

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 urge—
part 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

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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 creature—
does 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

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.