

Heart echo

Over the slosh and suck, the echo-distorted sound as she shifts the probe, she intones, *This is your pulmonary artery, your vena cava, your tricuspid valve,* as the noise that fills the exam room is wrecking my sense of a river system inside my body fanning out to water clumps of grasses, stands of trees, feeding silt onto fields, the seasonal pulse of ebb and flood. But this is a factory. This is the boiler room where the steam rushes through the pipes so loudly you can't believe the ship can hold it. The technician slides the cold metal across my ribs. *Lift your left arm, your left breast,* she says. *This is amplified many times, and it'll sound even stranger with your heart rate so high.* I'm thinking, I just don't want to have to tell my mother I have heart disease at twenty-eight, the sound waves passing through my chest, seeking out some defect in the shape that makes the sounds I shouldn't hear, hearing them doing nothing to slow them, though really it's almost cosy in here, the lights dimmed, a blanket draped across my gown, and lying back, I don't feel like my heart is beating at the rate the monitor says, but there's its sound broadcast through the room. Whitman called the body electric, a perfect system, a thing to celebrate, but what was known then of the pulses inside? How sometimes neurons over-fire. Electric storms run wild. I try to slow my breath to make the thing inside me match it, think of the steadiness of waves against a shore, a flock of swallows contracting and wheeling, but now on the screen, sound waves revealing shape, my heart is forming a Rorschach, and I don't want to see what I'll see.

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