

altitude sickness

at 12,000 feet
body forgets what it
promised mouth i was seven
watching sentences end before they began
architecture collapsing in real time no one notices
avalanche crumbs wait your turn teacher said meaning
learn to be late to places you've already been the art is compression tongue
pressing answers flat until becoming part of body instead of body lodging somewhere
beneath sternum a weight with no name except three heartbeats between knowing three
breaths between light holy ratio of making yourself small enough to enter rooms that weren't
built for your particular shape of freezing how did you— as if elevation were choice as
if some lungs weren't made to labor at sea level to crave the thin the stripped the barely breathable

you make me feel—
sentence hanging mist at treeline where
things stop growing upward start growing smaller
wind-stripped apologetic blooming (surrender) i watch
arrive where i've been standing cold-burnt relearning what to
call this endurance, blue-lipped “being ahead” calling it community
mother says: *your people* meaning those who also ration who recognize each
other by what crystallizes in the space between what we know what we're allowed
glass ceiling has a view because it exists where air forgets how to hold i see them—
generations making themselves aerodynamic shedding everything that might catch be too much
for atmospheres not built for us we become alpine wind-stripped beautiful in our adaptations to
climates that demand we thrive by becoming less

some nights
head splits along fault lines
vision whites at the edges the way
it does when breathing wrong too long
forgetting that gasping is not the same as....
i could descend—translate summit into valley
what i see into something safe for their vertigo but then the view...
and i've been breathing this air too long to remember easy too long to go
back to elevations where everyone breathes without thinking where knowing doesn't feel
like drowning and brilliance isn't something you survive alone at 12,000 feet they say if the air
feels wrong “must descend” no one mentions what to do when down feels burial-like when your
lungs were always built for heights that make others dizzy

