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## Songs of a Turning Body

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*Ecorchée vive*— in medieval times  
a form of torture, meaning *to be skinned  
alive*: when prisoners' flesh was torn  
in banners like tree bark from the living  
body, when its bindings were forced  
from the spine, creating a new, transparent  
text, its red inks glowed in astounded air.  
Scripture of smoke and suffering  
made visible, I call through  
your tintured bitters  
this body—

Body, my body, vessel of hurts  
and pleasures, mirror of all I have done  
and denied. You led me and I listened,  
following where you pointed the way  
and opened the gates, marking alike  
limits and possibilities, all the cells  
and dangerous appointments  
where I was to find, in the wild,  
my sweetening self in you.

Even at the pinnacle of assault  
something stayed the rack, the wheel  
meant to tear the shoulder from the soft  
cabinet of the body, the curve of the buttocks  
broken on a floor strewn with ankle-bones.  
It was easy to mistake stillness for consent.  
Even so, you did not deny me  
the experience of falling  
and falling through this world.

If I could call  
to you, I could return to that threshold  
of initial longings. *Break me then*,  
I cried, into the wind that came to flood  
my being with molten elements, that  
scorched my hair with its heat. This  
is the open moment that they speak of  
in books of the dead-- the only thing  
left on the plain, the body's scoured husk,  
a lit pyre surrounded by vermilion powders,  
the soul's thousand names dissolved in soot  
on combustible paper. Pestles ring the waking  
call, awaiting a gash of wings risen from  
the hurt mouth, its ashy bed; the heart  
made clean and empty as a bronze  
prayer bowl.