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### to the body at calm

Alice Brand

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to the body at calm

if they didn't die of typhoid  
if they didn't die in childbirth  
if they didn't stiffen from frostbite  
or rot from jungle heat  
if they weren't drowned in floods  
if they didn't cramp from dysentery  
or choke from pneumonia  
or suffocate in sandstorms  
leaning into the night like remorse

they ruptured their backs  
they were crushed by stone, sliced in half  
paralyzed by lifting, dragging block after block  
to the cathedral doors  
for the marble ship locked in the lake  
to the Great and Wailing Walls  
they lost their balance climbing bamboo  
scaffolding or descending on it

how many would tear just in the climb  
just in the carving of the frieze,  
designing a cherub, etching milky ceremonial  
ceilings and painting them with gold leaf  
the dizziness that comes from looking up  
when everything else falls away  
and you are unprotected from the belief  
in the value of great things except

human life, abundant and trivial.  
it is not meant to last  
it doesn't have to  
there are always another 1000  
to whip along with the obelisk, pink and smooth  
the guide says that what makes it remarkable  
is that it was carved from  
one unblemished piece of granite  
just when the earth closed over 10 million  
Africans became slaves  
quarried and lashed together

I remember pictures of coal miners  
interred with the stones that still warms  
their families. the mourning period  
lasts no more than a pulse  
but for the infinitesimal  
moment that we are today here

*by Alice Brand*