

Do Tigers Cry?

Tigress on vigil at the kitchen table,
embers dancing in her eyes as she gazes at the long noodles
wrapped around her chopsticks,
alongside jasmine tea, steaming.

Mama, do you miss home?

Her claws clutch the cup meant to calm –
faraway gunfire echoes in her ears.
I've heard that this tigress outran war, disease and famine,
relentlessly pursuing her striped, fiery coat,
which gleams with a rigor rivaling her ferocious feline eyes;
restraining inhuman anger, they grow distant,
as she camouflages her feelings like a canopy of leaves
concealing a lair.

I ponder why the tigress resents the jungle,
for was not the stupor of childhood freer than this foreign zoo,
or perhaps the land, across the Pacific, restricted her rebellious spirit,
and she left for the promise of free speech.

As I scan her face, searching for answers,
she silently stalks her memory's recesses.
The flames in her eyes flicker like lightning and portend
the rise of a thunderhead, as the tigress settles on her haunches,
and I seize the kitchen table firmly.

Her roar reverberates behind the lilt of an East Texas accent.
The fury veils a sadness forged by adult responsibilities
at eight years of age.

Mama, do you regret never being a child?

I regard that steely stare and recall that Mama's a tigress –
she does not weep salty tears
that would stain the family's kitchen table.

Mama, may I cry for you?