

from poetry collection, *Unless I Swim Skyward*, 2017-2019

The Cornice

We thought we were far enough
from the edge of the snow-covered ridge
that hovered above a glacier-carved ravine,
yet when Annica tripped on her shoelace,
we gasped until she was on her feet again.
We had entered this high point riddled with caution signs,
chose to walk along this finger pointing to an imminent death,
even paused to eat our lunch perched atop its severity,
haunted by ghostly implications inhaled as cold mountain breaths.
I feared the sound of snow cracking beneath my feet,
the beginning of a fall, my stomach lodged in my throat,
gravity pulling the rest of my body down,
these two parts of me a rubber band
stretched to its breaking point.
I feared the awareness of death
that would surface
in such a moment.

I find myself again at the abyss,
this time on a cornice of my own making.

This is a fall that will begin when she is born and last my entire life.

People tell me about their own plunges, what they found below, how they felt.

I can't know this expanse from looking over its edge,
not who she is, how I'll feel, what our connection will be.

I only know this gravity will take me somewhere deep.

I've come to this cliff precisely
for this unknown.

How rarely in life I've created my own precipice,
walked past the caution signs, stepped onto the edge
not by accident, but excited by a vastness I can never contain,
nervous for the fall, for all is unknown.

Yet here I am leaning
toward mine.

Seasick

She wasn't prepared for how her body

would deceive her

how her own flesh would be so quick

to give away

hunger meant to feed *her* soul.

We underestimate

the undertow of the universe

how it pulls

our corporeal thingness far from shore

to the primordial

so that we may swirl below surface

with life first arose

and how small we are in the company

of such a force.

Her body succumbs to exhaustion

deforms, feels pain

as the new life gains presence, strengthens

takes shape.

It must feed off her and she must submit

to the current

let it do with her what it will

bob with the nausea
trust she will stay afloat in this space
where her body
is not hers and the being not complete
that time will
one day wash ashore two wholes.

The Suffix to Giving Birth

is a skeleton that bickers
as sand in every hinge of a house,
a bladder that whispers
in my underwear well before
I've opened the bathroom door,
abs like stale hoagie bread
sandwiching soggy tomatoes and slippery ham,
and a heart like a rocket
every time she toddles into the room.