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.