

PAISLEY REKDAL

ODE

*And now the silver, ripping sound of white on white, the satin,
light snow torn
under wheels, car bang metally grenading, and the wood poles,
whipping, loom—*

*

I have always wanted to sing a song of praise

for the unscathed: myself
stepping from the fractured car whose black axle's one inch
from gone; slim pole slicing cable

up to sheet metal, seat foam, corduroy
(*like butter*, the mechanic will later
tell me, poking a stiff finger through the cloth),
to pierce the exact point

I was supposed to sit, stopping
because praise begins where pain
transfigures itself,
stoppered by a deeper kind of joy: so I
transfigure myself from driver

to survivor, the blessed Lazarine failure

bolting up and opening her eyes.
And here are the thousand wrecks
from a life configured in snow before me: myself,
at five, pulled from the burning car seat;
at twelve, bleeding from the scalp
after the car throws me from my bike; at fourteen,
tumbling over the slick hood rushing;

sockets of windows with glass
bashed out into a translucent, toothy ring; lights
and bumpers clipped clean off; tires burst; deer

gravitationally hurled through my windshield; brakes
given out and worse,

the icy loop de loops
on roads, the trucker's 16 fat wheels squealing—
All the ways technology should have killed me

and didn't!
Praise for my death-hungry luck!
And all the manner in which I've failed it—
marriage lost,

buried in the blanks of white space, my solitude
at the Greyhound station
knowing no one to retrieve me,
careless among the others pressed tight
to their own disaster or boredom—
unbearably young mothers,

drifters, boy soldiers
shoulder to shoulder with the insane, weaving
the same thread of conversation back and forth
between ourselves. How

could this happen to me
at this age, at this stage, how
did I not notice, and will you put this seat up?
and will you lend me this quarter? and will you
call me a cab when we get back home?

The young man in the seat before me, head
full of zigzagging tight braids says,
*Sure you can dig up that ballot box in Florida
and while you're at it look up all the bones
buried in the Everglades,* repeats it

for the amusement of the woman across from him,
who knows a presidential failure like she knows herself,
and when we pass my accident on the road points
and whistles, snickers: *Bet you no one walked away from that one.*

For this, and for all these things: praise

to the white plains of Wyoming, highway coiled
like a length of rime-colored rope; to snow
broiling in the sunlight so that the landscape
takes on a nuclear glow, so bright

we have to shield our eyes from it. Praise
for myself playing at morbidity
because I thought I had a right to it
as if flesh had to follow spirit
to such a pure depth the bones themselves
could not rest but must be broken, nerves
singed then ripped out, the heart clench madly in its chest.
As if

I had nothing
except this white earth, this
smashed car to praise

what I knew before and know
even better now, the hills
cold as a hip bone and tufted with ice. Praise
to my youth and to my age, praise

to ambition and small-mindedness,
the kind I recognize and the kind
I am soon to recognize; praise

to self-hatred for it keeps me alive, and praise
for the splinters of delight that can pierce it.
Praise for wood pole, praise for glass.
Praise for muscle, praise for bone.

The sky is bright as a bowl on a nurse's table today.

And the sun gleams into it as our bus slides by,
the light of us a wash of gold illuminating
bodies lost, bodies regained; gleaming

like my heart here, on this earth,
bloody and still beating.