

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