What That Poem Was About, Fiona Miller, Third Place
What That Poem Was About

My mother in her blue flannel nightgown shuffling down the hall, dragging her left foot like a block of wood behind her. Squinting. My mother’s soft body in and out of the sarcophagi of MRI machines, objects falling from the hands she thought were clenched. Words like numbness, blindness, scarring, scared. My mother on the toilet seat holding a needle long as her middle finger, diagram of a faceless body showing her where. Forty, with a walker. Saying my MS, my MS, like it was a thing that belonged to her.

And me, in the middle school courtyard with my friends, saying words like sick, brain, autoimmune. Me, in the spoken word workshop at writing camp with the only poem I ever wrote about disease. Me, on the stage beginning too fast and the teacher saying Stop. What is this poem about? Making me say it. Me, swallowing. Commanding the tears to stay back. And behind me my classmates, against the wall, knowing, each of us clutching our losses like they were the last things in the world we owned.