

when i lose my red cheeks

for every loss there is a gain!
this is our barter system-
milk for barley
a herd for a plot of land
tradition for opportunity

sell your yaks
move to a city
in the pursuit of a better life,
greed promises more more more
but for every gain there is a loss!

a mantra i repeat to myself:
i wish i could bring myself to believe that i will be born again
i wish i could bring myself to believe that a mantra will save me
i wish i could be beautiful in the tibetan way-

tanned skin, rosy cheeks!
(the sun kisses some of her children with more intensity)

my ཨ་ཡེ་མ་ a-ye has the most decorative cheeks
on her face, they sit high and elevated
just like the mountains she grew up on

a plateau girl with plateau cheeks
that match the coral she wears around her neck
blazing sunsets on fire,
tomato red
(when i was young i feared touching her cheeks would burn my fingers)

sometimes in the mirror i put on blush
or pinch my cheeks
and everytime, i meet discontent
when i find a feeble pink flush
instead of the crimson red i seek

but i also know a dream
that visits me so often, i do believe it to be truer
than any reality that is only visible to the eye

and in that dream, ཨ་ཕེ་ཁྱེ་ a-ye looks at me
with intent and pain and volume-
without saying a word
she rubs her cheeks with her palms,
the pigment transfers
and she paints my cheeks red like hers

i awake in the morning
with warmth and sorrow and scarceness
perpetually mourning
the loss of my red cheeks