

## **Instructions for a Tibetan Air Burial** by Felix Jung

The vultures, about 50 of them altogether, ambled slowly up the hill and took to the air with evident difficulty, overfed as they are from this daily ritual.

—*New York Times*, 7.3.99

What you see in front of you is only a body. Take your knife and begin with the feet, the toes. Oranges never cry when you peel their skin, the apples feel no pain when you remove their flesh. This is not a violence, but a returning.

Open the body like a book, but do not succumb to the smell. Overcome it as the mourners must overcome their grief. Yours is not the heaviest burden today. Should your nose begin to weep, breathe through your mouth. At every moment remember you are breathing.

Lift the ribs, the part that many call a cage (as though the body itself were not a cage). Remove each lung and open it to air. Take down the walls of each intestine, brick by brick. Let the stomach feed something other than itself. Be careful with the heart, its size and weight can make it difficult to hold.

Ignore the people who are watching. Think of the dead who have come before you, for they are watching. Keep your eyes upon the eyes below you, notice how your living,

pulsing hand reaches to hold  
the dead and empty hand even as  
your knife begins the severing.



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