

The Story of the Tiger (1978)

By Dario Fo

When we came down from Manchuria with the Fourth and the Eighth Armies and almost all of the Seventh, we were marching day and night; thousands and thousands of us, loaded with packs, dirty, exhausted; and we kept going, with horses that couldn't keep up and died; and we ate the horses, we ate the donkeys that dropped dead, we ate the dogs, and when there wasn't anything else to eat we ate the cats, the lizards, the rats. Imagine the dysentery that came of it all. We shit ourselves in such abundance that I think for centuries to come that path will have the tallest, greenest grass in the world.

We were dying; the soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek were shooting at us . . . those white bandits were shooting at us, shooting at us from all sides every day . . . we were trapped . . . they waited for us behind the walls of the villages, they poisoned the water, and we were dying, dying, dying.

We got to Shanghai and kept going till we could see the Himalayas spread out high before us. And there our leaders said, "Stop. There could be a trap here, an ambush. Some of Chiang Kai-shek's white bandits could be up on the mountaintops waiting for us to come along the gorge. So, all of you in the rear guard, go up there and cover us as we pass through."

So we climbed up, all the way to the top of the ridge, to make sure that nobody up there would shoot us in the ass. And our comrades passed through, marching, marching, marching, and we cheered them on.

"Don't worry, we're here, we'll watch out for you . . . Go on . . . go on . . . go on."

The passage took almost a day, until finally it was our turn. We came down.

"And now who's going to guard our asses?"

We came down scared, looking down into the bottom of the valley; all of a sudden, just when we got to the gorge, these bandits jumped down from above and started shooting at us: BIM BIM BAM! . . . I saw two big rocks and threw myself in between them. Under cover I started shooting: BAM! I looked out. My leg, the left one, was out in the open.

"Damn, let's hope they don't see me."

BAM!

They saw me. Hit me right in the leg. The bullet went in one side and came out the other. It grazed one testicle, almost hit the second, and if I'd had a third, it would have been smashed to bits. The pain.

"Damn," I said. *"They hit the bone."* No, the bone was saved.

"They got the artery . . . no, the blood's not gushing."

I squeezed it, squeezed it to force the blood out. I tried to walk softly, softly. I managed to walk with a little limp. But after two days the fever started, fever that made my heart feel like it was pounding down into my big toe. TUM, TUM, TUM. My knee swelled up and I had a big bulge in my groin.

"It's gangrene. Damn it. Gangrene."

The putrid blood began to give off a bad odor all around me and my comrades said, **"Can you stand back a little? That stinks too much."**

They cut two sticks of bamboo, eight or ten meters long. Two of my comrades lined up, one in front of me, the other behind, with the sticks on their shoulders. I walked between them, supported under my armpits, barely putting any weight on my legs.

They walked with their faces in the air and their noses stopped up so they wouldn't have to breathe in the stench.

One night we came up close to what was called the great "green sea," and all night long I'd been shouting, cursing, and calling for my mother. In the morning a soldier, a comrade who was like a brother to me, pulled out an enormous pistol and pointed it here. *(He points to his forehead)*

"The pain's too much for you. I can't stand to see you suffer like this. Listen to me . . . just one bullet and its over."

"Thanks for your solidarity and understanding. I appreciate your good intentions, but maybe some other time. Don't trouble yourself. I'll kill myself on my own when the time comes. I've got to resist. I've got to live. Go ahead without me. You can't keep on carrying me like this. Go away. Go away. Leave me a blanket, a pistol to hold, and a little container of rice."

So they left. They left. And as they trudged off along that "green sea" I started to shout.

"Hey comrades, comrades . . . Damn it . . . Don't tell my mother that I rotted to death. Tell her that it was a bullet and that when it hit me I was laughing. Hey . . ."

But they didn't turn around. They pretended not to hear so they wouldn't have to turn around and look at me, and I knew why: Their faces were all streaming with tears.

Me, I let myself fall to the ground, wrapped myself in the blanket, and started to sleep. I don't know how, but I dreamed a nightmare, and I thought I saw the sky full of clouds that broke open and showered down a sea of water. WHOOSH. A great big thundercrash. I woke up. There really was a sea. A storm. All the water from the rivers was flooding the valley. Torrents of water

swirled around me. PLEM, PLUC, PLOC, PLAM. It was rising up to my knees.

"Damn, instead of rotting to death, I'm going to end up drowned."

I climbed up, up, up onto a steep gravelly slope. I had to hold on to the branches with my teeth. My nails broke. Once I got up on the ridge, I started running across the plateau, dragging my dead leg behind me, till I jumped into a swirling torrent of water and swam, swam with all the strength left in my arms to the other side, and lifted myself up onto the bank, and all of a sudden in front of me there was . . . ooh . . . a big cave, a cavern. I threw myself into it.

"Saved. Now I won't drown. I'll rot to death."

I look around. It's dark. My eyes adjust . . . I see bones, the carcass of a devoured beast, an enormous carcass . . . a colossus.

"But what could eat a thing like that? What kind of beast is it? Let's hope it's moved out, with the whole family, that it's drowned in the flooded rivers."

So I go to the back of the cave . . . I lie down. I start to hear the pounding again. TUM, TUM, my heart beating down to my big toe.

"I'm dying, dying, dying, I'm going to die."

Suddenly, in the bright light at the entrance to the cave, I see a shadow, like a silhouette. An enormous head. But what a head! Two yellow eyes with two black stripes for pupils . . . big as lanterns. What a tiger! What a beast! A tigerelephant! OOEH. In her mouth she has a tiger cub, its belly swollen with water. A drowned cub. It looks like a sausage, a pumped-up bladder. She tosses it onto the ground . . . TOOM . . . she presses . . . with her paw on its belly. . . water comes out . . . BLOCH . . . from its mouth; it's drowned to death. There is another tiger cub running between its mother's legs that looks like it has a melon in its stomach; it too is dragging around a bellyful of water. The tigress lifts her head, sniffing . . . SNIFF, SNIFF . . . the air of the cavern.

"Damn, if she likes rancid meat, I'm screwed."

She turns toward me . . . she's coming forward, she's coming. This head getting bigger, getting bigger, overflowing. I feel my hair standing on end, so stiff that it makes noises . . . GNIAACH . . . the hair on my ears stands up too, my nose hairs . . . And the rest of my hairs: a brush!

"She's coming, she's coming, she's right next to me, she sniffs me."

"AAHHAARRRR."

And the tiger cub: *"IAAAHHAA."*

"OAAAHHHAARRR."

"AAAAH."

"OAAAHAAAAARRRRRR."

"IAAAHHH."

A family quarrel. He's right, the poor little tiger baby; he is full up to his ears with water, like a little barrel . . . what can he do? The cub runs to the back of the cave and has a tantrum.

"IAHHHHAAEEEA."

The tigress is furious. She turns to look at me, gets up, and stares at me. Me! Damn, she's mad at her son and now she's going to take it out on me. What do I have to do with it? Oh, no, I'm not even a relative. *IGNA TUM, TUM, TUM.* (He makes the sound of his hair standing on end.) The brush! She's coming close, lantern eyes, she turns sideways. *PAC!* A tit in my face.

"But what kind of way is this to kill people? Tit bashing?"

She turns her head and says, **"AAAHARR,"** as if to say, "Suck it."

I hold her nipple with two fingers and put it against my lips.

"Thank you, anything to make you happy." (He mimes taking a tiny sip from the nipple.)

I should never have done it. She turns, looking nasty.

"AAAHHAARRR."

Never spurn the hospitality of lady tigers. They become beasts. I take her teat and . . . *CIUM, CIUM, CIUM* (A pantomime of gluttonous, rapid sucking) . . . Delicious. Tiger milk . . . Delicious. A little bitter, but, oh my dear so . . . creamy. It goes down sliding and rolling around in my empty stomach . . . *PLOC, PLIC, PLOC*, then it finds my first intestine . . . *TROC*, it sloshes all around the empty intestine . . . I haven't eaten for fifteen days. *PRFII, PRII, PFRII*, the milk is gushingly flooding all the rest of my intestines. Finished. *PCIUM, PCIUM, PCIUM.* (He mimes folding up the empty teat like it was a little sack.)

"Thank you."

She takes a step forward, *TACH:* another tit. It's amazing how many tits tigers have! A titteria. I started sucking another one. I wanted to spit out a little, but she was always there, like this, keeping an eye on me.

If I spit out even a drop of milk she's going to eat me alive. I didn't even stop to breathe. *PCIUM, PCIUM, PCIUM!* I sucked. I sucked. The milk was going down. I was starting to choke. *PLUC, PLUM, PLOC*, I could hear the milk seeping all the way down to the veins in my legs. It had such a strong effect that I could almost feel my heart beginning to pound less strongly. I could even feel the milk going into my lungs. I had milk everywhere.

Finished—*PLOC*—she turned. Another titteria. I felt like I was in a factory, on the assembly line. My stomach was expanding, fuller, fuller. I got to the point, squatting like I was, with my swollen

belly, that I looked like a Buddha. *PITOM, PITOM, PITOM*, repeat-action burps. And I had my butt muscles squeezed tightly enough to make my ass choke.

"If I get dysentery from the milk and start shitting myself, she's gonna get mad, pick me up, dip me in the milk like a doughnut in a cup of coffee, and eat me."

So I sucked, and I sucked, and *suck-suck* by the end, my friends, I was flooded, engulfed, drunk with milk. I didn't know where I was. I could feel milk coming out of my ears, out of my nose. I was gurgling. *PRUFF*, I couldn't breathe . . . *PRUFFF*.

The tigress, having terminated her service, licked my face from bottom to top: *BVUAAC*. My eyes got pushed up like a mandarin's. Then she went off to the back of the cave, with her cat walk, threw herself to the ground, and slept. I, stuffed to the gills, sat still. *(He mimes the statuary position of the Buddha.)*

"If I move so much as even an eye, I'll explode . . . PFRUUUH."

I don't know how, but I fell asleep, calm and peaceful as a baby. I woke up in the morning, partially emptied. I was all wet with milk. The tigress. I look. *(He looks for the tigress.)* She's not there. Neither is the cub. Gone . . . they went out, gone for a morning piss. I waited awhile . . . I was nervous. Every time I heard a noise I was afraid some wild animal was coming to visit. Some other ferocious beast coming into the cave. I couldn't say, *"Sorry, the lady of the house isn't in. She's gone out. Come back later. Would you like to leave a message?"*

I waited, worried. Finally, in the evening, she came back. The tigress returned, so silky and beautiful. Her nipples were already a little swollen, not like the day before when they were bursting, but halfway nicely full, and behind her came the cub. As soon as the tigress entered the cave, she sniffed, looked around, glanced my way, and said, *"AAAHHAARRR,"* as if to say, "Are you still here?"

And the cub chimed in, *"OOOAAHHHAA."*

Then they went to the back of the cave. The tigress stretched out on the ground. The cub's stomach was a little less swollen with water than before, but every so often, *BRUUAAC!* he spit up a drop. Then he curled up next to his mom. Mom gently took hold of his head and put it next to her nipple.

"IAAHAA." *(He mimes the cubs refusal.)*

The tigress: *"OAAHAAA."*

"IAAHAA."

And the cub ran away. He wanted nothing to do with anything wet. *(He mimes the tiger turning to the soldier and the soldier obediently coming over to drink the milk.)*

PCIUM, PCIUM, PCIUM. What a life. While I was sucking, she started to lick my wound.

"Oh damn it, she's tasting me. Now, if she likes it, while I'm sucking she'll eat me."

But no. She was just licking, just licking. She wanted to heal me.

She started sucking out the rot inside the swelling. *PFLUUUWUUAAMM*. She was spitting it out. *PFLUUUU*. She was draining it all out. *WUUUAAC!* Goddamn it to hell, she was good. She spread her saliva, that thick saliva that tigers have, all over the wound. And suddenly it occurred to me that tiger balm is a marvelous, miraculous medication, a medicine. I remember when I was a child, old people came to my village who were healers, witches, and they came with tiny jars full of tiger balm. And they went around saying, "***Come here, ladies. You have no milk? Smear your breasts with this balm and TOCH: You'll get two breasts big and bursting. You old ones, are your teeth falling out? A little bit on your gums . . . THOOMMM, locks those teeth in tight as fangs. Do you have warts, boils, scabs . . . infections? One drop and they're gone. It cures everything.***"

And it's true! It was miraculous, that balm. It was real tiger balm, too, no tricks. They collected it themselves. Think of the courage they had, those old shamans, going on their own to get saliva from inside the mouth of a tiger; while she was sleeping, with her mouth open, *PFIUUTT . . . PFIUUTT* (*He makes a quick gesture imitating the gathering of saliva*), and then running away. You can recognize most of them because they have short arms. (*He mimes someone with lopsided arms.*) Professional hazard.

Anyway, it might have been my imagination, but it seemed that as she was licking and sucking, I felt my blood thinning out again and my big toe getting back to normal and my knee beginning to move . . . my knee was moving! Damn, this was the life. I was so happy that I started singing while I was still sucking, whistling. I got confused and instead of sucking out, I blew in. *PFUM . . . PFUM . . .* like a balloon. (*He makes a gesture of quickly deflating the teat before the tigress notices.*) All out! The tigress, content, like this (*He makes an expression of the tiger's satisfaction*), she gives me the usual lick and goes to the back of the cave. I should mention that while the mother was licking me, the cub was there watching, all curious. And when the mother was finished, he came near me with his little tongue out, as if to say, "Can I lick too?"

Tiger cubs are like babies. Everything they see their mother do, they want to do too.

"You want a lick? Careful with those little baby teeth of yours. (He threatens the cub with his fist.) Careful not to bite, eh."

So he comes close . . . *TIN . . . TIN . . . TIN . . .* His little tongue licked my face till it tickled . . . Then after a while, *GNAACCHETA*, a bite. I had his testicles within range, *PHOOMMMM*. (*He makes the gesture of throwing a punch.*) Bull's-eye! *GNAAAA!* Like cat lightning! He started running up the walls of the cave like he was motorized.

You have to earn a tiger's respect immediately, when they're still young. And in fact, from that time on, when he passed near me, the dear thing, he didn't go by in profile. He paid attention. He walked like this. (*He indicates bow the cub walks by him with rigid arms and legs, alternately crossing one over another, as he worries about bow to keep his distance and protect bis testicles.*)

Well, the tigress was sleeping, and the cub fell asleep, and I slept too. That night I slept deeply and peacefully. I didn't have any more pain. I dreamt that I was home with my wife, dancing, with my mama, singing. When I woke up in the morning neither the tigress nor her cub were there. They had

gone out.

"What kind of family is this? They don't spend any time at home. And now who's going to take care of me? They could be out running around for a week."

I waited. Night came. Now they're out at night too.

"What kind of mother is that? A baby, so young, to take him out gallivanting around at night. What will he be when he grows up? A savage beast."

The next day at dawn they came back. At dawn! Just like that, as if nothing had happened. The tigress had a huge animal in her mouth. The way it was killed, you couldn't tell what it was. A gigantic goat that looked like a cow . . . With enormous horns. The tigress came into the cave. *SLAAM*, she threw it on the ground. The cub pranced in front of me, saying, *"AAAHHAARR,"* as if to say, "I killed it myself." (*He shows his fist and mimes the cub's terrorized reaction of walking cross-legged.*)

Okay, let's get back to the big goat. The tigress opens her big claws, tosses the goat down on its back with its belly up. *VRROMMM*, a deep gash . . . *UUAACH* . . . she rips open the stomach, the belly. Pulls out the guts, all the intestines, the heart, the spleen . . . *BORON, BORON* . . . She scrapes it out, all clean . . . The cub . . . *PLON, PLOIN* . . . jumps inside. The tigress . . . What a rage! *"OOAAHHAAAA."*

You can get into trouble stepping on a tiger's lunch. They get mad. The tigress puts her whole head in the belly, inside that cavernous stomach . . . with the cub still in there . . . *OAHAGN* . . . *GNIOOMM* . . . *UIIINOOM* . . . *UANAAAMM* . . . *GNOOOOM* . . . What a racket . . . it'd break your ears off.

They ate the whole thing in an hour. Every bone sucked clean. The only thing left was a piece of the rear end with the tail, the thigh, the knee of the beast, and a hoof at the end. The tigress turned to me and said, *"OAAAHAAAA,"* as if to say, "Are you hungry?"

She grabbed the leg and threw it over to me: *"PROOOOOOMM . . .,"* as if to say: "Have a little snack."

(He makes a gesture of impotence.) "FHUR . . . FHUF . . . Me, eat that? That stuff's as tough as nails. I don't have teeth like yours . . . Look at how hard that is, like leather! And then there's the fat and the fur . . . all those bits of gristle . . . If there was a little fire to roast it over for a couple of hours! A fire, damn! Sure, there's wood. The flood washed out all those roots and stumps."

I went out. I was already walking, with just a little limp. I went out in front of the cave where there were some tree trunks and stumps; I started to drag in some big pieces, and then some branches. Then I made a pile like this, then I took some dry grass, some leaves that were around, then I crossed the two horns, two bones, and over them I put the goat leg, like it was on a spit; then I looked for some round stones, the white sulfur ones that make sparks when you rub them together. I found two nice ones, started scratching away, and *PSUT . . . PSUT . . . TAC*. (*He mimes the beating of the rocks.*) Like shooting stars . . . tigers are afraid of fire. The tigress is back in the cave.

"OOOAAHAAAA."

(He makes menacing gestures as if to the tiger.) "Hey, what's the matter? You ate your disgusting ugly meat? Raw and bloody? I like mine cooked, okay? If you don't like it, get lost."

(He mimes the tigress cowering in fear.)

You have to show a female who's boss from the start. Even if she's wild. I sat down with my rocks. *FIT . . . PHTT . . . PHITT . . .* fire. Slowly catching, rising . . . the flames leaped. *QUAACCC . . .* All the fat started to roast and the melted fat dripped down onto the fire . . . It let off a thick black smoke . . . it drifted toward the back of the cavern. The tigress, as soon as the cloud of smoke reached her, said, **"AAHHHIAAAAAA."** *(The roar sounds like a sneeze.)*

"Smoke bother you? Out! And you too, tiger baby. (He threatens the cub with his fist and mimes the frightened response of the cub's cross-legged walk.) Out!"

And I am roasting, roasting, roasting, basting, basting, and turning. *FLOM . . . PSOM . . . PSE . . .* But it still gives off a disturbingly savage aroma. *(He mimes going out.)*

"If only I had some seasoning for this meat." That's it. Outside I've seen wild garlic.

I go out; in the clearing in front of the cave, right there . . . I pull out a nice bunch of wild garlic. *THUM . . .* Then I see a green shoot. I pull. *"Wild onion!"*

I also find some hot peppers . . . I take a sharp piece of bone, make some cuts in the thigh, and stuff in the garlic cloves with the onion and peppers. Then I look for some salt, because sometimes there's rock salt inside caves. I find some saltpeter, *"That'll do, even though saltpeter's a little bitter. Also, the fire might make it explode. But that's not important. I'll just be careful."*

I stuff some pieces of saltpeter into the cuts, and after a while, in fact, it flames up . . . *PFUM . . . PFAAAMMM . . . PFIMMM . . .*

The tigress: **"OAAAHAAA . . ."**

(He mimes the tigress getting scared)

"This is a man's work. Out. Get out of my kitchen."

Turn, turn, turn . . . now it's giving off a clear smoke, and what an aroma. After an hour, my friend, the aroma is heavenly.

"HAHA, so delicious."

SCIAAM: I peel off a piece of meat. *(He mimes tasting it.) PCIUM, PCIUM.*

"Ah, so delicious."

It's been years and years since I ate anything like this. What sweet, heavenly flavor. I look around. It's the cub . . . he had come in and was standing there licking his whiskers. *"You want a taste too? But this stuff's disgusting to you. You really want some. Look. (Mimes rapidly slicing some meat and throwing it to the cub, who wolf's it down in a second) OHP."*

He tasted it, swallowed, and said, *"OAHA."*

"Good? You like it? . . . Shameless brute. Take that. OPLA." (Again he mimes cutting and throwing the meat to the cub.)

"EHAAA . . . GLOP . . . CL . . . OEEE . . . GLOOO . . . OEH-AAH-HAAA."

"You're welcome . . . you're welcome . . . Yes, I made it myself. You want some more? Watch out your mother doesn't find out that you eat this stuff."

I cut off a nice piece of fillet. *"I'll keep this for myself. The rest is too much for me, so I'll leave it for you. Take the whole leg." (He mimes the action of throwing the goat leg to the cub.)*

BLUMMM . . . It hit him in the face and flattened him. He picked it up and staggered around with it like a drunk. Then Mom shows up. What a scene!

"AAAAHHHAAAA, what are you eating? . . . This disgusting burnt meat? Come here. Give it to me. AAAHHHAAAA."

"OOOOHHHOOOOCH."

A piece of meat gets stuck in Mom's mouth. She swallows it. She likes it.

"UAAAHAAAA," says the mother.

"UUAAHAAAA," answers the cub. *(He mimes the mother and son fighting over the meat)*

"An argument."

"PROEMM . . . SCIOOMMMMM . . . UAAAMMMM . . ."

The bone. Licked clean. Then the tigress turns to me and says, ***"OAAHHAAAAA, isn't there any more?"***

"Hey, this one's mine." (He points to the piece he had cut a moment ago.)

While I was eating, the tiger came over to me. I thought she wanted to eat my meat, but she just wanted to lick me. What a wonderful person. She licked me and then went over to her usual spot. She stretched out on the ground. The baby was already asleep, and pretty soon I fell asleep myself.

When I woke up in the morning, the tigers were already gone. It was getting to be a habit with them. I waited all day and they didn't come home. They didn't even show up that evening. I was a

nervous wreck. The next day they still hadn't come back.

"Who's going to lick me? Who's going to take care of me? You can't go leaving people home alone like this."

They came back three days later.

"Now its my turn to make a scene."

Instead, I stood there dumbstruck, speechless: The tigress walked in with an entire beast in her mouth. Double the size of the last one. A wild bison. I don't know what. The cub was helping her carry it. They both stepped forward . . . *BLUUUMMM*, sideways . . . like they were drunk with fatigue . . . *PROOM* . . . they came up to me.

PHOOAAHHAMMMM . . . (He mimes the tigers unloading the dead animal.) The tigress says, *"HAHA . . . HAHA . . ."* (He imitates the tiger panting.) And then: *"AAAHHA AAAA."* As if to say, "Cook it."

(Putting his hands to his face in desperation) Don't let tigers get away with bad manners.

"Excuse me, tiger, you must be mistaken. You don't expect me to sweat and slave over a hot stove while you're out having fun. What do I look like? Your housewife, me?! (He mimes the tiger preparing to attack him.)"

"OOAAHHHAAA OOAHHHAAAAAOO."

"Stop. OHO, OHO . . . OHO! So that's how you get your way. Can't we talk things over anymore How 'bout a little dialectics over here. Okay, okay. . . OHEOOH Don't get all hot and bothered about it. All right, I'll be the chef . . . I'll cook. But you two go get the wood."

"OOAAHHHAAA?" (He indicates the tiger pretending not to understand.)

"Don't play games. You know what wood is. Look here, come outside. That's wood. Those are stumps. Bring in all those pieces right away."

She understood all right. She gathered up the wood promptly, all the stumps, back and forth, so that in an hour the cave was half full.

"And you, tiger baby. Nice life, eh? Hands in your pockets?" (He turns to the audience.) He did have his hands in his pockets. He had his claws tucked in and was resting his paws on two black stripes just as if his hands were in his pockets.

"Come on. Get to work. I'll tell you what you have to get: onions, wild garlic, wild peppers—everything wild."

"AAHAAA."

"You don't understand? Okay, I'll show you. Look over there. That's an onion. That's a pepper."

The poor thing kept going back and forth with his mouth full of garlic, peppers, and onions . . . ha . . . and after two or three days his breath was so bad you couldn't get near him: what a stink. And I was there all day, by the fire, roasting, falling apart. My knees were scorched, my testicles dried to a crisp. My face was burnt, my eyes were watering, and my hair was singed too, red in the front and white in the back. You couldn't expect me to cook with my ass. It was a dog's life. But they just ate, pissed, and came home to sleep. I ask you: *"What kind of life is that?"*

So one night when I was feeling burnt up all over, I said to myself, *"Enough. I'm cutting the cord."*

While the two of them were sleeping, filled to bursting with the food I had intentionally inebriated them with, I crawled toward the exit, and was about to leave, almost outside when . . . the cub reared up screaming.

"AAAHHAHAHA . . . Mama, he's running away."

"Little spy. One of these days I'm going to rip off your balls with my hare hands, cook them up, and give them to your mother to eat stuffed with rosemary."

All of a sudden it started to rain: a thunderstorm. I remembered that tigers have a terrible fear of water. So I threw myself out of the cave and started running down the mountainside toward the river . . . I dived into the river and swam and swam and swam. The tigers came out.

"OOAAHHAAA! . . . "

I answered back, *"OOAAHHAAHHAHA!"* (He transforms the miming of his swimming into a classic obscene gesture.)

I got to the other side of the river. I started running. I walked for days. For weeks, a month, two months, I don't know how far I walked. I couldn't find a hut. I couldn't find a village. I was always in the forest. Finally, one morning I found myself on a hilltop looking down on a valley stretched out below. The land was cultivated. I could see houses down there, a village . . . a town! With a town square, full of women, babies, and men.

"OHO . . . people." I ran stumbling down. *"I'm saved. People, I'm a soldier of the Fourth Army. It's me."*

As soon as they saw me coming: *"It's Death. A ghost."*

They ran away into their huts, into their houses. And they barred their doors with sticks and chains.

"But why . . . a ghost, Death . . . but why? No, people "

I passed in front of a glass window and saw my reflection. I was terrified. My hair was white and wild. My scorched face, blackened and red. My eyes looked like burning coals. I did look like Death. I ran to a fountain and threw myself in . . . I washed myself. I scrubbed myself all over with sand. Finally I came out clean again.

"People, come out. Touch me. . . I'm a real man. Flesh and blood. Warm . . . Come, come feel"

me . . . I'm not Death."

They came out, still a little scared. A few men, a few women, some children, they touched me . . . and while they were touching me I told them the whole story: (*He recounts his entire adventure in double time, recapitulating the story in onomatopoeic, sounds to accompany his gestures.*)

"I'm in the Fourth Army. I came down from Manchuria. When they shot me in the Himalayas, they hit me in the leg, just missed my first and second testicles, if I'd had a third, it would've been shot to bits . . . then, three days, gangrene. . . a big pistol pointed right at me: 'Thanks, maybe some other time.' PROM, I fell asleep, PROM, rain and water, water, PROM, I'm in a cave, a tigress comes, her cub's drowned . . . she comes up to me, my hair stands on end . . . a brush! Breast-feeding, so I tit, tit, tit; just to make her happy, so I suck, I suck, then there's another one: BAM AHAAA. A punch in the balls . . . Then the next time: BROOOOM, a giant beast, and me I'm roasting, roasting, roasting, red in the front, white in the back. SCIUM! Mama, he's running away. I'll rip your balls of AAHHAAHHHA, and I escaped!"

While I was telling my story, they looked at each other, making faces and saying, **"Poor guy, his mind's gone to mush . . . must have had an awful scare, he's gone mad, poor thing."**

"You don't believe me?"

"But yes, of course! It's normal to be breast fed by a tiger . . . everybody does it. Around here there are people who grow up drinking milk from tigers' tits. You ask them, 'Where are you going?' 'To suck a tiger tit.' And then there's all that cooked meat. Oh, how they love it . . . Those tigers just can't get enough of that cooked meat. We set up a cafeteria just for the tigers . . . They come down every week just to eat with us."

I got the impression they were making fun of me.

At that moment we heard the cry of a tiger. **"AAHHAAAAAAAAAAAAA."**

A roar. At the top of the mountain you could make out the profile of two tigers. The tigress and her cub. The cub had grown to be as big as his mother. Months had passed . . . Imagine, they'd managed to track me down after all that time. I must have left quite a trail of stink behind me.

"AAAHHHAAAAA."

All the people in the village started to scream in fright: **"Help! Tigers!"**

They ran away to their houses and closed themselves in with chains.

"Stop, don't ran away . . . they're my friends. They 're the ones I told you about. The cub and the tigress that nursed me. Come out, don't be afraid."

The two tigers came down, *BLEM, BLOOOMMMM, BLEM, BLOOOM*. When they got within ten meters of me, the mother tiger started to make a scene. But what a scene!

"AAHHAAAAAAAAAA a fine way to pay me back, after all that I did for you, I even licked

your wounds **OOHHAAAAAHHHAAAAA** I saved your life! **EEOOOHHHAAAA** things I wouldn't have done even for my own man . . . For one of my own family . . . **EEOOHHHAAAA** you walked out on me **OOOHHHAAAAHAAAA** and then you taught us to eat cooked meat, so now every time **EEOOOHHHAAAAHAAAA** we eat raw meat we throw up . . . We get dysentery, we're sick for weeks. **AAHHHAAAAHAAAAA.**"

And I gave it back to her: "Oohhaaaaa. *Why did you do what you did? I saved you too with the nursing so your tits wouldn't burst . . . AHOOOLAHHH!* And didn't I cook for you, roasting roasting till my balls bust, eh? **AAHHHAAA.** *Behave yourself, eh . . . even if you are grown up now . . . "* (He threatens the tiger cub with his fist.)

Then, you know how it is, in a family, when you love each other . . . we made up. I scratched her under her chin . . . The tigress gave me a lick . . . the cub gave me his paw . . . I gave him a little punch like this. I pulled a little on the mother's tail . . . I gave her a little slap on the breast, the way she likes it, a kick in the balls for the cub, and he was happy. (He turns to the people, who've locked themselves in their homes.)

"We made up. Come out . . . don't be afraid, don't be afraid."

(To the tigers) "Keep your teeth in **AAAMMM**, like this. (He covers his own teeth with his lips.) Don't let them see **AMMAAAA**. And keep your claws tucked under your paws, hide your claws under your armpits . . . walk on your elbows, like this." (He demonstrates.)

The people start to come out . . . A little woman softly strokes the head of the tigress . . .

"She's so beautiful . . . Guruguruguru . . . And the other one, so cute . . . Lelelele . . . And VLAAAMMM!"

Lots of licking, petting, scratching for the tiger cub, too. And the children. A group of four children climbed right on the tigress's back. Four of them jumped right on, **PLOM . . . PL OM . . . PLOM . . .** the tigress marched around with them like a horse. Then she rolled over on her side to stretch out. Four more kids grabbed hold of the tiger cub's tail. (He mimes the cub being dragged backward and resisting by digging his claws into the earth.)

"**A.AAAHHHAAAAHHH.**"

And I was right behind him, keeping an eye on things (He shows his fist.) . . . because tigers have long memories.

Then they started to play, rolling on the ground and clowning around. You should have seen it: They played all day with the women, the children, the dogs, the cats . . . a few of them did disappear every once in a while, but nobody noticed because there were so many of them.

One day while they were romping around, we heard the voice of a farmer, an old man who came shouting down from the mountain.

"Help, help, people! The white bandits have come to my village. They're killing all the horses, they're killing our cows. They're carrying off our pigs . . . they're carrying off the women too. Come

help us . . . Bring your guns."

And the people said, "***But we don't have guns.***"

"*But we have tigers,*" I said.

We took the tigers . . .

BLIM . . . BLUMMM . . . BLOM . . . BLAMMM . . . BLAMMM . . . BLAM . . .

We climbed up the hill, went down the other side to the village. There were soldiers of Chiang Kai-shek, shooting, killing, looting.

"***Tigers.***"

"***AAAHHA AAAA.***"

As soon as they heard the roars and saw the two beasts, Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers burst their belts, dropped their pants, shit on their shoes . . . and ran away.

And from that day on, every time Chiang Kai-shek's soldiers showed up in one of the neighboring villages, the people would come calling for us: "***Tigers.***"

And we'd be off. Sometimes they'd show up from two places at once; from here, from there, they called us from all over. They'd even come to book us a week in advance. One time twelve villages wanted us the same day . . . what could we do?

"***We only have two tigers . . . we can 't go everywhere . . . what can we do?***"

"*Imitations! We make imitation tigers!*" I said.

"***What do you mean, imitation?***"

"*Simple. We have the model right here. We get some paper and glue to make the heads out of papier-mache. We make a mask. We put holes in the eyes, so they look just like the tigress and her cub. Then we put in a movable jaw. Somebody gets in like this with the head and goes QUAC . . . QUAC . . . QUAC . . . moving the arms. Then somebody else gets behind the first one, then another one puts his arm behind him to make the tail like this. To top it off, we put a yellow blanket over them. All yellow with black stripes. We make sure it covers the feet, because six feet for one tiger would be overdoing it a little. Then we roar. For that we'll need some roaring lessons. Okay, let's have everybody who's going to be an imitation tiger over here for the lessons and the tigers will be the teachers. Come on, you can do it. Let's hear how you roar.*

"*OOAAHHAAAAA . . . There. Now you try.*" (He turns to a student.)

"***OOAAHHAAAA.***"

"*Again.*"

They were everywhere, little, mean, bandy-legged guys, their asses hanging down to the ground, with huge sabers, and big long rifles. White flags with red circles in the middle on their rifles, another flag on their helmets, and another one up their asses that had the red circle with the rays of the rising sun.

"Tigers."

"OOOOOEEHHAAAHHAAAAAAA!!!!!"

Flags off their rifles, flags off their hats. The only flags left were the ones up their asses. *FIUNH . . . ZIUM . . .* Away they went, running like a bunch of chickens.

A new party leader arrived and told us, **"Good work. You did well before to disobey that other party leader who was, among other things, a revisionist and a counter-revolutionary. You did the right thing . . . You should always have tigers present when there's an enemy. But from now on there'll be no need. The enemy's gone . . . take the tigers back into the forest."**

"What, again?"

"Obey the party."

"Does this have anything to do with dialectics?"

"Absolutely."

"Okay, enough."

We still kept them in the chicken coop. And it was a good thing we did because Chiang Kai-shek's men came back again, armed by Americans, with tanks and artillery. They kept coming, more and more of them.

"Tigers."

"OOOOEEHHHAAAHHHHAAAA!!!!!"

They ran away like the wind. We beat them back to the other side of the sea. There was no one left, no enemy. And then all the party leaders arrived. All the leaders waving flags in their hands and applauding us. Some from the party, some from the army. The upper-level intermediary officials. The upper-upper-level central intermediaries.

They all cheered and shouted, **"Good work. Good work. Good work. You did the right thing to disobey: the tiger must always remain with the people, because it is part of the people and is the invention of the people, the tiger will always be of the people . . . in a museum . . . no, in a zoo. . . . There forever."**

"What do you mean, in a zoo?"

"Obey. There's no need for them anymore. No need for the tigers. We have no more enemies."

