

Inga Žolude

Excerpt from the novel **Warm Earth** (Silta zeme)

(translated by Suzanne McQuade)

I'm lying on white sheets. And I'm watching how above me everything is growing from top to bottom. It's getting darker and darker, leaves growing over the lamps. Everything is green, richly green; the leaves are thick and swollen with moisture. They're growing downward, reaching out for me; tiny insects have started to gnaw their way through them, falling onto my bed and crawling over me, looking for somewhere to burrow their hole.

Chlorophyll flows through my cells. I am monkshood. *Aconitum napellus*.

As they cut me, I tell them I don't want to be buried in the earth, to be burned and scattered, to be preserved in any way. Toss my body in a field somewhere, let it decay, let it grow into the earth, let the birds get a meal out of me.

Nurses are marching to and fro like guards. They're carrying sterilized instruments. They're carrying gauze and knitted bed sheets. They place them in white piles like sandbags in trenches.

I've broken both legs, my arms in several places, I have a broken backbone, all I can hear are the urgent sirens of ambulances. I'm aware that they're operating on me, I'm even aware that I could die. The light at the end of the tunnel is a fabrication, a load of rubbish! There's only darkness at the end of the tunnel, and of darkness thou too shall be. I can't tell them to leave me alone because I can't speak; I no longer know where I begin and where I end. I hear voices encouraging me: just hang in there. Nelly lies two floors below me, tormented by a completely different ailment, but soon I'll get better and be able to visit her. Then her bacilli will cling to my wounds and fester, poison me completely. I'll beg her permission and I'll lie down next to her. Some people will come see me, people I don't know, don't recognize, and plead with me to summon my strength, to live. At some point they'll say the same to Nelly, knowing full well that she won't be getting better at all, and she too will know this, and I will know this. They'll want to send us to the best hospital in the city; we'll both say no. The nurse will leave the room and I will tell her to leave the light on so that they'll know I'm home.

I hear distant voices echoing somewhere in the corridor walls. The nurses are watching television. The nurses are watching the weather. Paris +12, +5. Marseille +11, +4. Zurich +8, 0 - +1. Amsterdam +6, 0. Milan +15, +10. Venice +17, +10. Belgrade +18, +11. Istanbul +16, +8. Larnaca +22, +12. Minacu +21, +17. Lusaka +20, +7. Livingstone +19, +7. St. Petersburg 0, -5. Etc.