

FIRST NAMES

How tenuous his voice sounds
when he calls, leaving a first name
and the desire to hear from her.
He's living in San Francisco.
It's fair enough to phone once a decade.

She scratches her head after a long workday
because it's really been twenty years.
For months, she wondered where he was.
No Internet or business linked them,
just the shared sorrow of youth misplaced.

The wedding had been a miracle in the snow,
slipping down slopes in a purple velvet dress
and hand-me-downs.
She thought she knew what love meant.

Two coasts and twenty years apart,
she calls him back to find he's divorced again
with two children and lots of debt.
She confides she's been sad, too,
though she's written serious poetry.

His voice moves far away.
He still polishes his rocket in the yard
to leave the planet eventually
though shadows lie longer in the streets.

Signing off, there's an agreement
to exchange e-mails and snail mails,
discussion of which parents died
and how pride interfered with love

like the vortices of depression,
fueled in the long Michigan winters
they shared when they were young.

--Carolyn Gregory