

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

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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.