

Good morning! This is Marylou Burton. You're listening to "Reading Between the Lines," brought to you by the Friends of the Homer Public Library.

One of the hottest new young literary stars is 26-year-old Tea Obreht, whose first novel *The Tiger's Wife* was a finalist for this year's National Book Award. She didn't win, but what a way to begin what looks to be a promising career.

*The Tiger's Wife* is a vividly imagined story that draws on the folk culture of the Balkans, where Obreht was born and lived until she was seven. The surface narrative revolves around Natalia, a young doctor who has grown up against the background of more or less constant war, and her relationship with her grandfather, who has recently died under strange circumstances in a remote village that is now on the other side of the border of their war-torn country. As Natalia pursues her own medical mission to this same area, she struggles to understand what happened to her grandfather and to understand how she herself fits into this land of mysteries and conflict.

Obreht bounces back and forth between this surface narrative and the mythical characters that populate the stories that Natalia's grandfather used to tell her – in particular "the deathless man" and "the tiger's wife." The deathless man is just that – a man able to recognize impending death in others but condemned to never die himself. The tiger's wife was a village woman who grew so close to an escaped, marauding tiger that she became the tiger's wife, in myth if not in fact. Natalia's grandfather proclaimed both of these stories to be true, having met the deathless man several times and, as a youth, having helped the tiger's wife save the tiger from the villagers.

Natalia, however, is a modern, pragmatic young woman. She doesn't believe in fairy tales and in later years often grew impatient with her grandfather's allegories. But as she tries to carry out her own medical mission and track down her grandfather's missing belongings, she comes to realize that the line between

fact and fantasy is blurred. Sometimes superstitions and patterns of suspicion get so ingrained in our history that they become our history.

This is an old story but it is also an ongoing story. In this particular novel, the setting is the Balkans, which seems to be endlessly tearing itself apart. But it could as just as well be set in any number of other places, from Iraq to Ireland. Only the details change.

I don't know that I'd call *The Tiger's Wife* a great novel, but it is certainly an engaging and well-written one. If Tea Obreht writes this well at age 26, just think what she might produce by the time she's 30!

*The Tiger's Wife* is available at the Homer Public Library. Library hours are Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m, and Tuesday and Thursday 10 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Tune in next Sunday morning at this same time for "Reading Between the Lines," right here on KBBI 890, Homer!