

## Frostbite

You tilted back your head to show me  
the blanched streaks on your neck pushing against the forest  
of your chin  
and the wayward white bristles you insist on plucking out.  
“There was no gray,” you said, “before I fell.”

I came to find these white spots cover your body,  
along the small of your back and across the softness of your lower abdomen  
where your clothes had billowed in the frigid water.  
But tonight, an early summer breeze wafts through the screened slider.  
Beneath the skylight, my moonlight falls in ribbons across us  
and I trace the spots with my fingers  
as we lie on top of the  
moist, matted sheets.

A summer home, your intention had been,  
but never married and childless it had become your  
total immersion in isolation and aloneness,  
there on your island in the middle of your lake  
in the dead of winter.

“Storm Island,” you’d announced  
when you ferried me across the first time that late June Sunday.  
A clod braving the wind-swept torrents, I thought, stepping over  
curled, petrified bark  
the size of beer cans strewn on the smooth grass,  
the aftermath of Nature’s wild party.  
But Storm, you explained, was the name of the man who first built on the land.  
Only a man.

And from the smooth grass, you pointed back out to the glassy water and said,  
“That is where I fell.”  
You’d placed each foot tentatively, then squarely on the frozen surface,  
warily making your way across  
the one hundred yards or so from your car and your mailbox  
on that moonless mid-winter’s night.  
You could not see the ice glistening, pooling--  
the shiny floor that crackled and shifted beneath you--  
breath pushed out in the bitter suddenness of the plunge--  
your teacher edition texts, papers, cassette tapes  
descending into the dark iciness.  
You called for help, struggling to keep your chin above surface

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where the white spots are that I feather now as your mouth covers mine.

Both hands are scarred from breaking your way through  
the shifting shards until you finally found your footing.  
Your right index finger is forever swollen and bent,  
your body so numb that night you couldn't feel the pain of bone breaking.  
But I love these large, beautiful hands that touch me,  
these fingers you lace with mine as you balance me,  
hands you use to guide yourself into me.

"If we are still together in the winter, I won't come out here," I tell you,  
recoiling when the bats in their staccato flight flap past the window.  
"Don't be scared," you say.  
But I am scared because you are still the ice-walker,  
searching for the sure, familiar footing you will not allow yourself to find with me.

I suffer your frostbite.