

RUTH TOLMIE

Lying Low

In this quiet only the peace of ministering,
Curtains, menthol, lysol, iodine,
Servile machines, watchers, counters, drippers,
Gentle shoes on tile
Only the snap crackle surgeon tap-tapping,
Blinka blinka snapshot doing rounds
Rowdy men banished, no giggle-poke,
Just smooth still air heavy like undersea
Deep around the beds, and above the sheets
The turbulence of pain
Where cuts lie healing.

Agile carcinoma, sprinter, long-distance runner
Surprise. Here I am. Hide and seek.
Dark mother-of-pearl crusting around the blemished gene,
The blighted gene, black against the fluorescent screen,
The root of it. Go back to look for it.
Old mother, fragile sister, rag of a heart,
Cousins daft as turkeys,
Oh, a motherlode.
Fuck an old cunt, he said,
What'd ya expect?

Before that, narrow coffin beds
Pushed close together
Because so many of us are mad.
Relics of better days
She wears her baby-dolls no gown for her
Nipples purple rings. Always beside me

The mountain of her breasts. Needled, quiescent,
She dozes, heaves, drones softly,
Broken whore or maybe mother.
And Ellie burning burning tearing her clothes
Because she had no money for the bus
When her daughter lay dying in Dakota.

Haldol corruscates the passages
The twitch of loxapine, fat lithium,
Lorezepam, fluoxetine,
Seroquel. All alchemy.

Before that, salt water where pearls live
Deep undersea. Go looking.
Lost inside, the ambulance whine
Does not reach me. The pump and suck of oxygen
Fills me day to day as the heart twitches,
Cross-wired, the pancreas atrophies,
Sugar runs riot in the blood.

Say now, what can philosophers tell me?
All this, and then not to win the lottery.