

Death Wing

They say, welcome to the wing son,
you'll be alright, just keep your head down.

They give me a prisoner's pack, grey trackies
& ask me to list my anxieties.

I tell them shaking, concentrating on the words.
It feels like broken teeth are falling from my mouth.

They prescribe amitriptyline.

My head is done in by the sound of cell doors
clanging shut at shift change, like falling dominoes.

I phone home & tell Mam I'm doing myself in
but it's three a.m. & she don't pick up.

The lads complain, it's easier to get spice than bog roll
that they are sick of the cockroach-infested grub

& rats the size of small dogs running about the place.

All night I hear the lads climbing the walls of their cells.
All-day the lads get high; the officers turn a blind eye.

They tell you, don't do owt stupid son,
cos we're sick of cutting down bodies.

They say, welcome to the wing son,
you'll be sweet, just keep your head

out of those knotted sheets.

R Burns

In the 12 months to June 2019, there were 309 deaths in prison custody, a decrease from 311 deaths the previous year. Of these, 86 deaths were self-inflicted, up from 81 the previous year.

Ministry of Justice: Safer in Custody Statistics, England and Wales: Deaths in Prison Custody to June 2019: Published 25 July 2019