Wandering the Kennesaw Nursing Home Looking for My Father

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Walking through that hallway I smell elders, and remember
the circus: scents of cotton candy, stale straw, and dried
urine. Under the Big Top, elephants turned endless circles

in red wooden rings. Black-link chains trailed from
each neck. Their wrinkled gray skin was hairy and rough
and vessel-rich, so unlike the skin of Coumadin bruises

and loose elastin sagging on the creatures in this place.
Here, I scan their faces for yours but refuse to stare
into their eyes, cages of cataract and vacancy.

They peer at me through unkempt memories, wondering
if they know me. I refuse to hear the cheer of the crowd
as these men reach for my name like a trapeze.

A nurse ushers the wheelchairs, lining them in rows
for *The Price Is Right*. I step around these men, exhale
and deny it all. I still remember how your hand,

once strong and soft, led me under the tent.
Who can lift me above my crowded life?
Roar again, Dad, so I can find you here.

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