

Kelsey Christine McConnell

Poetry collection featuring:

“Freezing”
“Volcanoes”
“The Sky Below”

Freezing

Walking through the streets at night,
I have to count my steps
so I don't shake.
My keys clenched between my knuckles
to ward off strangers
and the liberties they take.
I feel a weight in my feet
as shadows dance on the concrete.
I am freezing.

Music thumps at a party
with swaying bodies
and liquored lips.
I stand sober in the corner
when I'm pushed to the wall
and pinned by my hips.
Burning hands slide down my thigh,
the words don't come, and I don't know why.
I am freezing.

I used to think that if I couldn't run
I would hide—
Sweaters three sizes too big with a girl
tucked inside.
But just 'cause I'm out of my mind doesn't mean I'm
out of sight.
And everyone knows that the saying goes,
"Fight or flight."
But they grab and they grope and they squeeze,
and I just...

Maybe someday I'll be a fighter—
Swinging fists to jaws and
hearing them crack.
And maybe I'll be a flier—
Hitting the pavement
without ever looking back.
No more men who love power
sitting safe up in their tower.
No more teenage boys or old men,
stepping out of line time and again.
No more freezing.

Volcanoes

I am a world wonder.
Don't try to pollute me,
bulldoze me,
or burn me down.
I am a mountain that refuses to be moved
to better your scenery.
And you will navigate my twists and turns,
or you will take a different path.
I have been here for twenty-six years,
and I intend to be here for seventy-four more.
Don't misunderstand me,
I take pride in my strength,
but that doesn't mean I haven't suffered
years of erosion and landslides—
Sharp words and vernacular knives
clawing at my volcanic foundation.
You have no right to bear shovels and picks
and chip away at me.
What I have is mine to give.
You will not take.
You will earn it.
And you will wait.
Don't try and test me,
claim me,
or conquer me.
I will erupt,
and you will burn.
I am a thing of beauty,
from my cold, rocky surface
to the boiling magma running through my veins.
I know precisely what I'm worth.
If you don't, that's not my problem.
Volcanoes don't pay mind to tourists.

The Sky Below

The word "love" burns too bright in my chest
and turns to ash on my tongue.
The more I think to say it,
the tighter my lips press closed.
But still,
I trust you more than I trust myself these days.
I wonder when certainty
stopped being so important to me—
When I began to be able to live
in moments,
rather than pulling frantically at a rope
to find its frayed end.
And everything must end,
that's non-negotiable,
but I've learned to look close enough
to see the little beginnings
of the small and beautiful things
that grow in cracks
and forgotten spaces.

I know that beginnings
are supposed to be the scary part—
that middles are what people strive for,
where it's safe and familiar.
I know, too, that every smile you give me
is like the first sunrise after an endless night.
And when my fingers trail through your hair
I find the tangled threads
of dreams I never knew I had.
I know life's simpler when you touch me—
that I explode
into a creation of raw nerves
and electric feeling,
like a live wire kissing down my spine.

And you...
Well, maybe I don't know at all.
Maybe I don't want to know.
Don't tell me.
Don't disrupt the balancing act
I toe across splintered glass.

No one's afraid of falling,
they're afraid of hitting the ground.
So let's both keep quiet,
unless the next promise tumbling from our lips
is that beneath us
there is only sky.