The Singing Bowl

Anne Simpson

“What keeps this light from pouring out as light?”
Agha Shahid Ali

I
She recalls two high, arched windows in a farmhouse attic,
light slipping from side to side. The house was tilted;
it could have been a ship, going down. People might have needed rescue.

II
Perhaps she’s been made to promise something because of what she’s seen.

III
During chemo, she studies lymph nodes in the ceiling tiles.
Once she saw a farmhouse lanced with light.
It was evening.
She carried it with her. Radiant house.

IV
There’s nothing in the bowl, not even desire. Only nausea.

V
The chaplain’s hands make shapes in air, as if she’s building a house of cards.
There, she’s done it. The delicacy of the world,
one thing resting on another.

VI
She’s a child in the house of her body. The doors
open and close,
open and close,
open and close,
from daylight to evening. Eyes, mouth, lungs, heart.

VII
Light poured through the windows from west to east.
Sky, speaking in tongues.

VIII
She has a brass bowl, a singing bowl, on the windowsill of the hospital room.

IX
It catches the light and sometimes holds it, depending on the time of day.

X
Her body. A bowl, singing.
The Cannibal Doctors  
_Dylan Blacquiere_

(for Meredith)

She gives directions with a hungry smile.  
Her words are silken, reassuring,  
but her teeth still drip the hours, minutes, seconds,  
the remnants of the meal just past. And they don’t hide  
the days still caught between  
her sharpened canines, her worn-down molar teeth.

She eats time with all the rest of them. And when  
we see her talk, she wears her eyes  
ringed black with the mark of three nights  
spent awake, on call, and in the trenches, feeding.  
We thank her for her guidance, then walk faster  
to outrun the feeding-frenzy there beneath  
the unfilled seconds we spend standing by her side.

It’s just her eyes -  
hers tired, restless eyes that moan for sleep  
that hint at who she was before she started eating hours.  
They give the true directions, better than  
the well-meant counsel that she gives to passers-by.

Behind us  
are the suburbs of an ignorant, idiot time  
where she once lived,  
where all our empty moments were our own.

But forward – there the cannibal doctors wait  
like her, to steal our seasons, snatch the finite years  
and feed on every passing day and night.

Poet and artist Anne Simpson was the Medical Humanities Artist-in-Residence for the Fall of 2004. Among her goals and accomplishments Anne organized a weekly session on poetry and short stories. Dylan Blacquiere participated in these workshops, writing the poem Cannibal Doctors as well as many others.
The Moncton Hospital is a 400 bed teaching hospital centrally located in the Maritimes. Referral population includes Eastern New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and North-Western Nova Scotia. The city, with adjoining municipalities, has a population of more than 115,000 and was ranked as one of the best Canadian cities for quality of community life. There is easy access to warm water beaches of the Northumberland Strait, and also the scenic Bay of Fundy area. Excellent availability of educational opportunities, cultural events and recreational activities in the immediate area.

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