

Peeling Grapefruit
By Everett Wilson

I brought a grapefruit from home today
to add some vitamins to my bedside life
while the tv drones the crawling hours,
and the nurses slip in and out
—rubber-soled shadows
answering her respirator alarms.

“Grapefruit? That’s my *fay-vo-rite!*”

She mouths the voiceless words,
but in the bob of the trache tube
protruding from the hole in her throat,
I can see her savor each syllable.

I always found grapefruit too bitter
until she taught me how to eat it,
taught me to peel away the rind in a spiraling helix,
pick away the stringy pith, until a smooth,
bulging globe rests in the palm of my hand.
Showed me how to plunge my thumbs
into the top and pull the fruit in half
with a sigh of spray, then lovingly,
one section at a time,
peel away the inner membrane
until the beads of juice lay exposed,
waiting for me to flick away the seeds
with a fingernail, and scrape out the flesh
with my teeth.

And when we finished,
faces and hands smeared with juice and pulp
I learned that like love,
the best food is sloppy.

Marcia’s been on the respirator so long,
she’s forgotten how to swallow.
Even a Popsicle, melting cold
on her tongue trickles
into her lungs.

I can't bear to peel this grapefruit,
fill the room with its fragrance
if she can't have any.

"I could kiss you
between each bite," I offer,
"and let you have a taste."

She nods and grins
her secret, lascivious grin.

Now, when I peel a grapefruit,
and close my eyes against the spray,
I can see her looking up at me
with parted lips,

waiting for the next pulpy kiss.