

JOHN CASTEEN

Murmur

I've always had this hole inside my heart,
it's literal, and every two years needs
machines with cords taped onto me and plugged
by nurses with their gelid hands. In truth

it's never caused me trouble, or not much.
I need my prophylaxis certain times,
like anybody; don't much mind gray eyes
of residents who promenade to see

(or, rather, hear) my fault when I'm laid out
for show. I'm clinical; I'm teachable.
They have to use their stethoscopes like men
on subs use pings to find the enemy.

Have always been ventricular, septal, and defective
to them. Which suits me fine. I like to know
they squirm when asked to pin it down, and watch
my small systolic/diastolic cycles misfire

on television. Every time there's that suck
and whistle, leading to the next, referring
to the first, which speaks to the last. My own
inefficiency. The exegesis white-coats try

and try to learn: my fast, off pulse. Heartstutter.
Like murmured things old women said at cards
when I was small: *Good night*, they said. *Great day*
in the morning. And, *Lord, Lord. Lord have mercy*.