Emergency Room Run

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EMERGENCY ROOM RUN

For a month my mother knelt down beside your bulky figure, wrapping salt-soaked towels around your flaming red thigh, while talk-show hosts echoed all the way to the kitchen where I stood hovering, waiting for it to be over. But every day those huge wet towels ran the length of your leg, pale white except for the long expanse of inflamed tissue circling the raw open wounds, wet and blood red, like steaks thawing in the kitchen sink. Every doctor had a prediction, a theory on which way the six-inch wide cuts could talk us all, as suddenly we were speeding down highways to hospitals and isolation wards, the crash through that wood railing echoing in the frantic darkness. I slouched down in the orange vinyl chairs, silent and always uncertain at the age of fourteen, the required gown slipping off my shoulders as I stared at that leg, all shrouded over in gauze changed three times a day, tissue thick with yellowing pus. Your leg was a gift from surgeons and skin grafts, or from God. Months later, you lumbered back
into work as if there were no scars, the unbreakable
father I’d known all my life floating back
into motion. And just when I thought it was safe
to come for my birthday and fall into your lap,
my weight pressing against the muscles of your leg,

I find myself back on the road with you and another
raging infection. Two a.m. and I am sitting in an isolation
room, cakes and kisses lost in the fear I have come to hate,
the throbbing hysteria rising into my throat, as I watch
gloved nurses pull thin slivers of wood from your leg.

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