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After Rejecting Four Phone Calls From My Father

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After Rejecting Four Phone Calls From My Father
by Jessica Bowdoin

I think of you:
the blood-shot webbing of brown eyes,
the tight grasp of the half-empty
Taaka tipped generously into the glass,
the vodka barely pinked with cranberry.

I remember:
the last day I spoke to you
when you said: *I'm sober. 60 days.*

And, you quietly raised a glass
of water. Was it water? I wanted to say
I was proud like I believed it. I wanted
to encourage, I promise. For the hundredth time: *I*
will support you (is what I wanted to say).
What I wanted
was my voice not to break
over the phone into staccatos.

You have taught me this silence
all my life. I'm practiced in holding it close
in my hands like soft wool. I'll caress
the woven space that protects
thoughts from becoming words from becoming
erasure.

So I left
this silence suspended.

In the blur of breaths, I counted seconds
between a voice and a memory:
yours, not long ago, almost whispering:

"We both know
I think AA meetings are for quitters.

And love, maybe it exists,"
you say, slightly bitter,
"but only in Christmas movies,
the black and white ones that flicker,
not that new shit."