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To Father

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To Father

Michael Galati

Father, when you died you were too quick for them at the hospital. They had the oxygen and things, even in those slow-moving days, the Depression lingering over all of life, including yours. Oh, you made plans, plans to open a factory and some stores, plans to buy a house somewhere with a yard for the dog, if only the money would come. But you were quicker than the money that never caught up with us, and quicker than hospital tubes and wires, quicker in dying that is. So quick were you that when they brought you in, you were already blue, already cold, and your wallet had only a few bills, not enough. Not nearly enough.

The call came in the morning, and Aunt Martha was to be the strength we would need for the news about how quick you were, a mere 34 years old, to duck out of life like that, as if someone had thrown a baseball right at you, and you went down to death because that baseball was coming, and maybe you knew it was coming, so you ducked into death the way people duck into doorways when the rain starts to fall.

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Sister didn't believe about your dying. It was a joke, she said, a very bad joke. The man who held the world together for us could not ever be dead for us too. But the phone kept ringing, and Aunt Martha was there, and Mom besides herself, so she knew. Denial only goes up to the corner with you and then it makes you cross the street by yourself, all alone, cars whizzing by all the time, and Denial, just standing, but not ever stepping off into the street with you. So she knew. She could tell. You had ducked away from a fast ball aimed right at your head, and when you stayed down, there were no pinch runners and never could be, so the Umpire of Sorts called the game, and all the watchers went home because it was starting to rain anyway, and the benches would be wet, and you just lay there until they started to lower you into the cemetery clay. Then your mother, who afterwards shook her fist at the ceiling and blamed God, fell across your casket in the midst of her wails. Other mourners held her back from your grave descent. Perhaps you saw. You were only thirty-four. You were so quick.