

The Ice

Heather Taylor-Johnson

The ice is in the water, though no water that's known my skin where I dove into waves and jellyfish teased the bubbles of my wake or where I entered from a wooden dock, my ankle rolling on a deeply polished river rock, or in water where a group of us tried not to look at each other's naked bodies or maybe when I floated on my back, found language in the water's hushing vowels – this ice is something new.

This water is something new to me, the ice curving inward and the water smoothing its slow chip, the way a hand might a lover's hip, a basic need for speechlessness, *I love you* lapping at the ice, water tonguing millions of years, our life and the life of the ice, a balance impossible without death and threaded tightly with mood – the ice is kissing the air.

The ice is kissing the guide's skin, the guide who's fished it from the water, the guide who holds it like sacrifice, eating the ice as if it's meat breaking apart in his mouth, softening as he salivates and he passes it to us so that we might hold and understand cold, the ice-slivers and ice-sting (it was melting *anyway*, had broken *regardless*) and we pass it around, taste it and waste it and once we've felt it on our tongues and swallowed the place into our bodies someone throws what's left of the ice back into the water – the ice is now smaller in the water.

Heather Taylor-Johnson is the author of two novels, her last, *Jean Harley was Here*, recently optioned for a TV series. She's the editor of *Shaping the Fractured Self: Poetry of Chronic Illness and Pain*. Her fifth book of poetry, a hybrid epistolary verse novel called *Rhymes with Hyenas*, is published by Recent Work Press.