

## *Identity*

by Staci Perkins

Scientists insist mass, not weight,  
but it's not either I worry about.

Every morning before I shower, I DVD exercise  
in the privacy of my bedroom.  
I lift 5s and 8s coated in some plastic rubber  
that scuff marks when knocked together.

Each concentrated curl warms my bicep.  
I picture it, not beefy or burly,  
merely visible, like the faint stripe of thigh under blanket.

But never mind all of that.

Listen, when I climb five flights of stairs from basement  
to my office in Commerce Towers,  
I can hear, actually hear, my heart in my ear  
as if it has traveled its own interstate vein system  
straight to eardrum, so I can't ignore it.

It doesn't tha thump, tha thump like a cartoon heart,  
it booms as if it really were hitting a drum in my head,  
boom boom, boom boom—it's so loud and powerful  
I know it's the only part of my body.

Or how about this—  
yesterday I fixed the toilet for the first time.  
I lifted the top, and didn't know what to do,  
but I fixed it anyway.

When that toilet stopped running all the time,  
I proved myself,  
just like I do when I tricep dip and I keep going  
even though my arms shake like jackhammers.

Do you understand me?  
I proved myself. I fixed that goddamn toilet.  
I can curl two 8 pounds weights in one hand.

So why, when I shop the grocery store  
in the small town my dad lives in  
does the cashier look at my check and ask,  
*Perkins? Who do you belong to?*