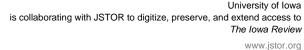
EMILY VAN KLEY

YOU AREN'T SURE & I MAY NOT

You aren't sure & I may not be made of the right kind of mortar, but how else to answer the ice axe of memory, the urgepart mechanism part scarsong-which says return is instinct & instinct is absolution & absolution is all we know of quench. We go. All praise to your iron smile & hips solemn as a staircase, your anointed fingers, the complicity of denim & windows white with hometown frost. Praise the place where I could not have met you. Praise the tiny city down twelve miles of ice-rutted highway, all I knew of cosmopolitan, its several thousand inhabitants, stone courthouse scrimmed in copper, square-jawed houses on streets named Magnetic, everything built when the mines seemed eternal & earth was another word for come right in. Before





the blast that siphoned an underground river into the Barnes-Hecker, filling the throats of 51, ripping at the boots of the sole survivor who terrored up 800 feet of ladder to the one bright scratch of sky. Before the new mines, sliced open like boils, those too containers for ache. & when we arrive if the people are insular, if they are hard as the jeweled snout of a northern pike, if winter is a shut vault with the lock cycling & we never learn to hunt deer or any more minor creaturedoes it mean we wouldn't flourish? Couldn't we find a house with cut-glass windows & let it go to ruin, tear up the lawn for garden, watch our collard greens palm the sun? At night, wouldn't I close my mouth around your knuckles, taste broccoli flowers & the sand which drifts everything, the frozefish tang of Superior mawing the harbor five blocks down? October

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fold us into the creed-cold winter, snowstorms like the shed blood of nations. Sundays spend in the pews with the fierce & lowly. Nights slake & burn.

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