The rash that won't stay

It has learned the schedule.
By the time the gown is folded
and the light is turned on,
the skin looks
almost cooperative,
palms quiet,
creases unremarkable.
Normal enough
to doubt memory.

The patient brings photographs:
dates without patterns,
flares blamed on sun,
then stress,
then nothing that holds.

"It comes and goes,"
they say,
as if rehearsed,
as if warning
not to trust today.

It prefers the dark.
At night it returns;
itching its way back
into sleep,
into focus,
into the parts of the body
that touch everything.

By morning
it recedes again;
no trace,
no witness,
nothing to point to.

"Where does it bother you most?"
Creams help, briefly.
Avoidance helps, briefly.
So does time.
Until none of it does.

Two years in,
the rash is gone today.
The patient stands there
in a white gown,
quiet,
unmarked,
waiting for the light;
visible only
when no one else is looking, a ghost
in the room instead.

—Meriah Frauwirth

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