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## Shark's Fin

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## Shark's Fin

*On their second attempt, in 2011, Conrad Anker, Jimmy Chin, and Renan Ozturk became the first climbers to summit Meru's Shark's Fin.*

I transfer weight onto a ten-ton slab  
of granite. It starts to move—surface fractures,  
loose rock, the dreaded House of Cards.

I tap the fragile surface—hollow flakes—  
drive a piton in—it holds. I promised  
Chai I wouldn't die. Leading Renan

and Conrad up this knife-edged pinnacle,  
to twenty-one thousand feet, where Shark's Fin slices  
heaven. Many have tried; not one has made it.

We push through wind chill, frozen fingers, numb toes,  
exhaustion, hunger, unrelenting snow—  
stuck in our tent, suspended from a ledge.

In the Tetons an avalanche swept me down  
two thousand feet at eighty miles an hour—  
*so this is how*, I thought, *I'm going to die*.

Renan outdid me: backcountry skiing,  
flew off a cliff, broke his skull,  
his neck, cut off half the blood-flow

to his brain, comatose.

He walked and spoke again. Conrad  
let him join this expedition.

Last night we nearly lost him—confused,  
speaking gibberish, like a stroke;  
no way to get him down.

Today he's climbing strong, leading us up  
the final stretch to Shark's Fin summit:  
you get a taste for this adrenaline.

Mount Meru, axis of the universe,  
source of the Ganges, circles through the night;  
above the Himalaya the stars kill.

*John Whitney Steele*

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JOHN WHITNEY STEELE is a psychologist, yoga teacher, assistant editor of *Think: A Journal of Poetry, Fiction, and Essays*, and graduate of the master of fine arts poetry program at Western Colorado University. His chapbook, *The Stones Keep Watch*, was published in 2021 by Kelsay Books. He lives in Boulder, Colorado, and loves hiking in the mountains.

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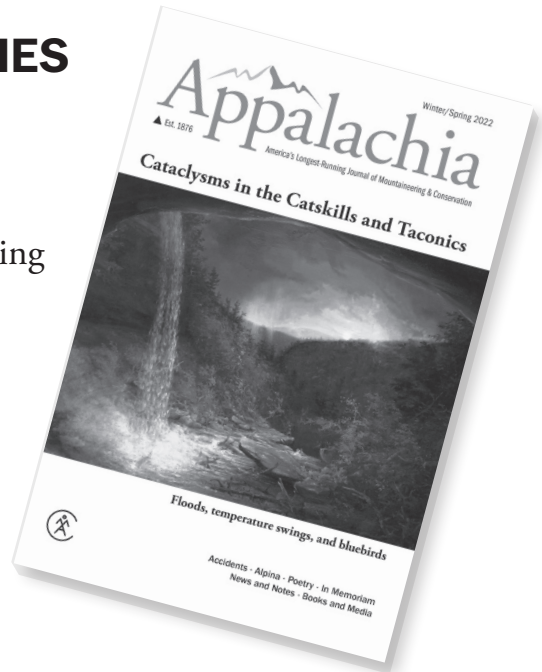
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