

## Ice Pilot

Sometimes, the ice is merely curious. Bergs nose  
this boat as cows, on land, crowd  
round an unknown rambler. But I like  
it more when it acts  
aloof, purely for its own amusement. When I ask  
it to dance and it refuses.  
When sunlit, sequinned, it spins  
out of reach, pretending I'm not needed.

I like it, too, when it bucks  
and rears, believing it can unseat  
the sky. At such times, I'm  
the ice whisperer. I must  
mesmerise the ice. Guide  
its mind and movements. Shift  
it at will with a hiss and a whistle. Break  
in each berg on a rope in circles.

But I like it best when it stalks  
me, snarling. While my audience gawps  
from a distance, I permit myself to dream,  
for an instant, of being mauled  
by the ice. To fantasise  
about its bite. Then, with one dismissive flick  
of my whip, I force it to slink  
to the ring-side.

Did I mention that I also control  
the tides? Decide when the glaciers give  
birth? Breathe and thus shape  
the space around each berg? Decree  
when they die? Yes, I'm the one who causes  
their collapse. The magnificent crash.

And the silence.

## Where the Hearth Is

Your days were ablaze with ritual –  
you knelt at eight to clean the grate each morning,  
lit it at twelve,  
stoked it at three,  
closed the curtains and dragged our chairs close for tea,  
then slept with the embers.

I watched with white-hot reverence  
as you tossed on more coal,  
stirred it up and scorned the guard  
that kept in spitting sparks but spoilt our view.

There, you toasted hands  
and feet and face and bread,  
told flickering childhood tales,  
cremated the towels the first time I bled.

And then, I left –  
to live in a hut with a man in the snow.  
All anthracite, I burned long and slow. He edged  
past my guard with more fear than flair,  
warned, I suppose, not to get too close  
to things that are hot and open.

You, meanwhile, had your hearth torn out  
and gas put in,  
with simulated flames,  
trapped  
in the act  
of dying.

## Grounded

Some would say it's evolution in reverse,  
this learning to unlearn,  
weaning myself off the wind, spurning  
my strongest instinct.  
But as far as I'm concerned, there's a freedom  
in not remembering, even wider  
than the freedom of the glide.

I confess the process hasn't been easy –  
willing myself not to rise, stilling  
my wings, forbidding  
each feather to yield  
to its urge for air.

First, I focused on not trusting  
I wouldn't fall –  
the sky, after all, has never been that supportive.  
It's mostly flat and grey – plain bored –  
has never embraced me in the same way as water.

I next progressed to failing to navigate,  
doubted the reliability of the sun,  
turned best-loved bergs, from above, into strangers.  
I acquired a real flair for plummeting,  
and still rate my first bungled landing  
as the greatest achievement of my life.

