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Meeting Aunt Nebbi for the First Time

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2020 Vassar Miller Poetry Award

Meeting Aunt Nebbi for the First Time
by Nikki Ummel

Button you up in my soul the way
I batten down
in my mother's
favorite jean jacket: frayed
at the edges but
functional, warm.

There is so much space, here
there is room. I need

to keep you close, until I learn
how you fit, discover
how we can stitch (disparate
patches)
together.

Tuck you up in my heart the way
I wear down
my mother's
picture in my pocket, faded at
the edges but
the resemblance, striking:

see my mother in your shoes, the
ones you wore, funeral black but
functional, worn.

I hope you have space for me, too.
I need to be kept close.

You wear her features well:
I squint, stare off
to the right, I see (second
chance to know)
her, too,
in you

together.

Like two
black funeral
shoes.