

LA TRAVIATA

Backlit panorama of blue sky and tree tops
on the ceiling above the MRI machine.
“La Traviata” comes through faintly,
headphones wrapped in woven tissue paper—
the same sanitized fabric as the gown and pillowcase.
The tenor sings *Libiamo! Libiamo!*
Let us drink! Let us drink!
A shadow voice to the skull-rattling kachunk-thunk.
the Do not stare into the laser sticky label
two inches from the eye. Sung from a booming belly
yet uncertain, elevator muzak played soft
and low as a hallucination.

I think of you, who died.
That comes first, with its own operatic rhythm,
easy to rhyme: you died. You did other things—
you lay patiently inside machines,
resisted staring into the laser, shivered thin.
You drew their innards, builder and designer,
as they later drew yours, exposed your faulty wiring,
your speckled organs and blackened brain.
You did other things, but then you died.

Grief rises from the unstirred deep,
not as it used to, not like a man-shaped monster
dripping with bog weeds. As a vision:
I am the technician behind the glass.
You are alone as you will always be alone.

I turn up the music. I have that power,
to make it swell in the chorus:
In questo paradise ne scorpa
il nuovo di.
Let the new day find us
in this paradise.

I can make the sky spread over the tiles,
fluff the picture-frozen clouds
until they travel on the wind.
I can make the thin fluorescent filaments
into a near and beloved star.
I can make the treetops rustle, send flocks
of bird silhouettes across the burning blue.

I am a limited god. I can turn hospital linens
to field grass and wildflowers,
I can bring your body to rest
in any heaven I desire.
I cannot bring you back.