It Didn't Start The Way It Ended

Ella Morton
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Poetry • Ella Morton

It didn’t start the way it ended,
With Papa pointing at my dad and my uncle
Saying, “didn’t I used to be associated with you two?”
It didn’t start in a nursing home in Greer, SC
Or with unshaven scruff that didn’t belong
On my grandfather’s once polished smooth cheeks.
It didn’t start with my mother taking us outside
So we wouldn’t hear the soft-spoken man
Curse and shout at the waitress.
It didn’t start with an argument about car keys
Or a police car chasing an old man
Trying to drive to Edisto beach on the wrong side of the highway.
It didn’t start when I first realized
Something was truly wrong,
When my grandfather locked himself
In his hot car in the driveway,
When he got lost while his girlfriend was getting her hair done.
It started with a joke,
Or maybe not a joke but an observation,
Steeped in our typical family humor:
It seemed that Papa only ever wanted to eat Jade of China or O’Charlie’s. Per-
haps, we thought,
he can’t remember any other places to eat.