In the painting of the young couple kissing on a bench in a museum hallway I’m the subject of the portrait hanging on the wall behind them. I’m wearing the blue velvet jacket of an eighteenth-century Prussian cavalry officer standing beside a white horse that’s too large to be accurate. Though I’m rendered with lifelike precision. Obviously, I couldn’t have served in the eighteenth-century Prussian cavalry. I don’t speak German, and was born centuries late. I’m not the first person to pay a famous artist to be in a painting. Though I wanted to be the man being kissed. Unfortunately, my famous artist didn’t believe a girl that lovely would kiss me in public. I offered photographs of previous lovers but unless one was kissing me on a bench in a museum hallway his answer was no. That’s unfair. Otherwise I’m pleased with the painting. The couple kissing, I suspect, also paid to be in the painting. Though I’m certain they were strangers. Her eyes are open, peering at where we might stand admiring the painting. Instead of resting on his cheek, the palm of her hand is pushing, proving that while she desired to live forever in art, her desire didn’t include him. I once fell thirty-seven feet from a railroad bridge into a river. Riding the ambulance to the hospital is when I decided to pay a famous artist to put me in a painting.
What brought the woman to the painting
is something I’ve often fantasized about.
The oxygen mask’s elastic strap
pinched the back of my neck.
I kept the discomfort to myself.