

My Sister's Heart

For three nights I dreamed of cartoon hearts saw-toothed in half;
bleeding hearts crushed by irreverent heels into the sidewalk;
a split heart, like a single profiled breast, wafting in the sky;
tweezers picking apart my own heart's striated muscles
until Monday morning when the routine EKG said *damaged muscle*,
said your heart had broken. You didn't even know it had resisted,
sullenly balking, some muscles deciding, "I'm sitting out
the rest of this woman's life." You remember no pain, and I wonder
about the heart's wisdom, how it knows to quit sooner than we do.
Our hearts have been wheezing and slurping for years.
My heart's too big, pushing the X-ray's edges. It's stretching
to keep all my dead people in. Your heart shrinks
to keep living trespassers out. We rely on will power,
our hearts having lost their authority to steer us to love,
to let us keep it. How long can a heart limp along before it quits?
Our father played professional football, our mother danced
in a chorus line. Their bodies were beautiful and did not love each other.
They preened singly their whole lives, hearts on hold, hanging fire
until their bodies stalled. Right to the end, their hearts beat
as reliably as metronomes. They'd hardly been used.
We've taken ours for granted, worked them double-time,
given contrary orders, and so the missed beats, the fluttering,
overexcited muscles. Our hearts are dead-tired.
Mine in its utopian expansion, so thin at the edges. Yours
in its realism, so atrophied, so small.