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This is to-day. A can experiment is that which makes a town, makes a town dirty, it is little please. We came back. Two bore, bore what, a mussed ash, ash when there is tin. This meant cake. It was a sign.

—Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*

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Wall Physics

Cheryl is a retaining wall. Gets cold these mornings, in her own shadow until afternoon. And no sweaters or blankets ample enough for a quarter-acre of river slate. Along her bottom, grass in tufts and clutches; holds its dew, brushes silver her lowest tiers. And this is only cold, more cold.

Cheryl contemplates utter cessation, Absolute Zero. There but for, she tells herself. At least my stones' atoms are dynamic. An inward attempt to further bestir: to cultivate kinetic energy is to cultivate heat. This daily disregard for Rule Number Two, energy's stubborn non-cultivability.

But, really, what else to do?

There is, of course, the matter of her primary function: retention. No small feat to prop a wooded hillside against gravity. And no small responsibility; that ranch below would stand no chance against the roll, the slide of land. At first, incursions of earth between her constituent parts—she being self-reliantly mortarless. In the first rains, some of the forest's loam oozed minutely through, she must admit. But Steadfastness and Heart are a wall's prerequisites. She shrugged and adjusted,

settled into her self.

Seasons of impermeability now under her belt. It's true, some of her elements have slid out of place, toppled into the grass. These send variously jeerings and pleas; some say escape, others ouster. Of some of them she thinks, Good riddance to bad, jostles her better parts down to better snugness. Others leave an unmanageable gap. These she leans toward, reaches for, longs to tuck back into herself. (If there is one thing a wall can do, she thinks, it is long.) But, truth be told, it is out of her hands; she is plates of slate and they are plates of slate.

Aside from the soil pressed against and held, there is one other relation, this one stone-to-stone: a run of stairs out from her shoulder. These too are settled and firm, their edges uncut but rounding now, from footfalls and rain. With morning still a long chill ahead, their canted stretch is Cheryl's sad vicariousness: the bottom two edge into sun. For Cheryl, a twinge of phantom warmth, almost almost there.

The Pines

Marlon Brando

Why are you laughing?

Did you—
meet the same life I have?

A town wherein the public land
forfeits by a development of billboards—
sinners impastoed on the sky,
fructiform in midday projection.
I met the cobbles.

A fountain accepting
a voluptuous woman, sure,
but not an ogling man, my friend,
importunate bone, the work of an isle-tracted union.

In the peasant wall. She will not
mind the revisions. The bounty, why
falling without you.

Andrea Fitzpatrick

The New World

Dearest Queen & Heart,

So many fish in blue water ocean blue flesh scales slick smooth languid eyes reaching pooling. Into dark numbers one living moving thing of decimated pieces still alive and rippled. Even after digested there were. So many oysters on the shore we climbed them like steps up the hillside shells hardened powder. Of bone white dust traced with black the inside of each step a pearl. White pearls crushed in our white teeth still same dust gritty. Sand centered oceans of flesh. Tho her arm slid up and over each razored shell darkened hide velvet sleeve oh mother oh. Thistled gardens on blue water smile razored arm smile lowered eyes dark between each shell.

Here is now cold. Her heart is luminal point red voice changing quite a child natives come. Beneath an inky smoke and sky all red caged. Raccoon caged bird bent head arm straight inviting. Smile reddened lips sanguine mouth mother oh mother vanishing throat pearled strand. Of white barreled heat oval shot warring grass lovely lovely pointed wood. Warring white

beach burnt water boat long fire. Hollow sigh sigh sigh loaded
gun trapping fur deus ex machina. Vessel whetted white hide
hidden heart breast of goose oh do I love thee. Thrushed songs
flushed out fever red cries in rain oyster white pearl crushed and
lapping blue.

I come all varnished to you beating hands knotted temple
gracing skies. All blue here there is land lush and covered. With
deerskin garden new and freshed here charted although no
industry we see. The make of something ghosted clean and
windowed. Crossed although we have no yet. Silo pictured is
well advised a gift. A gift oh mother mother oh the blue like
driftwood ashed as mothy wings pearl white the other red
retreating.

Oh Mother,
I Send My Love

Julia Johnson

Blue Anthropometry

The wind has gotten into itself.

The smudge-proof existence of us—

I hand over the curious lines

as if giving a speech.

Now the identity

of desire, bold and impossibly fractured,

breaks and presses against the face.

In this we are bound to wilderness,

and held there in heavy rain, the arm

up, and right, skipped mark of the speed

at which we move.

Daniel Grandbois

The Other Half

“I want to see how the other half live,” an ambitious, young wall mirror said.

In the succeeding years, it looked most everywhere it could, but whichever way it faced, it could not see backward through its own face.

Eventually, the less-than-young mirror got its wish. It grew eyes in the back of its head. That is, another mirror was hung across the hall.

“I had no idea,” said the mirror on reflection.

The other said nothing.

Pleasures

Perhaps because of the lingering heat or other atmospheric pressure, the global supply of sleep began to shrink, and sleep itself fundamentally changed its quality. We all complained, and it was scientifically proven, that drowsiness was now more brittle, like rubber seals and gaskets when they wear out. It was friable, dry, like sharp cheddar, a taste craved by some but anyway lacking the former creaminess of deep, blanket-laden slumber. People slept for a few minutes at a time, and strung the episodes out with periods of semi-wakefulness. All night long, old black and white movies played, the heroines of earlier decades looking so stiff now in their belted skirts, their hair crimped into waves. Bankers looked up from their desks at the sound of mobsters' cars; shiny little boys uttered insincere statements of adoration towards their on-screen fathers; the abandoned girlfriend shrieked as the madman advanced, when she would have done better to stay still and prepare to defend herself.

The same fate awaited other pleasures—the hand reaching out to fondle cloth, to pile apples in a bag. Even the desperate

scuttling of mothers behind the coal car, picking up clinkers to warm at least a corner of the baby's room, withered into caricature, the lust to accumulate or salve frayed into a chalky replica of itself, a dry going through the motions.

The husband she had long ceased to love was offered only the most unfleshy kiss when she left the house. At night she stayed up reading in the outer room until he went out who knows where. Formerly this had been only the last dry plug before some new flood, a torrent of carnality directed towards the new minister or the neighbor's brother. The undercurrent had always been there. But as the heat went on, and the headaches and complaints, even brushing her own hair meant nothing to her. Boys stopped flexing their muscles in the mirror. Quarters winking from the gutter could not attract takers.

The suppressed tide dried to a trickle, rocks in the cavern barely wetted, the whole experience an awkward fretting. Always there had been hope, and now there was only a scratchy delicacy.

Meg Rains

The Way to Represent Night

These are places where people piece
together their lives, inside this box

& that, a county line, a city limit. Rain blurs
past my window while wind flaps American

flags in all sorts of American towns. Hard
to tell silo smoke from clouds. It's the middle

of some day, some week, in some winter.
Fourteen hours from me to you. Home

toward home. Worlds dissolve
into a streetlight's green glow

& shadow. Train rolls.

Train rolls on.

Visitor

With you in this house, my face wears the numerous
crashes like badges. Under the floorboards a zoo

of vibrations from your basement music, lolling
on the turntable, volumes of a mystery novel series—

your tongue's divided, there's another, and I haven't
figured out how to tether you to anything.

If you were a rash I would sing; a tornado, roll
like a dog in your orange urgency. But you're

a jinx. So go on, drop on by—I'll keep my distance
front and center, igloo-vested, shoulder to the wheel.

