The Snowflake Heart

From the hospital window
looking down at rooftops
the outside world opens up
beyond the white walls
of intensive care.
Today’s light snow
floats timeless toward earth
bringing motion and meaning
absent in static wires and tubes
hanging blankly down from the ceiling.
The flakes prescribe a shifting diagnosis
randomly gliding toward my eyes
teasing me with full intention
before blowing away in absence.
Life-measuring beeps and buzzes
rubber shoes on linoleum floors
impose a disciplined white noise
in this wide-open wilderness.
I turn again to the snow.
An expert on snowflakes
wrote that solid precipitation
falls into thirty-five shapes.
The heart is a snowflake.
It has different shapes.
Nature adapts to diagnoses
a procedural, organic evolution
to serve our need for flawed form.
Snowflakes teach us to search
for a unique form even when
we know the research is right.
Today I search for one other shape
the thirty-sixth shape of the heart
a snowflake falling and landing
next to the reconfigured muscle
resting in the bed beside the window.
Hershey Children’s Hospital

On the road to Hershey
and its specialized cardiologists,
I find time to doubt our directions.
This is the first trip and it’s taken death
this long to arrive closer to life than ever before.

Our pediatrician is a serious little round man.
His directions, drawn on sterilized tissue,
followed his diagnosis that something was wrong.
He outlines the patent ductus, the four chambers
of the correctly functioning heart. He diagnoses
my sore throat and reminds me to drive easy
on this foggy mid-March night. He shares confidence
only as far as inexact detail can advance
a necessary process without knowing.

It is no surprise that at the end of the road
the hospital is locked down in dense fog.
The manicured arborvitaes look fake.
Pale light fights through fog to illuminate
a dark glow above the hospital doors.
It is an entrance to story without script or plot.
This is my welcome to “Chocolate City.”
Night Stand

Inside our room the Vaseline jar holds tight to the edge of a Sanctuary nightstand. Diapers, formula, and flowers present an exposition. I do not unpack my bag, fearing I may stay. The door has three locks. I cannot see out beyond the closed hallway, and hear only light rain falling on waste cans outside the window. It is six a.m.—all pretense of time evaporates in the darkness of night’s long closure. Joy of birth long gone, I stare ahead and make a dream: a pink balloon falling toward land as I dive headfirst to cradle it. Opening my eyes, I see the nightstand its curled legs stable, carved to control the tight space it has found itself in tonight. I will break free from this gaze only when sunlight reaches through the blinds.

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