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Uncle Earl's Wind River Ranch

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Uncle Earl's Wind River Ranch

It's salt, not rain, fat elk cows need. Uncle Earl
hauls salt blocks up from town and dumps them, wedged
by boulders licking tongues can't tumble.
Elk wander down to graze his slope. Wild elk
never nod, big bellies swaying, calves on their way,
most snow melted that far down in gusty winds
that wild. Uncle Earl looks up maybe once a day,
takes elk for granted and boulders about him,
a million years of rocky mountain balanced
except stones that tumbled, an avalanche of chance.

Like that one massive as his barn, a stone
he built his wide corral around. Look at those
up there, a thousand boulders propped on slate
and sand that slides, erodes, steep ledges cracked
and tilted where cougars make their homes,
scratching gravel to widen cracks for caves,
arching their long big-muscled backs.

by Walter McDonald