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For the Earth

Marden J. Clark

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For the Earth

To ashes, simply No.

—Emma Lou Thayne, *How Much for the Earth?*

I

We walked Third South on a springtime sabbath,
Watched the restless wash of sandbags
Man to man to perhaps a woman
To man, watched the flow of earth-
Rich water from Slate Canyon, tan,
Now contained by canyon walls
Of sandbags neatly stacked in haste

The work was mostly done, more people
Promenading than relaying sand.

But we admired the ordered relay
That tamed disorder; the irony
In floods that wash to people trouble
But wash them together in their trouble.

II

She's a strange earth these winters, sun
Buried above unflowing fog,
Bess's shrubs shrouded, buried
By snow that almost covers air-
Withered stalks of corn I failed
To bury last fall, snow that piles
Ever higher above the Squaw Peak
Trail where Rock and Maple and Slate
Fade out and up to smooth slope,
Withered by wind to ragged ridge.

The earth washed to drown Thistle,
 Drive rails through Billie's Mountain,
 Shift highways, scare Spanish Fork.
 Smaller Wasatch flows buried
 Or carried houses, streets, and people.
 But last year was not the last year.

A quirky earth we've come to know.
 Not firm as the mountains around us had seemed.
 Temperamental, a fractious mother,
 Live and sometimes even menacing.

Unwonted tears down the Wasatch
 Wash, out of control, even hers.
 St. Helens' burping and less modest
 Belches from El Chichon, the twitchings
 Of San Andreas' skin, quavers
 Along the Wasatch—as if in simple
 Runes she must remind us
 That for destruction steam or shrugs
 Are also great, and would suffice—

That she can think of suicide
 As we—eternal ice from fire:
 A dozen or so St. Helens in chain
 Reaction south along the spine
 Of continents, incontinent.
 Her twitching skin could really wrinkle,
 Move us in hours back to matter
 Unorganized, her hibernation.

III

This morning I plucked again my berries,
 Boysen, tartly sweet when dull,
 Bright Heritage, red, raspy, firm.
 Sometimes I fancy I really earn them:
 Planting, staking, pruning, chasing
 Manure, leaves and bluegrass clippings,
 Composting, spreading, running tubes
 To drip when roots are dry. Picking.

Heritage: let the name catch all,
All it will to tell me all
I really earn. Those berries come
In joyous chain from generous mother.
We echo then return in chain-
Reaction megatons.

So let her drip and belch and twitch.
We chain ourselves to outrage measured
In megas. Unless these waters can wash
Us all together we'll come to know
At last who wins—unless we really come
To know her: whose earth she is
And whose the fulness thereof.

—Marden J. Clark