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Leaving Too Soon

Lisa Bolin Hawkins

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Leaving Too Soon

Startled awake, I grope the ringing phone—
 Rush my eager “Yes?” past raspy voice—
 Dial tone. You hung up? It was a dream?

Nightmare figures, we watched you decide.
 All developmentally correct;
 All the crying choked behind weak smiles;
 Held each other while we searched our faults;
 Watched you drive away.
 Only daughter. Gone.

It feels like death—
 Family portrait’s static now: we age;
 Your picture will forever be sixteen,
 The picture of a girl we thought we knew.
 I want those years.

I reach a bare foot, shaky, for each stair,
 Then cold, smooth entry tile. Forgot your key?
 How long have you been ringing the doorbell?
 Empty moonlight. I step out and search
 The shadows under trees. Are you out there?
 Come back! I want to call to you, Come home!
 I speak your name as token: you’ll return.
 But it echoes, fades to whispered mother-dreams.

—Lisa Bolin Hawkins