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A LIFE (COPENHAGEN, 1967)

My father calls today, about an hour
after I leave a message at his home. It wasn't him
I'd called for, not really, but we chatted about my vacation
and his back and when my mother would be home.
and I remembered the last twig of our conversation
an hour before, his awkward, 'We missed you,'
spider etched like a comma on the floor.
We had been decades rugged hiking,
rutted landscape choked with granite and soil.

What was it about this day, no different than any other,
that allowed us to ease into conversation, walls chastened
into the shape of a door? I think
it had to do with a poem I had written, months earlier.
Although I know he hadn't read it.
There is something solidifying about language,
effable (contrary to what the philosophers say),
that builds beams where there was gravel,
heaps strength and possibility to the fore.

As we made plans for dinner,
there was nothing I wanted except to lean forward,
fill the hollow of this throat with calm. I remembered
a black-and-white photograph of him in Copenhagen:
willow-thin, newly glazed with pilot stripes,
Ray Bans, permanent resident status, silence
from air raids that no longer woke him from sleep
or interrupted fervent daydreams. A life
he was born to lose, somehow found.