A Change of Heart

She couldn't possibly have married him but she has learned the code he speaks and sometimes she can speak it. His call as from a distant continent, lurid sound in early-morning dark: I'm J-A on the transplant list. Or A-I.

She tilts between now and a series of then, some fifty years old – his heartbeat trembling the bones of her cheek - hotel rooms, Gulf-coast beaches. On her way to Quebec, the opposite direction, she waits for her plane amid flurries of slang, a high-school choral-group bound home. If they spoke English she might be diverted but these are periodic nouns abloom in slushy sibilants. She drifts. Strands of song like aural spiderweb cross airport space, design of truth beyond what he could say, the last loved man, who's known her broken, open. She resonates to his struck A across the thousand miles. One day she heard

a group of EKGs transcribed as quarter-notes, laid on staves and played: strong hearts sing ornamented melodies, sick hearts lines plain as early chants. All over the world people are going places and he lies as if dead, a man with a hole in his chest. Loved flesh. She hears the rhythmic slosh of pumps under engine-noise. Time zings and pools. She imagines fever charts and what she knows will happen does. She isn’t family. The nurses will refuse to speak and he will not be able to. She’s never been the other woman.

She’s the one before, between, and after. She comes to know to be beside oneself and tells herself in the third person She chose not to be with you so she can’t be with you. Years go. For a time they lived through days without each other, sweetness a bright silent phosphorous streaming through shallows of familiar seas, soft breezes over tropic nights and terror.

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