

## Written on the Body

Kate Delany

The heart wants to break but the body gets there first,  
eager to offer up the Achilles heel  
in whatever system it's located.

It's payback for the weeks of sleeping  
in stiff hospital chairs, or not sleeping,  
of eating greasy cafeteria food, or not eating.

After the anguished back and forth—  
will we lose her? Will she make it?  
My father is partially eviscerated, but only

partially, as if the torturer abandoned the job,  
had another appointment, someone else  
to disembowel. So now my father walks around,

holding in his guts, trying to smile convincingly.  
We celebrate his birthday, my sister returned to us,  
returned to her life, but there's more than the work

of a year written in his face. I know now how a person  
dies of a broken heart, how anguish seeps  
like slow acting venom through the bloodstream

to muscle, nerve, tissue, bone. He said the craziest things  
while we were waiting for the call: if they wouldn't  
give her lungs, maybe he'd go somewhere, maybe

the Ukraine, hire a surgeon, get them himself;  
maybe there was a pill he could take, end his life,  
give his lungs to her. My father is a guttering candle

I want to cup my hands around because we all know  
the wind will blow back this way. We can't shut  
the windows tight enough. And without his light,  
the darkness will be absolute.