those beats that deliver
Withering plagues through the endless forest.
On making a harness of tiger skin for the ox
The one fear is no more land to plow.
When making a banner of tiger skin
The one fear is that of finding no one to raise it.

I have never seen a tiger skin, nor indeed a tiger.
“A man leaves behind only his name at death;
a tiger leaves only its skin.”
In this life of yours, why not be a tiger?”
And why were the children taught this way?
Whatever the reason, all those tiger skins
Were sold by my father.

On New Year's Eve pine needles covered the sitting room floor.
Not one of Grandfather's footprints could be found.
Did he die again in the sky? Let it be just a dream.

I carried my cold heart to lay it upon
the pine needles piled there in the sitting room.
I did not feel the needle pricks as their tattoos
Covered my body.
It was again the midnight of that day
The midnight of that day.

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