

**Home Sick**  
**SUSANNA RICH**

Grandmother Mumchy's alphabet of vitamins  
doesn't help, nor her sweater  
into whose arms I step for leggings,  
nor her garland of garlic,  
like teeth, around my neck—

I bask in the mists of others' coughs,  
touch knobs, sit on toilet seats  
to bring myself home, sick for her socks  
full of roasted salt against my aching ears;  
and her thermometer, cool in my armpit,  
as if it were a spoon, and I her tasty meal.

Blinds drawn, buried in quilts, I  
cough, sneeze, ooze into tissues  
I crumple into ducks, snakes, puppies.  
She waves her hands over them,  
speaks magic words I don't understand.

When I *catch my death*, she makes me  
spit my apple into her hand, so she  
can eat it for me, kill my germs in her belly—  
Snow White's stepmother in reverse.

Mumchy told me she always wanted  
to be a doctor. And I, born in America  
where Mumchy came to be free,  
take for my need her need to be home,  
sick for a life she might heal.