

## **Ghost before Dying**

By Alison Pelegrin

after Lori Waselchuk's *Grace before Dying*

I did not come to harvest stories  
but neither will I turn my back  
on this image of a dying man.  
*Ghost* on his pillowcase, *Ghost* on his socks,  
George "Ghost" Alexander exiled  
from the world at Angola Prison Hospice,  
reduced to medical needs and mercy  
which radiates from the hands  
of men we've been trained to fear.  
He twists in the bed as though ignoring pain,  
as though to shout over his shoulder a message  
of a few words, maybe a joke in the manner  
of Issa: *A bath when you're born, a bath  
when you die: how stupid.* This is no mug shot  
or disembodied prayer hands making  
the feel-good case for his redemption.  
Ghost gives his face--he is clear eyed, knows more  
than we ever will from peering in  
on this image of his dying on display.  
Bed-bound, prison-bound, soon *The Angolite*  
will write up his obituary and he can't refuse  
any of it. Ghost sees through walls  
to the future and what's coming--  
mourners on foot behind his hand made casket  
in a carriage pulled by horses with braided tails.

No sun, no birds pinned to the sky, just one tree,  
its arthritic branches stripped to the bone.  
This is his dignity—thirty-three years  
an invisible man and here he lies before us,  
George “Ghost” Alexander,  
shackled in his dying to the wall,  
rising from his exile in the traditional Angola way.