

I am Professor Booklover and I am pleased to be here to tell you about The Tiger's Wife.

The book weaves together three unrelated stories. One that takes place in the present and two that take place in the past. They are brought together by the main character, Natalia, a young doctor, and her grandfather who is also a doctor, or was because the story begins with Natalia finding out he has died.

The three story lines include (1) the present day story of Natalia learning of her grandfather's death while helping immunize orphans in a small village where a family is digging up a vineyard trying to find the bones of a dead cousin who they believe put a curse on them, (2) the tale of the "deathless man" (a man who never dies despite being shot and drowned and starved) who the grandfather meets (and argues with) at different points in his life and about which he tells strange believable tales to his granddaughter, and (3) the story of the grandfather as a boy who meets a woman who can neither hear or speak but who befriends a tiger that has escaped from a zoo, hence the title of the book as this woman is known by the villagers as the tiger's wife.

Already you can see that the plot line is original to say the least. It is wild and imaginative which is why it's hard to describe fully, hard to categorize, and equally hard to put down. On a scale of four paws, this novel deserves the full four, minus a toe, perhaps, because the two stories of the past (about the "deathless man" and the "tiger's wife") are much more engaging than the present day experiences of Natalia helping

out at the orphanage. When the author writes about the past, she creates a beautifully believable and mysterious world.

So who wrote this book that feels like it's been around for generations? Her name is Tea' Obreht. She was born in 1985 in the former Yugoslavia but left at seven growing up in Cyprus and Egypt before emigrating to the United States at age twelve. She writes as if she's been an English speaker all her life which is just one more reason to be impressed by her work.

And where does this novel take place? That part is not so clear. Countries are not named and the town in which the characters live is simply called the City. Yet from references to war and such, readers find themselves somewhere in the Balkans, the area in which Obreht was born.

*And now for a passage from the text...*

The Tiger's Wife is meant for older readers who like the measured pace of a folktale rather than hard-edged action. There is a lot of suffering in the novel with a granddaughter mourning her grandfather's death, the deaf-mute tiger's wife being abused by her real husband, and the philosophical discussions that come out of the scenes with the man who never dies but who lets others know when their lives will end. You have to suspend reality while reading some of this book. It's like looking at a Marc Chagall painting...it doesn't always make sense to see floating people or goats playing cellos, but it still can be beautiful.