

## Songs of the Body · *Bea Opengart*

1.

The heart: an apple, half eaten.  
At the white core are eyes.  
A window. Someone is tapping.  
My hair will circle his throat.  
He doesn't recognize  
his reflection,  
face pocked by raindrops,  
he will examine my sex,  
I will hold him within it.  
Step closer. I'm here  
in the glass and beyond it.  
I press my hand to the ghost  
of itself, cover the man  
who loves wind in the trees,  
their nervous, rustling speech.  
Not the sounds a woman makes.  
Not the man as he enters her body.

2.

What begins in the body  
expands to enclose it. If desire  
exists without an object,  
I won't be held by yours for me.

Asleep, you could be anyone.  
I would want you no less.  
You speak of others to mark a distance  
between us when there is no greater

distance than this, where I live.  
I stroke your neck. I cradle your waking  
so you can turn from me to invent another version  
of the man who won't give in. I fooled myself,  
  
with many kisses, from the beginning.

3.

Until the woman I am without you  
is the one I don't know  
though it was she  
who brought us together, clear  
and sharp as broken glass.  
Running my thumb along the edge,  
I hold a weapon. Is this how  
it feels to be a man?  
I'm down to bone,  
the loose-limbed clatter,  
the mute jaw's edgy grin.  
Is this how it feels, bare,  
to lie down? The wind  
blows leaves to the doorstep.  
They brush the mat.  
This time I don't sweep them away.  
Dry leaves are a softness  
I don't sweep away,  
the husks of a greener year  
when I was glad to know  
men watched me, followed  
with their thoughts  
of where to touch me,  
how to move so I wouldn't  
remember the sky  
when the sun's going down  
and a human voice is small.

The body listens,  
straining to know what lasts  
longer than leaves in drifts.  
They nestle and curl like hands,  
your hands, which patiently  
roused me against myself.

4.

Anxious. Like the chatter  
of chickens, relentless.  
Their anger makes them ridiculous.  
How many months  
since morning was mine? I meant  
to speak nonsense, the relief.  
His fingers, a fist, inside me:  
no decent woman would permit this.  
The heroine must be a victim  
or a bitch, and like it. Abruptly  
awake at dawn, I couldn't  
move my mouth to speak his name,  
couldn't lift my arms  
through ghost light  
gathering edges of a room—  
quilts found in a barn,  
furniture peeling,  
photographs, one a self-portrait,  
his over-sized suit so white  
the lightest touch would soil it.  
He came to my door  
as a boy clutching lilacs,  
pleased with their violent scent.

5.

To ask if I saw the world  
differently, if lilies  
weren't lips, if his thrusting  
wouldn't force the mouths open,  
a chorus of orange  
risen through green, the air  
like a web we'd break  
with every step. I wanted  
to feel him like this:  
grass in haze, the trees  
overlapping, foliage billowing full.

What is the body? *A wild beauty.*  
What are the seasons? *A journey, I go.*  
What is the sky? *A wish.*  
*Clouds in an egg-blue bowl.*

6.

Not the wind,  
the blowsy wind.  
Not water.  
Not flames.  
Not the tree  
nor its branches.  
They jigsaw the sky.  
They reach everywhere.

If you were fierce  
you'd cut them down,  
the limbs spreading  
their leafy nets.  
If you call me,  
I feel your voice

as desire grazing flesh,  
the blood welling up  
in beads. These  
I will give you.  
Wear them to remember  
you came into me.

7.

Nights,  
in my small voice  
I call you,  
I think you might hear.  
If the wind were  
a sigh it might move you  
to speak, brushing  
your hand when  
I would stroke it  
unfolding. Night  
lifts its wing,  
you would draw near,  
beside me. For you  
my dark hair  
grows into flames,  
arms embrace your need  
to enter what you touch,  
to complete your love  
like a knife. I would  
open again, body  
closer than my own,  
your name a language  
of its own  
but you are gone,  
I have fallen through air,  
that the day comes  
without you is all I remember.  
The sky. A rock-strewn field.

8.

Somewhere a child is crying for my breast.  
A man is pacing the hardwood floor.  
If he held me now, he wouldn't know me,  
nor would I hesitate to leave him wondering  
what draws me from bed to raise the window,  
press my forehead to the screen and close my eyes  
to his face, fierce in love and empty in sleep.  
We might live forever without words  
to remind us how gladly  
the body received from another  
the softened austerity of flesh. Together  
we occupy silence I meant to come to  
by myself—bare walls, a table, a lamp  
brightens our joining and falling away,  
an orbit I break to stand naked. Behind me  
the man no longer exists. I open my eyes to the night.

9.

The rooftops almost make a city.  
I bring a small plant,  
mint, in a green pot.  
Nighthawks and rain  
recall our desire for a yard  
grown dense with flowers.  
Yes the windows are open.  
The rain seeps in.  
The whole skin tightens,  
feeling air again and again.