

Egg

We watch a wildlife documentary,
learn how emperor penguins take their time
to perform the tender rituals of come
and go. In autumn, he marches for miles:
all rocking waddle, all bib and tucker,
almost too fat for his feet, his belly
full of krill and squid. And when his claws
grow tired, he tumbles, sledges, slides:
a tiny figure in the whole vast tribe
who trudge through icy wastelands.

Who knows how he finds his way to her
or who performs the choosing? The camera
captures his certain strut towards the orange
blush of sunrise on her cheeks, the stripe
of dawn along her beak. Eventually,
the couple press their chests together
— an opal glow — stand still, their necks
bent in snowy folds, their heads bowed
and swinging. Only then must they wait

in freezing wind while famished winter
feasts on them, wait for the egg to be formed
— their alchemy of albumen
and keratin. Then they'll take their time
to rehearse the pass from her to him.
They'll have one chance: a single, frozen
moment. Finally, they risk it all.
The egg mustn't touch the ice or be lost
to cold, absorbed by the boundless white.
Like them, we took our time learning

how to love. Now, as we stand with our backs
to the storm, waiting for the light to fade,
we must keep to the faith in what we've made:
our frail cradle, this miracle
of our life together. Soon, I must walk
on my own in the dark. Know that I want
to be here. When I'm gone and the shell
of our marriage cracks, believe that what
we held between us all this time will break
out live and singing.