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A Gathering of Cardiovascular Surgeons

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A Gathering of Cardiovascular Surgeons

Dr. Veer, the keynote speaker, opens
with a joke about the swiss cheese fondue,

two types of cholesterol, "good"
and "delicious,"
and he winks along the banquet, his colleagues
sipping their aperitifs.

*How lovely it was
to be eager and serious, he says,
that first open-heart practicum:*

*an irish setter,
his limp paws and his thin damp coat,
his rib cage
sawed open, arteries clamped
with small gleaming forceps.*

*One cannot forget that first time groping
inside another body.*

*Everything so close and almost hot,
and your fingers slip
under the left ventricle,
cradling it,*

*believing in that muscle's steady hitch
and wobble, as if startled
by the touch.*

By sunset, they have toasted
that tragic, magnificent dog for hours.

Some lean into the breeze
on the glass verandah,
others wade
in the fountain below the stone boy,
pouring endlessly
from his fluted urn.

When the music begins, the timbales
and congas and horns,

Dr. Dubois in a strapless cocktail gown,
mambos in tight circles,
coaxing her lanky husband.

Dr. Wheeler pulls off his shoes, suspenders
dangling at his hips.

And Dr. Veer is famous for his rumba.
He weaves his partner, a first-year intern,
among the ferns and palmettos

and the courtyard clears.

She is blushing, her dress whisking
from her thighs
with the lazy swish of maracas.

Her feet chase
his quick, sweeping half-steps.

A few moments,
and she finds the pattern,
swinging and pulling
from his arms, tight as a shadow or mirror.

She feels the whispers and nods,

his right hand hovering
near the small of her back.