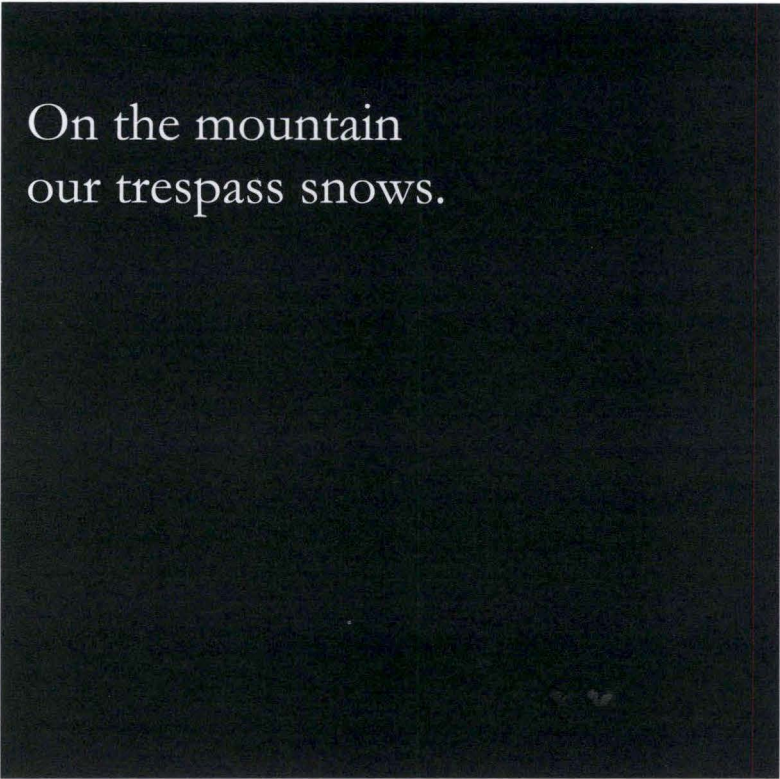


KATHLEEN BROWN / On the mountain our trespass
snows



On the mountain
our trespass snows.

MATEO:

Where are we?

What is this place?

What do you see?

MATEO:

Where are we?

We are climbing a mountain on Ellesmere.

I am watching a tern skirting the drafts:
a darkness caps her head.

From the tern's distance, we are two moving
exclamation points ascending the face.

The long thin lines of our ropes draw
our escalating distance from the base.

Above the tern scrawls in
a lineless spiral across the frozen eye.

Her wingbeats blink
in the iris of the Arctic sun.

What is this place?

The side of the mountain:

The crampons on our boots dig
into the ice-caked rock.

Our hands numb, gloved.

What do you see?

Your body leaning out from the ice. Your arm

whack!

the motion of setting
another screw in the ice for our line.

NIELS:

What time of day is it?

I think it could be 2:16 in the afternoon.
I can't push back my sleeve to see my watch.

We begin to approximate.

What is the weather like?

It is blue, the horizon a clean line
where I look straight out behind me.

But to the left
the sky is an eggshell inside out,
a filmy cover, impenetrable whiteness.

Nothing falls.

How cold is it?

Our breath leaves our mouths like one frozen horse galloping
after another, grappling with the updraft
into oblivion at the peak.
No skin is exposed except for the fingers
when absolutely necessary.

When I am still I can feel two lines clawed in my cheekbones
where my muffler meets my snowgoggles
and I have been gouged by the wind.

*What is
happening?*

You are leading us up the mountain.

I am climbing below you.

Are you cold?

No.

Como vai?

Hoe gaat het met je?

The mountain is still hooves.

*We are kneed by horses,
heaved into the atmosphere.*

What do you see as you climb?

I look up, and see your jaw - the line of your jaw - anchoring us
firmly to this: our grip
on the metamorphic cliff a tenuous pact between ascent,
and loss. To possess the mountain:

not this emptying.

The body cannot fail. Break and rest. Begin again.
You haul the past of yourself into the future
of what you are becoming.

In Mongolia our guide brought horses,
he met us at the base of our descent, remember?
I pressed my nose against the mare's moist muzzle as
she huffed honeyed exhalations: Gobi grass.

What are you looking out at there for so long?



*I long to inhabit velvet, cup
warm breath, enter
the deep inbale.*

Can you know in the beginning how the climb will end?

Held in place by the mountain, standing
on air, our toes clamped into a sheer wall of ice.
We are building this architecture of collapse
over the backdrop of finespun blossoms of snow.

look:

in my hand,
the snow punctuates what is not

I reach out,

there.

It is all I can handle,
not your rope

which tears

through my grip.

I see the snow on the tundra
gather the lines of the wind.

*The
body
cannot
fail,
Niels.*

The mountain does not move.

What are the dismaying signs?

The tern.

Her wings in the last shreds of sunlight are shards of ice
she spins and plummets down the mountain, premonitory.

What do you remember?

We are climbing north of Ausuittuq on Ellesmere Island.

I am looking southeast at the horizon, the distant line
where sky lies as land.

The blank page of the tundra: outer space below us.

We ascend, cradled in azure.

The soft eggshell cover unwraps in the south,
and the sky turns coat: is a sudden ursine malice,
churning, whipping grey snowspatter,
a dark bell ringing lightning.

Oh breathless lullabye to the pinnacle –
there is fear and
then there is

what it feels like to climb.

What does it feel like to climb?

above me
Your body lifts and m
t
i
b
e
r
s
off the side of the mountain.

Mateo, where are you going?

Your face falling beside and
then
below
me.

Our weight on the anchor securing us to the mountain and now
your body is a drowning horse,
thrashing.

The knife in my hand.
And now

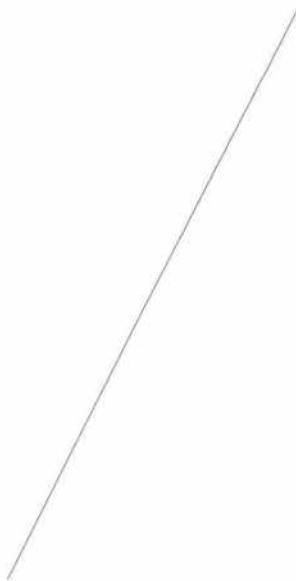
the cut line

You
empty form.
But you will not disappear.

My anchor thrown to air.

The long thin lines of our ropes

cracks in the shell, the ice shelf.




What events tell you this moment is irreversible?

Your mother is embracing me,
her brittle arms the weather around me, but I cannot
feel her there.

I am remembering the beads of ice in the hair above your lip,
flask of water in your mouth as you stand
on a ledge - cheers to the summit: *we will achieve this.*

The snow falling, the ice melting, the land moving, the mountain.
My knife cut a hole in the shell of the world.



Our bodies blossom
and tumble.