

Wrinkle

There is a place called Land of the Sick
we ferret away, tuck under
the map, ignore bulges under New
Jersey and Detroit where industrial stacks
send droves of us to beg under broken
smiles of free-care hospitals. But when it comes
to it, not even the rich can outwit the white-
breathed furnace that will claim all

of us. This is why we hide
the evidence. Like a mother trying
to hide her cigarettes. If we
had the sick walking among us
they might remind us that we are
as frail as the simple failure
of a blood test. That's how it happened
for me—what are these spots
on my legs? And suddenly,
I've stepped through a wrinkle
in the fabric of privilege.

Day Before You Were Yourself

On the day “chemotherapy” becomes a word
relevant to your life you will not
scream. You will close in on yourself
like a spider going rigor
mortis, hard, hollow-limbed,
curl feebly to protect organs.

That night when a spider appears
in your bedroom, you will want to step
toe-ball on it, but instead capture
it in apparatus of Tupperware
and manila folder, shunt

the body through a flap in the screen while feeling
nothing. You will do this, because—
it will be what you do. In the morning, the howl
will begin behind your eyes, your head

will try to shake it off, involuntarily jerk
to the right-left-right.
It may be rush hour,

but suddenly, all around, there will be plenty
of seats on the bus. You won't know
you're bawling until something
wet slaps your shirt. The temporary relief
will allow the world to still
just long enough for an idea

to open: Jump out onto the grass. Go
get the car. Drive to Goodwill. Spend
three hours picking out
the right chemotherapy costume. Purchase
six pink dresses. An extravagance,

even at Goodwill. Pink
is medicine. Pink is Pepto. Pink is peony
beginning to die in your bathroom of whom
no one but last week's daisy is envious.

Being told you're going to have chemotherapy
is like suddenly realizing you're on a zip line.
Maybe you had some cerebral acquaintance
before, but this will be brand new body-

awakening that the contraption
into which you're belted isn't
kidding. No theoretical
here. No religion either, although

you will be joltingly aware
of your soul. New body-knowledge, cold
demanding fact: You have sped
up, the cable above is not only
limited, but fraying. This is not a movie,

but free fall. Always has been. The "safety"
belt has always been optical illusion,

otherwise known as cultural habit
to deny impermanence. On the way
home from Goodwill, while six pink
dresses steam from the passenger seat, anger
will seize the wheel. You will confuse

one foot for the other, accelerator
for brake. The sudden upsurge
on polite street will scatter
crows and scare the mother

with two girls trying to cross
the intersection. She will pull back,
hold the girls' shoulders, scowl,
until she sees
you're weeping. She'll pause, her face
will melt, and then she'll prompt
those chickadees forward, wave.

You'll think of your ex-husband, who left
for a younger woman with a functional
womb, "Bet he's glad I couldn't
have his children now that I'm—"

The sight of the girls' retreating backs
will prompt you to scoop-gesture
your chest out, push its fake air-contents
through windshield—please take
whatever-it-was-I-was-supposed-
to-give-my-never-to-be-daughter
and keep it. Put it on
like a pink dress. One of them
will be wearing green, her hair
will glint as she rounds the corner
out of sight.

Listen, there was a day before
you were yourself. There will be a day
after. This is what is
called eternity. It's the only thing we get to keep
forever.