

YESHIM TERNAR

Death of a Fishwoman

Rumor has it
that the bed they assigned me
in this hospital
is a death bed.
I know,
I know I will die.
Some beds send one to one's death
like rivers
salmon spawn in.
One must struggle upstream
only to die at the end
the ecstasy of a death
that fish have always known
dying after spawning or
dying within water, gasping;
pierced, screaming
implausible screams.
Now, on this bed,
my breathing escapes me,
my memories, shifting shores,
but I will not let them know.

There is a draft
underneath this bed,
somewhat like
a cold-water current.
I might die from the shock,
perhaps slowly, perhaps dying
a delayed death.
Perhaps I will die

like this, here on this
hospital bed.
Tomorrow they will operate
on me,
to remove a tumor.
It is simple they say,
a growth like any other.
But, I, too have grown.
I was small once,
beautiful,
and blond.
no, I don't regret
anything I ate.
I always ate with joy.

So I told him
who is from the coast
like me.
"Son," I said,
"go buy a basket of fresh sardines,
fry them and bring them over
when the nurses are gone.
let's you and I eat here
our favorite food.
Let us share fish and bread."

When they cut me up
to remove the growth,
I offered them fish
instead.

Yeshim Ternar has published a collection of short stories entitled Orphaned by Halley's Comet (Williams Wallace Publishers, 1991). Her poetry and short stories have been published in numerous other magazines, journals, and anthologies.