

Alice Friman

Ars Poetica on Lava

So much depends . . .

—William Carlos Williams

The night I picked my way
across the lava slicked by rain
in the moonless dark, all past
and future sliced away
like bread. Nothing existed
but the blade of my held breath
and the flashlight probing
the black and roiling rock
for a safe place to place
a sneaker down. One shoe
after the other, disembodied
from the feet they were tied to,
with orders to swing out, land,
grip, and pass me on.

Two hours it took to cross
that stretch of Stygian black,
having no thought but the need
to prevail, upright. Now I know
what it means to balance
a writer's life. Each footfall,
each stopping point, a fulcrum
around which the body teeters
and sways: a high-wire act
demanding concentration—

the chattering mind delivered up
blank as cardboard with a pinhole,
dependent, in the pit-dark, upon one
thin thread of dazzle coming through.