About that coupling

I wonder about that coupling. A highball of the weakest blood, seasonal bubbly of her and him, clang of deep ancestry’s economy and resignation: genetic snake eyes thrown in the dark. Did she moan, call out his Army name, his Christian name? Neither knew what would stick to chromosome 19 -- how they’d double down their doom, gift me at my making. That symmetrical fate, butterflied blot, twin allele. Primitive pairing, homegoing to type, one disposed to line ventricles with lard, collect cream in carotids, fumble for words like patio and Guatemala, surprise themselves behind the wheel.

Cheap scotch and dancing, new appliances, buying houses, assembling cribs. Later, the slow buildup: angina and gallstones, TV remote to the ear when the phone rings, big white brain blooms, coral lips misaligned by ischemia. This type grows dense as sedimentary stone: pearly strings of amyloid dress the eyes; waists, chins and breasts thicken. Thoughts flee, stratify. Somewhere deep in the memory pile, the buried name of a neighbor’s son, exact location of a wad of cash. Yet I know they were innocents at the start.

Farm kids who didn’t choose to slap their baby with bad code, pair ApoE 4 genes one December night. She pressed a birth lock of my hair in a pink book, as if it might hold all secrets, dark and light. It does. Now, I dream lightness. Not how I was made, implied certainty or risk. But how I might be excused -- the grace of clean arteries, flash of a meadow, more time in bright places. There and here, in the sun, still doing my work with an untangled mind.

—Deborah Fries