Above the Tanana: ‘Moo’ Dying
For my mother

As Larry’s Flying Service drones in low,
it’s two-prop shadow bellying the ripples,
smoke downriver billows from the flats.

When I flew East three months ago to get
you well, you sat in your hospital chair
and beamed but wouldn’t eat. “I hate it when
they bully me,” you said as if food were
a choice or whim, so we threw up our hands
and ambulanced you home. Dentures out,
your cheeks caved in and respiration lightened.
The worst was over and the best. One breath,
another, as I stroked your hand’s cold blue,
coaching your last abandonment of air.
Speed the film forward and suppose I were
still your prince, how would I rescue you
from that claustrophobic repose, where,
in the gagging dark, your flesh turned gel, your
chin bruised black, pink novas mottling your cheeks,
you brave maggots and centipedes and master
the stench of ripe obscenity? “Oh, shit,”
I hear you say, “please pardon my French.”
But where are you? Head on a pillow, you lie, as your consciousness unwinds, thinning as it spreads. While fresh sprucecones litter the ledge, a phoebe swoops and returns, inscribing its thoughts on sky like a mathematical design. Again I clasp your wrist, one minute stretching into two without a pulse.—Nowhere. No thing. No Moo.