

THE ARTIFICIAL HEART

1

Fistfuls of drinking straws,
soup cans and balloons—
I build a heart. I decorate its walls
with bits of colored glass.

2

Shaped by their servitude the hearts of chickens and cows
become my models.

I break into slaughter houses. I steal from local farms.

Oh! for the occasional heart of a dog or a horse,
or the huge flabby heart
of an elephant soaking in vinegar in a bucket.

3

I earmark a yellowed copy of *Gray's Anatomy*,
take notes on a napkin at the scene
of an accident: *The driver clearly caught
a steering wheel in the chest, but where's his heart?
Hidden in the ashtray? Or lying beneath a newspaper
beside him on the seat?*

4

The neighbors, my family—who needs them watching?
My mother hacking my chest open with a saw, my father tickling
my ribs with the beam of a flashlight.

I paint the windows of my house black and board up the doors.
I burn a soft watt bulb. I consult no one.

My left ventricle is a cracked headlight casing.
My right atrium is a broken jug.

5

My heart has a slow leak, a faulty valve. Blood
gathers in pools in the bottoms of my feet. I bruise so easily
a nose bleed could kill me. I wear steel-toed shoes
and welder's gloves. Avoid open flames, climb fences slowly.

6

Sawdust on my hands. A rusty knife from the kitchen. I flip
a switch on a tank—my face is hidden by a mask.

My flesh comes apart, like warm butter, in my fingers.
I cannot help marveling at this strange sensation:
my new heart in my chest, my old heart in my hand—

7

My new heart will run on its own free will.
My new heart will be filled with nothing but blood.