

On The Line

She calls him up exactly once per week,
a quarter hour every Friday night,
but he still presses the phone to his cheek,
drinking in her honey-lemon voice like
a dying man open-mouthed beneath a leaky faucet, a plea
on his lips for something just out of sight.

He knows he makes for quite the wretched sight,
fingers shaking and his voice just as weak.
But with her in his ear, pride deteriorates faster than he'd like.
Once the line clicks off, he scrubs from his cheek
what's left. For these calls, he'll wait through the night.
She won't, though, so he stops raising that plea.

But if it did matter (that which pleases
him), he'd first wish himself home, anywhen but this abhorrent sight:
a subway of folks on overtime week,
with fatigued resentment appearing like
crows' wings abridging their noses and cheeks.
Free at last, he hurtles into the night.

Leaf carcasses scuff beneath boots tonight:
the only sound around to hear the plea
of helpless rage — no stars nor clouds in sight
as he treks home for the last time this week.
With keys in the door, shoes on the floor, weight of the phone in hand like
an empty casket, heat floods to his cheeks:

There is one New Voicemail. *To wake a dreamer, pinch wrist or slap cheek?*
Timestamped two hours earlier that night,
her poppy-flower voice sways through this week's
field of club-music weeds. (He dreams the sight
of quarters in her hands — she ignores pleas
to join friends til after one call.) Unlike

him, she fears nothing. She bounces back like
it's second nature to smile, turn cheek.
He has never missed a call ere tonight;
What if she doesn't call back, too displeased?
Instead, her cheerful "I booked us dinner reservations on-site!"
will play on repeat all day for a week.

"Let me know if another time that week is better," she says, like
he hasn't saved all seven nights to leave kisses against her cheek,
to promise, not plea: *"Three months left, love, until you're back in my sight!"*