

PRAISE SONG FOR MY MOTHER'S LUNGS

Don't we all have places to go like these? Wet
and stuffed with life, warm, not yet growing spots,

these great and hollowed grenades. I let myself coil in.
Like any good blanket that's ever swaddled me safe,

where we, yes, respire, expire, the new e-cigarette haunting
these walls, deemed less lethal. Isn't there room enough in you

for me? Room enough for all of us—
all these daughters singing premature elegies

for their breathing mothers? Despite the virus spreading,
I develop my own ashy habit, feeling you there for a moment—

curling into my own damp corners—and wonder when
I might release you. Wonder if, for the daughter,

release is ever an option. If we are meant to live
forever inside each other, body worshippers,

and I defender of your latest bout in the hospital bed
(I'm sorry I always return here), where you offered

your lifelong vow, the one I asked for at ten on the balcony
in my silver New Year's dress, and then again, desperately—

no, did I demand it? Can a daughter ever demand?
—as you, wheezing through the oxygen mask,

became all assurance and apology. This time
I delivered the diagnosis, never mind the bill amassing

as we paused the Netflix movie to cry into each other,
the debt for your somber weekend retreat deepening

because you got sick in the wrong country,
and this time no house to refinance for the loan, no,

the Medicare gone and your retirement thinning quickly,
but no, never mind it, never mind—we watched the maples

from that thin bed instead, rotting their unmourned leaves off
through the window. Now, just two years later, our planet

held hostage by a sickness that aims for lungs, I press myself
anxiously in again, into those pumping things, little suffocaters,

little wilting globes, urgent, almost hopeful you'll break just enough
to open. And you do: this foggy November evening sees you

come back to life. As you exhale, finally, something left ajar in you:
I have seen it so many times, and each as terrifying as the last—

still, the daughter in me walks through. Inside
I find you still awake, still, so help me, breathing.