Poem on the Occasion of My MRI

Ashley Capps
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Fancy the brain from hell held out so long. Let go.
—John Berryman

Like a fat-headed fetus pushing feet-first through the mother;
like a half-eaten bug jutting up from the lips of a frog;
like Uncle Cross in Than Ke snaking into the enemy tunnel—

my body, my white legs protrude
from the tube
and it’s tight and I ask
for a last-second sedative.

But nurse wants to know if I have a “driver.”

—Do you have a driver?
(I do not have a driver.
Just as recently as last month I had a driver.
I should have a driver.)
—I do not have a driver.

I do not have a driver.

*

I’m floating
this particular river
in a boat for one.

Voice over the water:

The next scan will be three-and-a-half minutes. Hold completely still.

OK.

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Sivabali Yogi sat twenty-three hours a day for eight years, his attention peacefully between his eyebrows.

I myself in eighth grade won a contest for least visible movement.

The prize was to be a human mannequin for Sears.

I kept my eyes on the swans in the pond in the middle of the mall.

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Always it begins behind the left eye: a tear, then throbbing. Sometimes I speak to it as to a child: softly: No, not now. This isn’t the time. Yesterday

at Manzetti’s, stuffing my mouth with fresh bread, suddenly simply visionless—Marco Polo in the pool and my first bikini, Where are you?

—No, you have to say “Marco” and we say “Polo!”

Where are you?

Meaning, really, where am I in relation to you?

Or to my wine, which I spilled, groping, ignoring the blackness. The waiter looked ready to weep. Your head was just lying there. You wouldn’t answer. I’ve begun tipping over

midsentence. Twice at dinner with my parents. Once near the end of a blow job. He didn’t understand what was happening. Go home, I stammered, to your wife.

Last week in front of my students, discussing Dream Song #9.
It’s golden here in the snow.

*

This morning at the door, a representative of The Mystic Truths of the Spirit World of the Soul of All was scarfing down a doughnut. He told me, Go into the heart of imagination with your eyes closed. Then, you may see some beautiful light.

Going into the mouth of the machine, I am trying. My eyes are closed. I have giant headphones playing a Beethoven CD.

It’s supposed to distract my mind from being illogical about the world of the senses.

*

I learned to sleep with his arms and legs on me. For once in my life, it did not feel too close. Now the wide bed suffocates. The first week I cried the kind of crying where you almost start to choke, which happened frequently when I was a teenager. Wonderbread my guinea pig did sympathy shakes. I speak to her still because she sends me tiny messages from the grave, full of grief. My father smacked her with a shovel after I said go ahead, she was drowning on her own fluids. Try as I may, I cannot picture my spine as a tube of loving light. I cannot find the peace glowing like a flame or moon in the forehead and then the chest. The next scan will be fourteen minutes. I speak into the emergency microphone: Please, set Ode to Joy at repeat.