Anastomosis / carcinoma in situ

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Anastomosis

he placed a heart in my hands
and asked me to name each blood vessel

when I couldn’t find the words, he said:
“clearly, you don’t understand the heart”
and I thought there must be a metaphor in there somewhere

he lined a row of hearts on the table
and told me I couldn’t leave until I could map
the coronary arteries

so I held each heart
one by one

traced the borders and grooves
held the dead weight in my hand
and felt nothing
but my steady pulse against its waxy surface

felt waves rising to my carotids
felt my head pulse with each ebb and flow
pictured myself plunging into circulation
following the tides of each vessel
like a stone smoothed by the ocean
letting myself wash away
carcinoma in situ

I.
we wait
because we are taught to be patient
2.
with the invention of the microscope
came new ways of seeing

new lenses
new findings

zoom in
deeper
and deeper

push past each layer of tissue

look at how cells divide
and how we grow

marvel
be raptured

new lens
shift focus

sometimes cell division goes wrong
uncontrolled

a mass forms
(we don’t say the c-word
we’re waiting on lab results
to say it for us)
3.
something feels off
but you wait because your kids have basketball practice
and your husband needs dinner

you can feel the mass in your breast
too big to ignore

your own doctor berates you,
how didn’t you notice this sooner?
4.
who gets to decide when a woman should leave him?

when his handprint
blossoms into purple remnants
of burst vessels and bad blood

when the family says she is better off without him

when he takes off at night
and stays on the couch all day

when he tells her she’s let herself go

when
his words
make
her
shrink

when he tells her she has nowhere to go
no job
no prospects

so she stays

who’s to tell her she should have left?
who’s to judge?
5.
we wait because we are taught to be patient
we wait because things could be worse
we are stuck
waiting to be told
it’s okay to leave