



Laura Schulkind

At Last

She fell without grace,
arms clutched around herself instead of bracing her fall,
as if she thought she could catch herself.
And as her legs gave way, she thought, “This is just how I imagined it.”
A certain satisfaction in that.

She never imagined swoons with fluttering eyelids, wrist to brow.
When she imagined human disaster it was without filters.
People shat and pissed with fear.
Snot ran from their noses as they wept.
They stumbled and jerked; she stumbled and jerked.

A lifetime of bracing—
plane crashes, homecomings to smoking cinders, cancers of all sorts—
none would have caught her off guard.
No one would have had the satisfaction of saying, “She never saw it coming.”
She always saw it coming.

It began the day she bought her first car—
everything about driving 3,000 pounds of metal off the lot exhilarating
and terrifying. Holding the wheel, swooshing the wipers,
pressing the gas, the brake, the gas.

Eating alone that night, she saw the crash—

car buckling, airbag exploding in her face.

Her legs splintered, thighbones pushing out of their sockets, breaking the skin.

She heard the crunching, smelled the blood.

And then she made coffee, replaying the scene
not with horror, but relief.

Smiling, she remembered the moment
as she slumped to the floor.

Laura Schulkind has published poems and short stories in such publications as *The MacGuffin*, *Minetta Review*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal*, *Bluestem*, *Eclipse*, and *Talking River*.

Image: From SpinalStenosis.org.