

Three Poems · Elizabeth Spires

THE BODIES

Here, in the hot half-dark of the sauna,
the bodies of the women glisten . . .

Naked, disproportionate, lush,
hung and burdened with flesh, they open slowly,
like orchids blooming out of season.

Sweat beads my forehead.
Heat rings my breasts, like circlets,
and I *am* my body, all shimmering flesh.

Secrets are whispered here. Stories told.
The bodies, alabaster, abalone,
relax, give up their pose, to ask,
how shall we be joined?
how shall we know each other?
By doors, by chains and linkages,
through which we shall be
entered, touched, possessed.

I see them, row upon row, the rank and file
of generations moving without pause:
—the bodies of the young girls, the willows,
complete unto themselves, androgynous;
—the great bodies of the mothers,
circled by their little moons, adoring;
—the mothers of the mothers,
the old wise ones, ponderous and slow.
And in another room, not far from this one,
the restless bodies of men, searching
without knowing what it is they search for.

Body of the world! Body of flesh!
Leaving this room, I leave the orbit of women.
I dress and walk into the snowy night,
into the great body of the world,
cold, still, and expectant.
Bodging forth, I am taken by the dark.

What am I? Asked, shall I say:
*Struck by a spark, I quickened
and was born to flashing
days and nights, a small significance
of one. I did not wish to change,
but changed, feeling desire and fear
and love, failing many times.
My meaning made, I died,
the windows darkening for the last time.*

We move, we love, we cry out,
we hold or cannot hold to what we are
and finally wake to find ourselves
changed beyond all imagining.
Was it enough to have lived?
In that moment of still approach,
will it be given to us to know?

THE ROBED HEART

They come in white livery bringing the sun,
the Robed Heart astride her white mount,
crowds lining the royal road in anticipation.
Ahead, the castle flying the new colors,
a queen's great labors come to an end.
A shout, and the cord is cut,
the crown placed upon my head.

And I am, Mother, I am!