

MATTHEW TIERNEY

Re the Individual Wellbeing

for Ken Babstock

Recumbent; an IV line hitches me to vertical
by a single vein. RNS in blue rustle up firewood,
their voices patched as if through dispatch
where Tagalog, possibly Hindi, is the main.

I'm calm, I've gone nowhere I haven't before,
and across heat-stretched rock the yellow flight
on the EKG scouts concentrations of methane
in the slope mine of my heart. Too much? Too

much. General—no, *blanket* contrition, for a string
of acts of omission that imagination has scared
into memory. Experience is elusive; to identify
pain as phantom takes away none of its throb.

Dear anesthesiologist, I'm willing to forget more
than O.R. lights swelling into pulsar or if you prefer
remember less. Who hasn't pretended to slump
asleep, carried in from the car in Dad's arms

and been told later you were dead to the world.
Birdie outside the screen window unseen though
your chirping's so caustic it ignites a plug
of gunpowder, blunderbuss flash and I'm

the sound wave catching up, lapping propofol
as it shorts out sodium channels. Today maybe
I awake immobile to incision, Rachmaninoff
on the iPod, tincture of iodine like the mark of

plague on my ribcage. By any stretch I have it good
and am thankful. I say this uncertainly because
it feels like rain, time to latch windows and
rescue laundry before the flood comes slippery

with leeches. Penny-ante reasons for unhappiness;
shameful when my friend on the station steps sits
knees to her chest, distraught, and I crack wise,
welcome the manhole drawing me wrists first

or extending above asphalt a yawning copper-
head to ingest my body whole, lying in full sigh
and keen for the moment's (any moment now)
small-bore dart. Can I may I have a last thought?

Standard care means I undergo repairs neither
earned nor essential, performed by trapeze artists
always gauging distance to ground. Each handclap
flies through air. B minor. *Agnus Dei*. Bach? Bach.