

Alva and the Magnetic Resonance

There is a cage over her head
in the space chute the nurse

hummed her into, the nurse's hand
on Alva's knee until the very last

second, a gesture of kindness,
which almost made Alva cry

because she knew the nurse
was a mother to someone—

she could feel it in the weight
of the nurse's hand, this mothering,

this tiny gesture of: "as I push you
inside the machine, I will hold you

in the smallest way possible."
Alva lies inside on the electric

gurney. The doctor told her:
"a little swelling where the brain

meets the eye," so they must
"take a look" inside her.

In the waiting room, she'd sat
surrounded by doors, knowing

at the very moment, behind one,
someone was being dissected by light,

someone was being read by light.
And behind another, radiological

fortune-tellers divined hidden messages
written in bones or in gray orbs the size,

maybe, of sparrows' eggs: the prophecies
of science. The fates they measure.

Inside the MRI, Alva closes her eyes
to remember the boundaries of her sight

are still intact. The room with the nurse
is haloed around her feet. The nurse's hand,

gone, turns the machine on.
Suddenly, everything is washed away

by sound. A wood pecker thumps, calls
across a forest of white trees, bleached

by the diagnostic sun. Alva floats in a lake
of echoes. Then a hammering. A pulse winds

faster. Inside the machine, she knows,
magnets spin in short, engineered orbits

to peel away layers, to see inside her.
It is a small consolation, to imagine

the technician, later, like a monk, will study
his illuminated manuscript, the parts

of her body no one else will see,
another way of being held.

--L.S. McKee

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