

High Atlas

By Abbie Garrington

In the looped line of the belay you were held close,
Suspended
On a portion of air so fine
It seemed your fall was inevitable –
The rope a joke, the slightest pause before you hastened,
Wingless Icarus, in a delicate descent to
Frigid seas; to African ice.
At the end of a written line I waited,
Sure the last of those scribbled loops would be, not yours
But another's
A telegrammatic account
Of your failure to cheat gravity,
The scantest of details sketched for my memory –
High heroism; self-sacrifice.
But the lines held and you returned
Corporeal witness to the upper regions
Uneasy on the horizontal plane.
And I lost you
Not to rock wall or flitting spree
Nor a harsh night of low mercury
But to another, closer danger.
A spinning compass took you elsewhere
New landscapes unknown to your senses,
Routes for a tentative step;
But the promise too of triumph

And of discovery.

So you left

Your heart roped to another, and not a line to say.

Now, summit-bound, I recall our years

And find some happiness in ascent,

The climb a consolation

A Berber pilgrimage

To a place where the atlas spreads beneath me

Plateaux of longing, gradations of loss,
Issouâl, Id Aissar, Aoulime.