

John Morgan

## Above the Tanana: 'Moo' Dying

For my mother

As Larry's Flying Service drones in low,  
its 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.