

Carol Muske

Sled

The sled on its red runners
flies ahead of itself downhill.
The child shields her eyes
against the moving glare of the snow.

Looking ahead to where the sled
has been, the child will grow up to be impatient,
hungry for the treacherous slide
of thought into thought.

Now, because of that sled, I
follow everything a little too far
ahead in my mind, not listening,
never letting the landscape be more

or less than what I anticipate—
imagining everything before it happens,
even apperception, a person,
the plural surface of touch.

When you touched me, I dreamed
of the arching board, the child doubling the frozen rope
over her knuckles, kneeling, then flattening,
against the dropping wall of snow.

In the blue digital light next to the bed,
a heap of skulls from a photograph
you'd taken in a war-torn country
dropped into thought, impersonal
as jewels flung on the assessor's tray.

I had no way to imagine you.

From a height, from a hurtling sled,
I fell against the distant hill of breath.
Flung back into my body next to yours
on the bed where I have often lain awake
desiring patience, desiring to repeat

the same simple act over and over,
till I could understand its gravity;
a step, a woman turning in sleep,
a key in the lock, a kiss.

There were executions today in another country—
today a child went sledding
on a windy hill meant for burial.

If my body meant less to you than that
familiar precipice, I don't wonder.
I wonder at myself—

why I thought of the sled as pure intention,
the impatience of my conclusions as natural
paths in the cold earth. It is my habit
to think ahead of what happens—

but that night I did not.
I did not, though in memory
we move through those few moments in little time

and it pains me that I can't recall how we
were holding completely still and how still,
we seemed so human to each other.