

ASHLEY CAPPS

Poem on the Occasion of My MRI

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.

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.

*

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.*