you pull up to the same *safe* place

where you became impatient—

no, it’s *in*patient—

thirty years ago.

same gray day.

same damp drizzle.

same dismal red brick

trapping at-risks

inside thick-blocked walls

built up like a minecraft world you return to

in survival mode at dusk.

(where every patient’s patience gets tested.)

same wand scans for contraband

by an overweight security guard’s hand.

same type of young man—

the TSA kind,

the likely-bullied-as-a-kid kind,

the maybe-he-was-here-too kind.

at most, he’s kind.

(you wonder who abused him.)

same prison treatment.

all belongings must be kept inside

an anteroom locker.

no, you can’t bring

your phone or keys or

yeti mug of herbal tea.

yes, it’s really tea.

(you quit drinking sixteen months ago.)

oh, and leave behind your dignity.

they’ll keep it *safe*.

you hear hinges creaking,

rusted metal slams.

a locker key exchanges hands.

you’re escorted to a waiting room.

you grasp the shame.

same faded blue carpet.

dark stains whisper secrets

too softly for your ears,

too distant to hear.

you thought they’d have replaced

what you had to step on,

but they didn’t.

(it doesn’t surprise you.)

same analog clock (plexi-boxed)

like a rare book on display.

are they scared she’ll change the time on them?

use the hour hand to stab a random LMHC?

could numbers one and seven become weapons?

(anything without a curve just might work.)

you watch time circling back slowly.

your deepest demons preserved in its ticks.

same dark wood paneling

(dented and chipped)

from mad impulsive inmates—

no *patients*—

sharing pain

with flailing arms

and hardened hearts

and angry kicks.

but it’s so different (this time)

when the patient is your daughter

answering questions in a small voice

three years younger than yours was.

she hides inside a hoodie

a shade lighter than her dark brown eyes.

be patient.

they call her name.

they buzz you in.