

## **The Poet's Broken Heart**

by Renee Podunovich

“Your heart is like an aperture,”  
says the confident clinician I have hired  
to help me make sense out of my pain.

I consider this as I stare  
    at the charred heartmeat  
I have unpacked from a wicker picnic basket,  
presented on a delicate china plate,  
an embroidered linen napkin folded neatly in my lap,  
heavy silver utensils in hand,  
    in preparation for cannibalizing  
    my own demise.

“One can learn to open it to varying degrees,” she claims,  
“You can close it to protect yourself.”  
I imagine how things might have been different  
if I had known this  
    before I took this once beating organ  
    and proceeded to gradually filet it,  
    throw it willingly on a grill,  
    but not just any grill—  
the most cryptic and deceptive one,  
the one most likely to start out with mild heat,  
the kind of heat like early summer sun on my bare shoulders,  
that feel good warmth that seems benevolent,  
    inspires juices to drip onto coals,  
    seductively stimulating them  
so that I hardly noticed the fact that  
I was burning.

Yet I never pulled back, even when the fat dripped,  
flaming that intensity,  
even when I realized that yes, I am choosing  
    to be seared alive,  
    have lost my preservation instinct—  
the one rational people, like this therapist,  
use to shelter their tenderness in the face of annihilation.

But not my poet's heart.  
Instead I opened the aperture all the way,  
despite the blisters, the smell of feverish flesh,  
let any discernment about safety  
    disappear into flames.

And now I sit, this overcooked mess on a plate—  
and the tears come, tears of disbelief,  
that I can love so deeply,  
not because I am a saint,  
because this is what it takes  
to prepare a poem in a wounded world like ours:

I didn't open myself so wide  
only because I loved you,  
That part is irrelevant.  
I did it for my own healing,  
I was hunting for these words,  
now tucked secretly inside me.  
And at the end of the therapy hour,  
I pack up this picnic of my own undoing  
and tonight

when the moon is full,  
I will walk into the desert,  
find a certain place on red earth  
where the moonlight is lace and ethereal,  
will nurse my own wounds,  
take this overworked cardiac steak  
in my bare hands,  
lift it so that moonlight bites  
and stars alight on scorched surfaces,  
and the words will pour forth from me,  
because by the sheer will of my art  
I will be raw again.