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The Yellow Magazine

Grand Valley State College. Thomas Jefferson College

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THE
YE
MAGGANE



THE YELLOW MAGAZINE is a publication of Thomas Jefferson College, GVSC. It welcomes contributions in a variety of media: poems, stories, essays, drawings, prints, photos, musical scores and choreographical notes, etc.

8GVX-100

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*inside cover, and back
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A LONG DRINK*

we are both thirsty, but
she is the first to ask
for a glass of water.
"make sure it's cold."
"ok."
i run the bathroom tap
for awhile so the cold
water can get up to the
second floor, fill the
glass, go back to the
bedroom.
"thanks."
she takes a long drink
and i sit on the edge of
the bed watching her throat,
tan and gently moving.

*from A LONG DRINK, print shop of
the consortium of London presses/
National Poetry Society

FIRST SUN AND WARM

There is a barmaid
behind the bar
whose voice is small waves
against black beach stones,
whose breasts, loose
beneath a red pullover,
are geometrically perfect, and
when I order another double irish whisky
w/ice and look into her eyes as she says,
"Good day for a double irish,
Tuesdays are good days for them,"
my knees shake.

It is spring, and this is the way it comes.
I down the last double irish and walk out with
warmth with sun with people/birds/cats/cars/
noise/ dust on the street/ music from somewhere/
food being made/food being eaten/ men with flowers/
women in bright dresses/ The Stranger smiles/ today
is The Day of No Questions I merely walk, keep
walking, thinking of the barmaid behind the bar as
these are the First Days
the rain goes away

Death does something else for the time being
all the starving people in Asia for whom I had to
eat my
peas for are eating peas at the moment and
people are throwing themselves into the sun

and warm like
sponges, I walk, keep walking, there is much good
there is
a fruit standby the side of the road and I stop
to buy
an orange and I walk on into the First Spring
sucking the
juices out of an orange from Israel, or California,
or Florida, or some such sun place. I suck juices
and walk.

IN JUNE, 1:30 A.M.

I try to write
in the night but
the dog comes into my room.
She scratches my leg.
I give in and
let her out into the back yard
and she runs off and I loose sight of her
in the heavy night that is warm, slightly
humid, almost equal to skin temperature,
with grass at the dew point,
moist, there are no stars,
heat held close to the earth
by overcast clouds and
the dog has run away so
I give in I lie down,
let the wet grass
form an inch-high wall around
my body, nothing else moves but me,
my movement makes
the only noise, the moisture
seeps through my clothes,
it dampens my skin,
I give in
I give in I let
the heat and the night work,
and my dog comes back
and stands next to me,
quiet and knowing.

AUTUMN III

They are dead at my feet,
wet from the rain.

2 poems by billie hoffman

WINTER SCENE

late night
i work
slicing apples
a stranger's face
appears
across seas
of warm snow
rising

PICTURES ON THE WALL OF THE ROOM
WHERE GRANDPA SITS

I. Ocean

under the deep water
are the great shells
which because of age
will never reach shore.

II. Birthday Party

an old lady sits beside the cold window
children have come with gifts
of vegetable seeds
and twelve yellow roses
she reaches out
because these hands are sun
though snow falls.

III. Sidewalk

where the autumn tree stands
bare against the sky
its hair fallen out light
at last!

IV. A Charcoal Drawing

in this grey field
grows a grey tree blowing wind
through black leaves on the roof
of an empty house
no one lives here
anymore.

richard moser

THE TABLE

Sitting low to the ground, round, a long finger, nail polished, moves through the grooves of a hand carved sun, a smiling sun, with large eyes and yellow fangs hidden behind its lips. Her lips, mine, both silent in the candle light. Then an old dream, newly awoken, sits, an empty cup, on the table. And our eyes closing, long lashes curling upwards, see.

I watched him on the bar stool, staring at myself in the mirror. We were separate then. He was there and I was there. No, not there, over there, pointing towards an empty chair. Give me something, we say, anything, something to grow on, to lean on, my drunken body, weak, her hand, her shoulder, leaning heavy, my arm draped around her shoulders, around her neck, like the ice melting in my glass as it rises to my mouth, his mouth, the mirror paints a sad eyed portrait.

The table comes back into my mind. I can see it clearly now. I can list the things on it. Over and over my memory steaming, not sure, for sure, whether anything ever happened, or it, at all, a memory, I've seen it before in a dream, a candle-lit dream, the table; a flickering candle giving life to everything, an empty cup, paper, a smoking incense burner, the scent returns then floats away, a small bell, I think, a small golden bell, a picture, and a knife, blood stains across the smile, the table.

I watched
it all happen again, in my glass.

She slept silent as he lay on his back watching the ceiling hid beyond the darkness. The thoughts there drifted aimlessly, thoughtlessly. Small flowing beads of sweat, down his forehead, his face, moving warm on his neck, he kicks off the blanket and sheets. Covered only by the darkness, he lights a cigarette.

As he sucks the smoke in a small red dot glows brightly, then cools. Ashes fall on his chest. He doesn't brush them off. More ashes fall. Then more. His whole body is covered with them like a new layer of skin. Only his eyes are naked now, naked and shining, watching me in the mirror for an instant, then back to the darkness, trying to see things in it, into it, the ashes disappear. He rises towards the table to light the candle. The darkness runs away quickly to hide behind the door, waiting nervously, its eyes on the flame, hypnotized. He feels that in the air, he feels the fear, he fears the feeling, that feeling, that hard empty feeling when he's left all alone. He settles back down to watch the shadows on the walls.

The bar stool squeaks as I swivel to look at that empty chair. Her ghost sits there quietly, legs crossed, just an outline, but she's still there.

She's there, still, quiet, moving a little, now and then, but never enough to disturb them. Within his head dream after dream floats by. He watches them like short stories, silent films, with faces painted white, red tongues, grotesque bodies that wither and squirm across the flat shiny surface. He loses himself in them. The candle on the table melts down to its end, sputters, screams silent with a bright flash. From behind the door, it returns.

My eyes on the chair see nothing, not even
the chair.

The table laughs in his dream now
showing its fangs close to his neck, its saliva,
yellowed from the poison that mixes with it,
drips warm from them. He watches as it devours
his head and body, limb by limb, sucking in the
blood, clear plasma oozes out the wounds in his
flesh. The pain is worth it, he thinks.

He
moves easily, his body gone, just a soft
glowing light, free, without purpose. One
dream to another each fantasy comes in bring-
ing something from the table. He fills the
cup. The pen takes him by the hand moving
quickly spattering ink on paper, putting the
dreams there, carved there in the table, in
his head, mind,

mine,
my shoes hiding beneath
the table, my moist palms shaking, my head,
floating, a cork in an ocean.

And she said
in a whisper, "I'm going outside to watch the
lights on the water. No, don't get up, stay
where you are."

Music climbs off the walls,
my fingers, bleeding, streak down the white
sides, her insides, taking them in, one after
another, on and on, I sit on the curb, vomit
drying on my shoes, that table, that damn
table, smiling, sneering, spins around.

LEGENDS

I.

There is no hole in the dark night sky to burrow through and reach the moonlit sea where dreams are cast about like golden fish in swirling waters. But holding the line of the sky in long fingers, she hauls in the stars with her song, as a fisher-woman woos the fish to come with a coaxing call. She is drawn to the soft, muted edge of her dream to those all-seeing waters where the quivering, silken tails of the fish brush smooth stones sleeping at bottom. Merwomen, too, with their luminous eyes move in the water; the emerald fins of their bodies sparkle by turns and by weavings through the dark and rhythmic element of sea. Sometimes, the night is hard as winter-earth with no niche of tenderness in its massive wall to look upon, and then beyond. The spade shovel balanced in the air, my foot upon the metal, trying to dig my way through this oppressive death which chokes and strangles blood and senses. Some say the womb is the hole of the night, but mine, if she carries her secrets, harbours them silently and smilingly from me. My body; a child hiding beneath the bed, giving to no one the least clue as to where you can find her.

II.

I don't mean to frighten this tree or to hurt her as I cut my way through the crusty bark and reach the yielding, green underlayer that quivers in the rushing, naked breezes. I mean to ask for magical herbs of healing; perhaps for nothing but my own breath, rising as the sap does, mingling with the singing pulse that graces every leaf. These animals in her arms; the birds, unafraid to build their homes right in her fingers. The squirrel dances on a limb; confident. I want the same assurance.

But, now, standing on cement in mid-city, pleading my case; a madwoman selling her charms. (I've told you my body is hiding and will not be found, at least until my charms are talismans and amulets, for free).

III.

Mute Moon of ancient power; emitting no life, no color, when clutched to the stone heart of Death. You are swept in the arc of her swift sickle; a womb is then ripped, the limbs are crippled, and a bird is cast down from her nest in the crag to the rocks. Ravens claw at the Moon. The red blood runs down her white breast to eternal darkness.

Knowing the earth for her fickleness; one night turning towards life, the next, preparing to turn and meet death; one Moon-eve in her rustling greenery, a free bride dancing out joy, the next dawn, a chill stirs in the veins of the trees, only to put them to sleep with this cool autumn potion. Knowing the earth and her changes, songs of her, tongues of the sensuous sea offer communion and magic to me, but I don't believe in their warm, sororil call. It is to her I am drawn, where the skeleton dances out death on a dusty floor.

The dark Moon woman is a frame of bones, forever spinning out fate with her poison fingers. She is constant in waiting within the musty, dim light of the room we're afraid to enter. The dark, wet wind of the nightmare carries us there, while the wide, black wing of the bat eclipses our vision.

IV.

Holding the husk of the night in my hands, tipping the black shell back to drink of her juices, the magic tells me of another crouching upon that Moon, gazing within her as though the lunar goddess herself were a crystal ball. She divines visions and the rhythms of dream. She can find breath in the stones, or see a dead tree dancing. She stoops over the earth, waiting for me, casting a sly glance over her shoulder. I climb her and ride those changes; she is a wild horse on a well-known pathway.

WHAT YOU SEE IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT YOU SAY

I open my eyes cautiously in the morning
by degrees I adjust to the light again
things reveal themselves gradually
at the edges of the windows objects
begin dim and cloudy like under-exposed photographs

I see your figure framed by the coming day
as it moves across the sheets
the wrinkles are silent waves vast
an ocean spreads from my side of the bed
to yours miles of frozen white peaks

rise up your legs to your waist
and the back you have turned to me
is a shadow
your head a dark jewel on its cushion
you are wearing a sort of halo

some of the furniture is wearing
our clothes the clothes I will put back on
those you will hang in the closet
I remember dressing for you
I remember trying to undress each other

last night's candle stands mute
naked and still in the background
the stiff black wick has no voice
its glowing tongue now shrunken and
helpless it struggles to speak over the radio-alarm

loud and light enough to see
the real shape of things
one of my bare arms spans the ocean
to pull it over your shoulders
which seem to be waiting

and I know that we must get up
and I know we are planning on coffee
and I know where my jewelry is waiting
and I know where the light switch is
and I know if it was any colder

I would see my breath
in the shadow of your back

NAKED

early morning
a cruel light in
a contact kitchen
bare feet on
red linoleum red
contact paper counter
dirty dishes stare
from grey tapwater
fridge clicks on
begging for defrosting
and ignored
a cigarette
waiting in his mouth
he reaches for
the coffee
squints to set a burner
winces for a stiff back
then notices
a faint heat coming
from the white stove

he leans
nearer

3 poems by joseph keller

THE WATERHOLE

From my hiding place
beside the waterhole
I watch the gibbons
drink from the black water.
I hide in the reeds
and wait my turn
to drink. Tracks
frozen in the mud by the heat of the sun
tell me
that the puma
and the elephant
have taken their turns.
I can hear the puma
far off, hunting,
the birds screech hysterically,
betraying her. Today
she may go hungry and I
may sleep this night
thirsty. I am the weakest visitor
to this pool
and I drink after
the others
have had their black water.

So the day wears long
and I wait
in the reeds
as the sun arcs high
making an eye
in the face of the pool.
My tongue
is thick;
my mouth
sore and cracked. My bladder burns
when I urinate thick orange.
But I wait
knowing
that my turn will come

after the python
and the ounce
a family of badger
three ibex
gnus camel bear a lynx
the armadillo
and the jackal.

After the air turns cool
and the moon replaces the sun
as the eye in the pool,
the timid will come out, sip
at the edge:
deer
elk
otters and the lizard.
They all have their turn
and I will too
but I must wait
because I am the weakest
of animals
and I know
my place. Even the trees lean in
and drink
and the clouds too
have their drink
and I wait
and grow tired
and sleep curled into myself
and sleep to the rhythmed roar
of this place
and while I sleep
the weather changes, the whole sky
rolls over me
and the moon is kicked
to another sky
and the pool burns and steams
and rain hisses on the pool face
and it rains on me
it rains on me dry and burning
while I wait my turn
to drink
from the waterhole.

URGE

The surgery
is nearly done. With scalpels
the size of samurai swords
my mind's physician
is severing me from you,
my Siamese sister. Only the heart is left.
This red muscle. What to do
with the one heart?
Spit it? Throw it out
and mold two new ones?

The surgeons hold long conference.
They award me our ghost,
give you, my sister, our heart.
They decide to fashion one for me
out of table scraps: porkchop bones,
stale cake
and apple cores.

We were not born
this way, attached at the breast
and pelvis. Once we floated
independent of one another. We had
separate pulses. Separate bodies.

But as moths find mates,
we found us. We stumbled into
the same candle. I completed you.
I poured mortar
into the cracks of your brain,
and you covered my rawness
with the blanket of your skin,
your mouth, hands.

When we embraced
I could feel the cells
of my chest
divide and adhere
to your cells.

As my new maleness
rocked in the hollow
of your girl thighs,
an unquenchable urge
to inhale you
swept through me
like a virus. I wanted you
inside my lungs. I wanted
to occupy the same space.

Frightened of me
you relented. I swallowed your she,
you ate my he. We slept deep,
fearing everything outside
this single body.

The cells divided
and divided. Your belly swelled
and stretched. They said your bones
were too small
to give normal birth
so your belly burst
like a milkweed pod.

It must have hurt terribly.
I heard you shriek. I heard you
curse me and at that precise instant,
the surgery began. Suddenly I hated
our urge. Mea culpa. Mea culpa. Guilt
diseased me. And believe me,
guilt isn't like a dirty word,
my sister. Repeating it loudly
to your self
doesn't diminish its ugliness. Mea
maxima culpa. Surgery was *my* idea.
I signed the consent papers. It was *my*
decision. I
sent you adrift.

Now the surgery
is finished. The surgeon
is scrubbing up. They've put us
in separate rooms. You lie in your bed,
I lie in mine. We mumble to one another
over great distances.

By the way. Tell
me. How do you find it
out there? Do cripples and idiots
live in your room,
too? Do your stitches itch
as mine sometimes do?

from HUMMINGBS

I

Sometimes
there is too much,
like this plant in my garden
loaded so heavy with tomatoes
that its trunk has split
from the weight. Its branches sag
into the mud around its base,
making the fruit prey
to snails and mildew
and rot.

II

The refrigerator door opens
and closes.
The refrigerator opens
closes
as my dull head sits
watching you prepare food.
I watch your hips
and wait for the familiar stirrings
but like this afternoon, watching the breeze
sift and roll dry leaves
into the yard's risings and fallings,
I see, hear, smell nothing,
feel only
my great numb head
sitting.

III

Sometimes
there is too much,
like this yellow moth
alighting on the red face
of the zinnia. I expect it.
Feel nothing.

excerpts from a work-in-progress

PINCH ASS

poems by Dick Bakken

monoprints by Isabee Thiebaut





WAYNE'S POEM

it's my soap
and my cock and I'll wash
it as fast as I want

UNCLE LLOYD

Lloyd became Catholic
to live with Theresa,
took off his sock at Mass
to blow his nose.





MARCIA AND TERESA

skinny sisters
come to chat and screw.
they have four small breasts.

2 poems and a story by Berta Eritz

Uncle Milton,
I came to your
house, and you
& Aunt Bessie were
careful to lay out
the rubber sheet
I never forgot.

You kissed full
on the lips
you loved
and were not afraid,

Bless the body
and the heart
The words
came tumbling
easily
washing frowns
warming smiles

Tone deaf
to my
insides, the wet
lips touched
you loved I
wanted
to weep

STANDING TIME

In
those days I
could take
a shower
without
getting
wet
Too many
curiosities
To explore
beaded
drops glisten on
pink tiles
divided by grout
accumulated
dirt and
Remnants
tell that a
spider was once
here before
Leaving spittle pieces
of web to
mingle in
cracks, partially wiped
away He wants
Those fingernails
clean and ankles catch
dirt in wrinkles They'll
be looking
but I
stand in shower
without letting
water touch me where
I am
not touchable instead
I sway,
rocking tones
of my curiosity I
wonder and weave
secrets between
the beads of moisture
clinging until
my finger connects a
trail of drips runon-
to form a new
pattern
privately holding me.

I am...slipping off. mommy. mixed myopia. Don't quite know what is...going on. The mind churning in the turbulence of...body. And turmoil overwhelms. mommy. Help. God damn me. What is...going on? I must gain control. Hang on. Things not clear. Hazy...Mind groggy...fuzzy. A lot of people Names. I know them, but I'm...not sure. mommy. Where is she? I need her. I need something. Please help. The head is...separate. I...don't know. I don't know I don't know I...Don't.

* * * * *

Don't do that to me. Can't you see it hurts? My body needs...some protection from your interference. We oppose the meanings...for my own good you invade. But my own good includes me. And you don't. Me...if I bleed, it's blood for me. And until you can see me, stop the interference. Take your hands away. You encroach; you meddle; you interrupt. I be me and the meaning connects; but your language excludes, and it hurts.

** ** * ** * ** * ** *

I don't know what you assert this time...I love you. But you keep usurping my body's freedom. I never resented your power. I love you. This time you interrupt to seize me. My body fights back. I am scared. And they gather fast to overpower me...to protect you. You are saved. They carry me back downstairs.

There is a tremendous scuffling. Big strong bodies. There isn't enough me to accomodate so much bicep, fist and shoulder....

* * * * *

You were special...more alive than the rest. Your smell was brocade, and you tried to teach me womanhood. You were nice, and your value reached beyond the others. You could accept their pettiness and still not be part of it.

You demanded and your directions were strict; but you made room for variations. You could surprise me....I left my clothes soaking in the bathroom sink and went away when I was told. You understood the differences in

magnitude between you and me. When I returned, dragged myself to face the sink..the clothes were missing. You had rinsed them and draped them to dry. Your kindness didn't fit a pattern; you were more than all the others.

** **

They hold me down. I am scared, and I need to stop them before they finish what they've begun. They hustle to prepare cold wet packs. I don't need that. My mind is back with them, but they don't know it. What they expect is what they see. They feel contractions in my body, and they stiffen their hold.

I know what they're preparing is wrong. It is against the ruler's intentions. They only know what order is written, but I have access to his thoughts. He does not intend for this now. It is my duty to stop them. They cannot understand a change of heart--only a change of order counts with them. Thought cannot enter their domain.

I ask to talk to you privately. You are the only one who can understand. But it is an outrageous request from the one being held; it isn't safe. I use your language; on their grounds, controlled by their armpower, controlled by their system's judgement. What a ludicrous notion that one such as I could speak near human being elevated nurse. You must be protected from this irrational uncontrolled beast which cannot be permitted a minute's talk time.

You burst through the door. You rush forward to tell them to proceed. I want to protest. You're different, you'll understand. But the expression you carry freezes the impulse between my brain and my mouth. I catch a look at a triumphant you, drunk with power over me. Your satisfaction shatters me differently.

I realize you are not the perfect Mother I have worshipped. My disappointment seeps deep. They handle my wild body that has never learned to weep.

2 poems by Martin Koosed

THE DAMP THAT BREEDS THE NIGHTMARE

At the beach tonight the mist welded the sky and sea together.

The sun watched us in the horizon above the west.

We stripped and entered the water and swam and did our best
to smile hoping to baptize our love. I held you in the
water but you slipped from my arms and the moon drifted
between the clouds I could not see you and the alewives
on the shore stunk and looked at me with wide eyes and I
was afraid--and mosquitoes hovered and dove and sucked my
blood and I finally found you and you were like the water
and the sky dark and the mist.

On the path home bushes grabbed me, scratched and held me
and the smell of dead fish for miles on my hands and my
clothes.

Even as I held you in my arms, in our bed wet with love
I could not hold you and I was afraid.

AGONY

You cannot hear the fury
in this candlelit room
where some old grandma
rambles on and on
about her god and the homemade bread.

You sit next to me
and talk to a pair of lovers
holding each other on the couch
--I don't know what language
you're speaking

My hands grip the arms
of my chair
my eyes
pressed to the floor.

We are not together:
Love grown sour
as the stew I cooked
all morning
the remains hard and chill
at the bottom of the pot.

But if this cauldron
brooding from my neck
to my toes
it would be a scream
and you, my love
would cry with recognition
of the pain
before covering your ears
to protect yourself.

2 poems by danu

Ja Mocha
your smoothness
like that of
burnished ivory

reflects
my reflection,
reflecting
all of my senses

overwhelmed,
by the secrets
of your beauty

wandering
i feel a paradise
near the edge of your

ja maican shore

i stutter and i quiver
like a blade of grass

being born

wandering
left in

your jungles... Ja Mocha

goddess of love

Ja Mocha
your smile
revealing one secret
to share

holding

shyly

my eyes with you,
embracing all
of your sweetness

ja maican breeze

your breath

gently graze my forehead...

Ja Mocha

goddess of
my dreams

i am the wind
the breath of the earth

listening,
hearing clouds of heaven
roar,
gushing mighty flames

i am not consumed
but carry the wrath
of the dragon

scorching all that cries
to be let free

let gone,

these steel roots
gleam in the darkness
not even rust
cuts through for sanctuary

sea slapping skin
flesh torn on bleeding coral

i am the tide washing in
wash out,
fire and blood
that rises like mist

a coloured vapour
sheltering the dark garden
a dank mist
harbouring the womb

there is stillness;

i am the mite,

gentle penetrating wind

FULL MOON

I set out at a dogtrot
pushing the wind
with my chest.

My lips curl back.
I suck in cold air
till my teeth feel clean
and numb. The twin
channels of my nose
snort in the wind,
snort out steam.
My lungs burn, my mouth
tastes of blood.

I rush past rows
and rows of cut corn stalks
jutting for the snow; the wind whipped
whistle of hawk, the moan
of a woman making love,
giving birth.

I walk into the house.
It shakes; I stand
still in the center
as it sways.

I slide under the blankets
and toss and turn
as the woman in the next room
sleeps quietly
I feel somehow
incomplete
lying here alone
watching the wind
streak snow
across the window
pane

GHAZAL II

The cottontail somersaults through the air, screaming.
The look in its eyes. Uncle ejects the smoking shotgun shells.

In case of nosebleed: apply the birds-foot fern.
If you are wounded apply the inner bark of white pine.

Just beneath the skin of my forehead, my skull is hard,
my brains soft and moist. My eyes are connected with red cords.

At the age of twelve, I could throw the lariat, the hatchet,
the knife. With a hickory bow I sent arrows into the trees.

The hawk in the pine looks at me in a strange way. I watch him
watch me. I fly away leaving him sitting there in pine shadow.

GHAZAL VIII

I sit by the boxcar door with my eyes open. The desert
rolls by. A jackrabbit squats in the sagebrush.

We packed the pony with gear and hiked toward
the spring. We drank the moon from cupped hands.

"This is our last match." The wind slips between
us. We fall back laughing into the snowdrifts.

Icicle beard. Chopping wood. Recipe: one hatful
of snow. Three handfuls of rice and a wild-apple fire.

Picking apples my Grandfather died. The farm was sold.
Now I cook for farmboys on a summer camp retreat.

2 poems by mark seeley

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN KNITTING

she bends to her
knitting
 and slips
the loop over blue
needles
hands
 dipping in and
out
of the other

nothing else
moves.
 red
 hair'
 s tied
back with
thread
and her knees
 bunch
 to hold
the ball of yarn

she takes
her eyes back
to the weave's
margin

and behind them
willows .
 what
she thinks of

SONGS TO TAURUS #3

man you are woman
I am

loving on a bed without end

then like a thief breaking a window
I take your face
you take my will

I enter/

the house falls down

birds walk on their wings

feet clawing the ceiling

this nervous woman

crazy

with a bird in her head and hollow
bones in her thighs

with a glacier winding thru her valleys

I go head first into you
and tease the earth--

dying and not/
dying

buried to my ass
in the blood fruit

laurel grossman

SONGS TO MY MOTHER:
INTRODUCTION

For: my mother, and
her mother (whom I
never knew); and for
both of them in me.

Lea stood in a shadowed corner. She could not remember how she had come to stand there, and she was afraid to move, to ask, for they were very silent, and made a sombre picture. From the shadows she watched, unnoticed.

The woman by the bed had her back to Lea. She wore a calf-length blue skirt and a pull-over sweater of a darker blue. She had on silk stockings and brown pumps. A large brown handbag hung at her side, its strap slung across her left shoulder. She held her head straight and her dark brown hair curled about her tense shoulders. She was full-fleshed and shapely. Lea wished she would turn around so that she might see the woman's face, but she did not move.

The other woman lay in bed, white sheets pulled up to her chin. Against the whiteness, her skin appeared yellow and damp. The patient's eyes, large and brown, looked at her companion, but did not recognize. She tossed her head; dark brown curls tangled over the sheets, and she mumbled. Her companion made no move closer to hear.

How long she stood in the shadow watching the patient and her companion, Lea could not say. In the rectangularity of dresser, door, window and bed, the whiteness of ceiling, floor and walls glared. Lea stared at the companion's back; the companion stood motionless before the patient. After a time, the patient fell to sleep.

The doctors came in then, from a door across from where Lea stood. There were three of them. They wore sheet-smooth white coats, and masks about their mouths and noses, and white skull caps

on their dark heads. They came wheeling in a bed. Lea and the companion watched as they lifted the patient and laid her on the bed. They pushed the bed out the door they had entered by. The companion turned and followed. Lea stepped softly forward, and followed the companion into the annexed room.

It was the surgery room. The wheeled bed stood in the center of the room, beneath a round, fluorescent light, hubbed in blue glass and hanging only a foot above the doctors' heads. The companion stood, as before, a few feet from the bed. Behind her, Lea stepped into the shadowed corner of the half-open door. At her feet and at each side of the patient stood a doctor. At the left shoulder of the patient stood a tall metal table, with two shelves. White cloth covered the shelves and the top shelf glistened with surgical tools. The doctors at her right and left folded back the sheet from the patient's body. She still slept. Her breasts, rising and falling unsteadily, glistened yellow beneath the bluish fluorescence.

The doctor at her left side taped a long tube onto her left breast. At the end of the brown rubber tape was a gauge, big as a man's palm. The big, black numbers were arranged like those on a clock, but were different numbers. One red stem pointed outward from the center. The gauge was handed to the doctor at the patient's feet. It was this man's job to watch the gauge, which now stood steadily at 80.

As one by one they were asked for, the doctor at her right side handed the surgical tools to the doctor at her left side. When he finished with a tool, he handed it back, and it was placed on the second shelf, soon damp with slow-spreading blood stains.

Two doctors bent over the patient, watching intently as the one at her left made

a deep incision over her hip. Yellow and brown pus oozed forth, mingled with blood. The companion watched motionlessly: Lea stood spellbound.

The operation continued for a very long time. Lea could feel the anxiety mounting in her and all about her. She did not know the patient, nor how she had come to observe this scene, yet it had become her hope and prayer that the patient should live.

Then, the man at the patient's feet looked at the gauge and spoke sharply. The other doctors looked up. "It has jumped to 115," he told them. They nodded their heads and bent over the patient once more. The doctor probed the diseased wound with his metal instrument. A few moments later the doctor with the gauge shook his head. "it's no good," he said, "it's dropping, and steadily."

It was then that Lea noticed the companion no longer stood in front of her; now her vision was unobstructed and she could see the gauge. Lea watched the red stem as it gradually moved from 100 to 95 to 90 and did not stop. The doctor performing the surgery seemed more determined; he bent closer to his work, cut the wound deeper and probed there with a kind of desperateness. Lea wondered what it was he searched there for. The tension heightened as the gauge-man called out "80...75...70..." The doctor, moving almost frantically now, tore the wound wider. The others breathlessly leaned towards the infected wound.

Unconscious of her actions, Lea stepped forward. Absorbed in their task, the doctors did not notice her.

"50...40...30...", the gauge man called out. The arm of the gauge dropped more quickly. Lea reached out her hand, placing it on the gauge-man's arm. Angrily, he swung around.

"Please, what does it mean--the gauge?" she asked timidly.

"It measures her heart, of course," he answered impatiently. "It measures how strong her heart is."

He turned back, calling out swiftly now, "28...25...23...20, 19, 18, 17, 16, 15..." At 15, he stopped announcing the dropping numbers. Moving swiftly, the gauge was removed from the patient's left breast, the surgical tools were stashed on the lower shelf of the table and the sheet drawn up to the patient's chin.

Lea could not believe her eyes. "You can't do this--she's still alive! You can't give up yet-- it's like killing her." They, in their same positions, lifted the patient and carried her through a door on the right wall and set her on a bed in a white corridor. Lea followed them, crying softly now. The doctors, single file, passed down the long corridor, and disappeared from her sight. She watched them go; helpless and weeping, she turned back to the patient, expecting her to be dead.

But the patient was not dead. And the companion had returned. This time she stood at the left side of the patient; Lea could see the side of her face now. The companion's eyes were large and brown. She bent towards the patient, who opened her eyes, smiling when she saw her companion.

Then to Lea her eyes seemed wide and vulnerable as a child's, and filled with trust. She spoke softly to her companion, and her voice was clear and strong, "I dreamt I was ill and the Gods were healing me." The words stung Lea, thinking they were no gods who had left too soon. And Lea saw that the patient knew she would soon die. Again she spoke to her companion, "I know all of you did what you were able to." Her clear, dark eyes were trusting and content.

Suddenly stronger, the patient sat up. "I want to see my wound," she told the companion.

The companion spoke for the first time. Placing her hand firmly on the patient's hand that clutched the sheet, she said, "No. Wait until you are stronger. Now it is time to sleep."

The patient nodded her head in childlike obedience and laid down again. She closed her eyes and died.

The companion left her, silently walking up the corridor in the opposite direction the doctors had taken. She had never seen Lea.

Lea stepped forward and stood watching the complacent face of the dead woman. She shivered and glanced down at herself. She stood there naked. Her brown eyes growing large, she saw an open wound on her left hip.

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