Two Sojourns in the MRI Machine

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PATRICIA HOOPER

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1.
Groggy with valium, I've put on the mask left over from our transatlantic flight. It kept the movie from my eyes all night, blocked out the slender cabin rimmed by dusk, vast darkness, coasts of stars. I may have slept, if that was sleep, slouched on my daughter’s shoulder, dreaming of moving through a foggy nowhere, sealed in a crowded capsule, funneled between black ocean, emptiness. And then we dropped a little, till I looked. Still black, still lost. Only the stars swam in their silver mirror, the moon still crossing what I must have crossed. And then, toward dawn, a steel-blue glaze, a slash of crimson, England beneath us, green and lush, familiar as my child, my shoes, my sweater. Descent, the force of land, the news of weather, the reassuring captain’s welcoming voice, a breeze through the opening tunnel. It was over.

2.
In Rome, at the catacombs, I took three steps inside the corridor, drew one dank breath and fled. All that I saw were the first vaults where Christians kept their bones although their souls, as they believed, had risen. Outside, I sipped gelato melted down in a plastic bowl and waited for my daughter who moved inside the earth. All that the gods would have to do was roll one boulder over the entrance . . . . But the guard looked bored, our driver who’d seen so many leave the underworld, sprawled on a blanket near the parking lot and smoked, and up the hill, a plot of asters, a path, a shop, a fountain spilling water, and then, around the curve, thank God, my daughter.