

## M(OTHER)1

**text by Christine Roberts (incorporating Swinburne)  
for Athens, 2002**

*Breathing.*

Essential Mother: I will go back to the great sweet Mother.

Daughter: She is alert, but behind the actions, beyond the body, the eyes are dead, blank. She is drifting beyond us. Beyond me. I reach for her, but she has gone. I have lost her, but she is here. I watch my Mother...

Essential Mother: Mother and lover of men, the sea. I will go down to her, I and none other, Close with her, kiss her and mix her with me.

Mother: There was a time...

Daughter: I know.

Essential Mother: Cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast. O fair white Mother, in days long past

Mother: How do you know?

Daughter: What?

Mother: What?

Daughter: What do you want to say Mother?

Mother: Who? *(Pause)* Mother who?

Essential Mother: Born without sister, born without brother, Set free my soul as thy soul is free.

Daughter: You... Mother. What did you want to say?

Mother: I expect she'll be here soon.

Daughter: Who?

Mother: Mother. I want to show her my room. Show her how well I'm doing. She'll wonder why I haven't visited. I'm definitely going tomorrow. You'll like her. *(Smiles at the daughter).*

Daughter: Mother?

Mother: You seem like a nice girl, I expect she's proud of you.

Daughter: Who? You?

Essential Mother: I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships, change as the winds change, veer in the tide.

Mother: *(Looks perplexed and uncertain, tries to continue after 'sleep')*  
I expect, I expect that... I expect *(with relief as if suddenly remembering something from the past)* I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships. Change as the winds change, veer in the tide...

Daughter: Mother? What do you want to say?

Mother: I get these....feelings

Essential Mother: O fair green-girdled mother of mine, Sea that art clothed with the sun and the rain.

Daughter: What kind of feelings?

Mother: I don't know just these feelings. *(Stares blankly)*

Essential Mother: Thy sweet hard kisses are strong like wine, Thy large embraces are keen like pain.

Mother: My daughter was born with a caul over her head. This fine inner membrane which encloses the foetus, but sometimes clings to the child's head at birth. As if it dare not let go. Dare not let the child face this new world alone. And so part of the Mother is there, protecting her, covering her when she makes this, her first appearance.

Essential Mother: Save me and hide me with all thy waves, Find me one grave of thy thousand graves

Mother: It can be very carefully peeled off and dries like delicate skin. It is thought to be a good omen. It is thought that a child born with a caul will be beautiful, gifted and will never drown at sea. They would be sold to superstitious sailors desperate to escape the dangers of the sea. I kept Eva's, how could I give it away? It would be like losing part of us, together. In one action we would be taken, removed, lost. Lost at sea. One grave of thy thousand graves.

Essential Mother: Those pure cold populous graves of thine, Wrought without hand in a world without stain.

Mother: I have it still.

Daughter: Mother?... Do you know me?

Mother: Of course I know you. You're that girl.

Daughter: Which girl?

Mother: That girl in the garden.

Daughter: I'm Eva. Mother?... Mother? Can you see me?

Essential Mother: Sleep, and not know if she be, if she were, Filled full with life to the eyes and hair.

Mother: *(Abruptly)* Of course I can see you. I'm not blind. Do you think I'm blind? Look out there... the garden, the trees. I can see them. Can you?

Daughter: Of course. They're beautiful. It's a beautiful garden.

Essential Mother: As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips, With splendid summer and perfume and pride.

Mother: Are you the gardener?

Daughter: No, I'm Eva.

Mother: Ah yes Eva! Always getting earache.

Daughter: Yes, that's me, Mother. Remember you used to warm olive oil and pour it into my ear, and everything would become strange and frightening because I couldn't understand what you were saying. I could see your face moving but all I could hear were muffled sounds. I was frightened because I couldn't hear what you were saying. Mother? Mother? Where are you?

Essential Mother: This woven raiment of nights and days, were it once cast off and unwound from me, Naked and glad would I walk in thy ways, Alive and aware of thy ways and thee.

Mother: I wonder where she is. *(Stares blankly)* Ah yes!

Daughter: I'm here Mother, but I've lost. I've lost to what is slowly emptying your mind. Emptying you of me. As you are drained away, so I am drained of who I am. My essential Mother. As you drift away from me I become hollow. I want to cling to her, strive with her, hold her fast. Keep her here.

Essential Mother: *(Repeats)* Naked and glad would I walk in thy ways, alive and aware of thy ways and thee.

*Music Cue*

Mother: Come on, we'll miss the train. I can't keep her waiting. Mother is very punctual, she hates being kept waiting.

Discourteous, that's what she calls it. If people can't make the effort to be on time then why should you make the effort to wait for them. Discourteous.

Daughter: There is no train Mother.

Mother: Of course there is. Ten o'clock every day. Stupid...thing.

Daughter: We're not catching the train Mother.

Mother: Where's the ...table, the...table, you know the thing-table. Where's the...

Daughter: Time-table?

Mother: Let me show you that there is a ten o'clock train. Then we can go.

Daughter: There is no train Mother.

Mother: I can't keep her waiting. I must show her how well I've done. She'll be so proud. Have you met my Mother?

Daughter: Yes.

Mother: When? When did you meet her? Did you go without me? Why didn't you take me with you?

Essential Mother: But death is the worst that comes of thee; Thou art fed with our dead, O mother, O sea, But when hast thou fed on our hearts? Or when, having given us love, hast thou taken away?

Daughter: You were there.

Mother: Are you sure?

Daughter: *You* took me with you.

Mother: When? When did I take you?

Daughter: A long time ago. Don't you remember?

Mother: Did you like the garden?

Daughter: Of course.

Mother: What was it like? Disintegrate it to me.

*(Moving in unison with teacups)*

Daughter: It was beautiful.

Mother: I know it was beautiful. Roses, lilac trees, honeysuckle. The smell was...

Daughter: The smell was wonderful. Especially in...

Mother: The evening.

Daughter: Yes, especially in the evening.

*(Pause – The briefest of connections)*

Essential Mother: The hopes that hurt and the dreams that hover, Shall they not vanish away and apart?

Mother: When were you there? Why were you there? Are you the gardener?

Daughter: No, I'm Eva. Your daughter.

Mother: Did we go by train?

Daughter: Yes.

Mother: Aha! Was it the ten o'clock train?

Daughter: I don't remember.

Mother: Come on we'll miss the train. I can't keep her waiting.

Daughter: There is no train Mother.

*Mother begins to scratch her head, becomes irritated by her hair.*

Daughter: What's wrong? What's wrong with your head?

Mother: It's filthy. Can I wash it? Would you help me?

Daughter: Yes I'd like to.

Daughter: Waste and disintegration just centimetres from my fingers. Imploding in on itself. All the memories, the ideas, the furies and fears. Our hopes, our hurt, our humiliation. Hold on to them, keep them in, keep them there. Delicate tracery. Filigree mind.

Essential Mother: Fair mother, fed with the lives of men, Thou art subtle and cruel of heart, men say. Thou hast taken, and shalt not render again; Thou art full of thy dead, and cold as they.

Daughter: You were terrifying. Terrifyingly wonderful. Strong and irascible and fun. We had such fun. 'Let's jump over the

moon, shall we drown our cares? Why not play the fool, after all no fools no fun'. No fun.

Mother: Yes this is fun. We must do it again.

Daughter: Each time I come there is a little less of you. You are slowly drifting away and as you disappear so the shadows in my world become darker. Soon you will be emptied of all your memories, soon you will forget even the simplest words, one day you will forget to breathe. Then who will I be?

Essential Mother: But thou, thou art sure, thou art older than earth; Thou art strong for death and fruitful of birth; Thy depths conceal and thy gulfs discover; From the first thou wert, in the end thou art.

Mother: Thank you so much for coming. Please feel free to visit again. We always like to have guests. I'm sorry I can't ask you to stay, but I have a train to catch. Goodbye.

Daughter: Gone...The train's gone Mother.

Mother: We've missed it?

Daughter: I will go down to her, close with her, kiss her, and mix her with me.

Essential Mother: *Koda tis, tha tin filiso ke tha tin valo mesa mou.*

Mother: Well I'll just have to have the child here. After all it's the most natural thing in the world. I think they make too much fuss. Women can give birth anywhere, doesn't have to be in a hospital. Just squat down, and push and breathe, push, push, push harder and out it pops. I wanted a daughter. My own daughter.

*(Essential Mother covers Daughter's face with 'caul')*

I will go down to her

Essential Mother: *Ego ke alos kanenas*

Mother} Close with her, kiss her, and mix her with me

Essential Mother} *Koda tis, tha tin filiso ke tha tin valo mesa mou*

**end**