MAURA STANTON was born in 1946 in Minneapolis. She received an M.F.A. from Iowa in 1971, and currently teaches writing at the University of Richmond. Her poems have appeared in Poetry, Poetry Northwest, The New Yorker and many other magazines.

THE FIRST CHILD

I grow dumb: the snow crops
pine from the hill until only dark
bark flaws the white everywhere.
This is nowhere. The child knuckled
in my belly is no one, a muscle,
a blind fish nervous at its hook.
Each day it devours my speech
until I dream, surely I am a fish
beached somewhere on an iceberg.
This isn’t love. My husband
keeps his hands away, quoting
statistics: the trauma of young
wives in their first pregnancy.
He thinks I match some percent,
that I won’t jab our baby with long
hatpins or feed it ammonia.
Doesn’t he see how it puffs
within me, trying to get out?
How it nibbles my brain?
I want him to understand
how frost comes: to see white
fear wall me in like a glacier—
& see this child at my eyes
cracking its way to air.

CRABS

The new in-laws steam crabs
for my wedding, the aunts mumbling
how many kids can cram at her breasts?
Trapped in the crab-pot, red claws
clamp on each other’s eyes for safety.

95 Criticism