On the Death of Marie Smith Jones

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The word does not exist
for a glint of sound
that unblends
whitetail deer from hay fields

If a word exists, meaning
soft dangerous spot on the river
it is no longer felt
through speech
in the muscles of the feet.

When I heard
no voice to withhold this absence
I stopped the car and stepped outside.

Snow broke from my boots onto the black highway.

There is no word
for a blur of land and light
adrift in veils of heat.

1 Marie Smith Jones (1919-2008) is the last known speaker of the Alaskan native language Eyak.