

the tiger

Alison Hargreaves 1963 - 1995

I think of her
as I walk the dog
out in the snow
feet weighed down
in winter boots
my steps laboured
within the hour

what kept her going
ever higher
each step
a huge effort
in the thinning air
her tiny frame
bulky with kit

they say things
come in threes
like bad news
and buses

the middle child of three
born nineteen sixty three
Alison set out to climb
the three highest peaks
in her thirty third year
three months separated
triumph from disaster
elation from sorrow
pride from rage

seemingly
the only parent
ever to climb
a perilous route
in fact three parents
were amongst the dead
lost descending
the Savage Summit
in a violent storm

three months earlier
she'd climbed Everest
without oxygen or sherpa
wanting nothing to come
between her
and the mountain

nothing did
but love for her children
to whom she dedicated this first

for three sweet months
we basked in her glory
women everywhere
were inspired
to climb their own
everyday mountains

three months to the day
she died on K2
her body never found
not the thinnest of breaths
can come now
between her and her mountain
the greatest accolade
cannot raise her
the cruelest critic
will not stir her

in kitchens
throughout the land
women were in one camp
or the other
to leave her children
or not to leave
to be true to herself
or not be true
to choose
or not to choose

she chose
and so I hope will I
at every crossroad
in every precious
minute of my life
for surely
*it is better
to live one day
as a tiger
than a thousand
as a sheep*