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## One of the Martin Company

Dian Saderup

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# One of the Martin Company

Dian Saderup

The cart was green timber that warped,  
 split, spilled her home on the silt  
 north bank of the Platte, the iron  
 cookpan, tentcloth, Mama's Welsh carved  
 music box tinkling in the mud  
 "flow gently sweet . . ." Then it stopped.  
 Herricks took the soiled stiff bedding;  
 hundred pounds weevil rotted grain,  
 fifty of beans, a shank of salt beef  
 she put in a company supply wagon,  
 carried the baby Etta  
 in a makeshift sling on her waist.  
 When the sand wore through her  
 thin-soled ankle shoes, rubbed the balls  
 of her feet raw, at night she tied  
 rags on them, tight to squeeze the pain,  
 whispered: "I'm going there, I'm going there,"  
 pulled the rags tighter. September  
 the air went frost. At night  
 the tarpaulin and three blankets  
 did not stop the cold; Etta cried  
 from cold. She kissed the baby  
 with cracked lips, warmed the forehead,  
 pressed the body tight between her breasts,  
 and listened to wolves. The first snow  
 came in skifts thin-cruste'd over frozen  
 wagon ruts and three opened graves  
 of summer immigrants, scattered  
 broken bones white with brittle snow.

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Dian Saderup is an English major at Brigham Young University.

Then the snow came hard. She walked on  
 clubbed-numb ankles, Etta tied  
 to her waist, small fingers blue then  
 white, then hands, feet, the frost crawled  
 into knees, into infant thighs;  
 she rubbed the baby with a blanket,  
 with snow, wrapped her in arms  
 that night beneath the tarpaulin  
 beside the Sweetwater and listened  
 to the wolves cry till light when  
 Anna Herrick came, pried away the stiff body,  
 spooned the snow with a soup ladle,  
 buried Etta. Wagons jolted her  
 over frozen October Wyoming,  
 her mind in gentle spasms:  
 Going there, going there; down  
 the willow gullies of the Wasatch  
 to a desert not gone yet to roses,  
 where a City Creek midwife  
 and her husband sawed the white feet  
 turned black, wrapped the stumps in linen  
 that did not squeeze the pain;  
 "It is all right now," the midwife said,  
 "Over." And she sat close by for some days,  
 touching the woman's hair, forehead,  
 spooning her tea and milk-sopped bread;  
 listening one morning she first spoke  
 whispering hoarse with voice cords raw  
 from that time in bitter air:  
 I lost my Mama's music box.