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2021 Vassar Miller Poetry Award
Honorable Mention

Where Else Does My Mother Go When She Dream Walks?
By Nikki Ummel

Last night I dreamt of my mother,
her return, after all these years,
lip-shaped apologies unheard,
yet I knew, from the space in her teeth,
what she bit back.

*I came, she didn't say.
I'm here now, for good.*

And I reached out,
held my mother's hand the way
I did only once
in the waking world,
when I walked her to the middling ground,
where dreams drip ghosts
and living slides sideways
into hazy nothing.

When I woke, mouth open,
sticky tears pooling like blood
behind my head,
hand grasping the pillow as if
human were an easier concept
at dawn, I strained to hear
her hum from the fireplace,
the soot song spilling, begging
to take my arm and lead me back
to the dream where time ends,

my head in her lap, her hands in my hair,
and sleep that brings peace.