

Mother Waiting

Rawdon Tomlinson

The background blurs from sleep to sleep,
with pills at nine and morning toast.
He bathes and dresses me; he cuts
the meat and bits of fruit; I add
some rouge before the mirror,
my gray hair wild as a baby's.

On this side, doctor visits and family:
they repeat the same non-answer,
"We will just have to wait and see."
Upstarts, knowing nothing, feeling nothing,
can't remedy the burning tongue
or restore a crumbling memory.

The children phone long distance,
sensing the floor giving way;
I transpose their names; they
happened long ago; my grand-
daughter babbles like me, she takes
each step breathlessly.

In this limbo the movie
changes: my husband is the clever
stranger impersonating my husband,
doctoring my food, selling the house
behind my back; as he watches TV
crime stories, I sit against a wall

wrapped in a blanket of silence,
rotting from the head down, one eye
wandering while the other fixes on nowhere
or haunts the past, where my people wait —
and God every day. Pain

says the prayers, the dull
nausea which grinds me down
to a whimpering thing, then terrorizes
suddenly — a door flung open,
wind scattering the props,
the new script full of masks.

What lesson I must learn from this
on top of age, I do not know;
and now they are here, their caroling faces
lit by the flickering lights
on the white-ice cake, and dressed in my new

blue gown, wishing, I step across
and blow out the candles.