Between 5,000 and 12,000 Years After the Eruption

Laura Cresté

We lower into the cave system as a bucket
into a well. Cows lowing over our heads.

The water from the ceiling runs clean.
If this was your country, the guide explains,

the stalactites would grow long,
minerals building out. But this water is pure.

The ancient ceiling stipples with short nubs,
pips of cream on the edge of a cake.

I think of nipples and cows carting their milk
all over the island. I have to think more of myself

in this language. Thank you invokes gender, not
of the thanked but the thanker. I, a woman, thank you,

I say all day long. It is one of several words I know.
That and the menu sectioning up the cow.

How to say I'll take the milk but not the meat.
Give me the leather without the harm.

I want the marriage without property.
This, our life, without an end.

Laura Cresté is the author of *In the Good Years* (Four Way Books, 2025) and *You Should Feel Bad*, winner of a 2019 Chapbook Fellowship from the Poetry Society of America. In the Good Years received a Silver Medal from the North American Book Awards, was longlisted for the Nossrat Yassini Poetry Prize, named a finalist for the Paterson Poetry Prize, and is currently longlisted for the Massachusetts Book Awards. She holds an MFA from New York University and has received fellowships and other support from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, the Tin House Summer Workshop, the Community of Writers, Monson Arts, and the St. Botolph Club Foundation. Her work has appeared in *The American Poetry Review, Bennington Review, The Cortland Review, The Kenyon Review, Poetry Northwest, The Yale Review,* and elsewhere. She lives in western Massachusetts.

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