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Circle, Line

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McCullough: Circle, Line

CIRCLE, LINE

Laura McCullough

There that day were six seniors from the assisted living center
at the community pool. One was on his oxygen, the tank parked
next to the plastic recliner lined with a blue towel draped across
it for comfort, and he'd seen the boy dive into the shallow end,
and there were signs. A circle. He remembered what a circle was.

A tiny man diving in a slim arc. A line cutting across. Like No
Smoking. He wanted a cigarette hot in his lungs and cold menthol
in his mouth, the small ripple across his skin from the nicotine, and
the clarity, so temporary, his mind filling like lungs with smoke,
even in this air, next to the pool next to the lake with the optimistic
fountain, even with the twin plastic nodules in his nostrils, his arms
placed along the chair rails, his hands dangling, twitching the index
and middle fingers of each against the other, back and forth, the drag
on his skin reminding him to stay awake if he can, the darned boy
an annoyance going by again and again with his wet slapping feet
and scuttling run, then the sound of the sirens coming closer;
then the fear; surely they would take him away for good this time.