

## **hospice prom gown**

wake, take dreams, suffocate them under pillow

conform. take comfort in rigidity,

a stiff, sick script, miscast,

act the role, go through motions

like you were born to. no sons to rise,

light barely sneaks in.

floral stem slips through cracks in walls, shaking.

warden's absence, door, kicked down, exited again

dresses worn with sisters doused in grand marnier,

iridescent flame. don black and white

striped shirt, pants to match

play pretend as survival, keep meals coming onto dull trays

i'll cut my hair, it's too long now,

hate my face, hate my name

play sports with the boys, loose soccer shorts

spin and curtsy. sink down from laughter.

ninth grade, science class, i blink  
as you tuck my hair behind my ear,  
tie it up. tell me, unflinching sincerity, 'you'd be a pretty girl'

wake up every day in stripes. other boys notice now,  
cells minimum security. they've got a word for us,  
the trapped, hate my face. fuck my name.

faggot feels more fitting.

spend weekends in incendiary basement,  
take lessons. doze off, get hit by yardstick, point at  
whiteboard scribble 'how to be a man'  
feel ill. path, inescapable. can't change  
what you are. puke in this prison, wretch  
until blood comes out, pass out,

wake up, dream of  
that lost self. 16 now, in hospice, feeling pretty  
in the blue gown, sick, barely eating, receding,  
feeding into notions, long suppressed.

what am i? mom calls me handsome and i'm sick again.

hide it, i'm okay. feel the gown. feel reprieve.

feel free, now. more than ever

every place i'm in, it's orange jumpsuit, in the

fashion of the times. they see the pink, three vertices.

eyes go right through me, read what's not there

play my part in every room,

thanksgiving, christmas, every day between

earn my day pass. meet you, share backpack

as pillow, know then, it changes everything

go to your apartment. walls, wood and drywall.

escape the jumpsuit.

don leggings, blouses, colourful.

any skirt you have that fits me.

carefully paint over jaundice. 'you're glowing'

sun in my face, blinding.

you look at me, as i am. see me, as i am

you look at me in a way i never thought possible

wake up again, myself. more than ever.  
still in that cell, there's a window now  
space to dream if i dare to,  
and i do.  
let my mind wander to thoughts of  
the sinking son. nights of  
swallowing sickness down, fading  
son is out. shining. scratch the days  
on the wall until freedom comes.  
19 years, someone else.  
thunder through the hillscape,  
revving, smiling  
finally becoming myself