
Avalanche Birth

EDWARD WILLIAMS

Axe thrust in easily,
Stopped with ominous wrist-wrenching scrape;
Boots sank fluffily,
Precarious ice-surface hold, gaiters out of sight;
Jelly feel of side slip
At next forward step on infinitude of sloping white.

Gently I firmly grip,
Carefully rub in my boots and slowly undo my longest screw
Then I hold it neat
Between my feet and clip on a crimson sling;
Breath held, then sighs,
As well-aimed blows bury it deep in the ice.

A hiss comes up behind,
Each step-hole joins to the next and the snow here and below
Wrinkles like skin
Of aged hand, fragile and thin, it breaks silently,
Crumples and undulates,
Moving and spreading: a sea leviathan disturbed.

Then as a spent wave
Retreats from the shore the hollows and crests
Move inexorably,
Innocently, down, break and tumble in terrible turmoil,
Gathering a silent power
Feared and fearful, in seconds unstoppable, irresistible.