

PATRICIA HOOPER

Two Sojourns in the MRI Machine

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.