

*A Sovereign Medicine for the
Greensickness*

First, I cure all women or maids
Of the suffocation or rising of the mother,
Obstructions, urgings and tertions of the guts.

Secondly, I cure outsinking, downfalling,
Hard bellies, swelled as with child,
Or as if troubled with the dropsy.

I drive away all gouty pains in the joints,
Nay, though your arms were gone crooked
Through a contraction, or humours of the sinews.

Nay, though you had kept your bed for many years,
Nay, though tampered with and almost ruined by others,
I correct all vices and distempers,

Though the patient were broke out all in blotches,
And left off, never so far gone,
In a month or six weeks time at farthest.

I cure many sad accidents in the eyes,
As spots, specks, pearls, all warts and rheums.
I colour the lips, which keeps them all the winter from chapping.

At the Coffin and Child, against the Watch-House,
Next door to the Sugar-Loaf and Roll,
Where you will see the Golden Ball hanging over the passage.

The Snow Crab

It was a fragrant December. Satin-voiced.
The earth launched from its anchorhold,
In many lungs all at once
Turned vertically the shape of a mouth.

Showings of the host-like moon
Flickered between book and door,
Most present when about to be lost,
Semi-lunar, fringed and watching.

Her head was held by four different hands,
Four coffins perfectly nested,
Tied with nine silk ribbons
That rubbed charcoal into small cuts

And on one knee, a cross.
Downwind, only a narrow shelf
Of membrane circled in his eyes
In black, like smaller baskets

Full of earth, with a spill
Of oil rich in water:
The bee returning from a nuptial flight
Emitting his floral odour.

Kaddish

An angel chances to mention it,
Blowing imaginary dust off
The palm of her hand.

Her face at the lips of the sky
The colour of moonlight, without form,
Without looking.

Her spine of purple linen,
Her eyebrows sewn in a line
In the hot, sad afternoon.

Her six small braids shine harshly
In one direction only,
Away from my door,

My heart that burns like an oven
Where the dead are locked
And cold or warm memory

Lengthens out their shadow
Or buys them prayer.
I had come to visit her

Wearing an indigo skirt
That she coveted,
And her desiring left its mark

On the child like glass in her womb.
Now I do not see any colourableness
In empty winds that could be

Spirit-laced, the turning over
Of the world by ankle-bells
And sheer fabric-lack.

The Musk Ox

With moorlike beauty the moon
That served in the autumn as a lamp
Reappears and seems the one living
Deserving thing
Already above the horizon for much of the night.

The year is complete: each season has set
Its sharp stamp on the land.
And after the easiest winter of the war,
Some of us who overlapped for six years
Are born into that sanctuary, the lean spring.

The floor of last year's ragged tent
Is carpeted with reindeer moss and cranberry
Blossoms, as if a heart, on whose shoulder
My tent was placed, had burst through
Its sleeping skin, from the weight of the snow dome.

Snow-beaten, the snow floor of the double igloo
Feels like rice. No scab of ice
Forms on our weather-ravaged faces
As dawn greys the burning dry-ice window.
Snow falls thinly, and I can imagine them

Crossing the empty white sea
In other winters, the long frosted feathers
Worked into their rain clothing
Like Egyptian eyes on a dress
Always frozen in its vision.

His hand always warmer than my own,
His broad, peaceful arms bringing
Two miracles into being at once,
With one knee pulled upward he anchors
His sled with a flourish and birdlike amen.

His name-soul has cried herself
Completely dry, and offers her half-moon breast
For a flat-tongued kiss, which touches them
Into words, a voiceless I
As in sing, never as in hunger.

The vowel is drawn out tenderly,
As snow snakes and patches their fireplace
Of three stones. Which makes

The soot-greyed icicle walls in which
They stand in a fictive chapel,
Awkward, urgent as a photograph,
While the ground-wind dies
Painlessly, under the shallow snow.