

Animal Crackers

By Richard de Zoysa

"Draw me a lion."

So I set my pen
to work. Produce a lazy kindly beast...
Colour it yellow.

"Does it bite?"

"Sometimes,
but only when it's angry--
if you pull its tail
or say that it is just another cat..."
But for the most part, indolent, biddable,
basking in the sun of ancient pride.

(Outside, the sunlight seems a trifle dulled
a there's distant roaring, like a pride
of lions, cross at being awakened
from long, deep sleep).

Then

"Draw me a tiger."
Vision of a beast
compounded of jim corbett yarns
and Blake
stalks through my mind, blazing Nature's warning,
black bars on gold.

"DRAW"

You turn and draw the gun
on me, as if to show

that three-years-old understands force majeure
and as you pull the silly plastic trigger
all hell breaks loose; quite suddenly the sky
is full of smoke and orange stripes of flame.

BUT HERE THERE ARE NO TIGERS
HERE THERE ARE OLNY LIONS.

And their jackals
run panting, rabid in the roaring's wake,
infecting all with madness as they pass
while my lord
the Elephant sways in his shaded arbour,
wrinkles his ancient brows, and wonders—
if did he venture out to quell jungle-tide
of rising flame, he'd burn his tender feet.

“Put down that gun. If you do, and you're good,
I'll draw a picture of an elephant.
A curious beast that you must understand....”

DON'T LOOK OUT THE WONDOW—
Just a party down the lane
a bonfire, and some fireworks, and they're burning—
No, not a tiger—just some silly cat.”

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