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The Wasatch

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The Wasatch

From northern reach to southern stretch the Wasatch
 Capture cloud cargoes lifted by Pacific
 Winds from spouting whales and fish in flight,
 From drying bodies on beaches at Malibu
 Or sweating *in labore veneris* on Mexican sands:
 All vapors of the deeps and shallows congregating
 Around Nebo or Twin Peaks, swirling and churning,
 Metamorphose into dropping rain and snow.

The sculpture of the landscape came from winds
 Bringing the rains that dredged valleys and crenelated
 Crests: sharpening skylines over ages and draining
 Detritus from a thousand gouged gullies
 Onto Basin plains that sank in silence
 As the Wasatch reared skyward on faulted scarps
 Beside them: isostatic clash in contrast—
 A thousand feet of uncompacted sediment
 Westward and Cottonwood granite to the east—
 While equalizers work away: granitic
 Feldspars decaying to clay, freed quartz
 Globules, and mafic minerals washing to plains,
 Rains scouring the mountains' stone face.

Crystals are living things, as mountains are,
 Conceived in dark recesses of the mother world
 To grow in slow gestation from the central heat
 And pressure of the womb, in genesis controlled
 By blueprint forces sure as DNA.

The Wasatch Mountains live, and living nurture
 Other lives—forests and fields—an equal
 Footing afforded weeds and flowers. Each patch
 Of land, aspiring to its climax, starts with weeds
 And builds superior forms to ultimate goals.
 Old fir trees topple or fires fell them, and life
 Blossoms at bottom again in lichens—fungus
 And alga bound siblings—and growing once more
 Toward trees with all forms fighting to survive
 By schemes devious and intricate: hybridizing,
 Flying, or playing dead for generations,

Tolerating salt or tasting sweet
 Or bitter—whichever advances dumb needs,
 Perceived without brain but purposeful as humans
 Seeking their ends: winged maple seeds in flight,
 Exploding pods of spores hurled windward,
 Seeds riding free in bellies of birds or in burrs
 On matted hides.

From lily to columbine,
 Ergot to evergreen, Wasatch is home ground:
 Background too, feeding and breeding other lives—
 Animal: miniature to mastodon whose bones, grounded
 Now, is extinct as the lake whose shores it lumbered by.

A working arrangement, mostly good, plants
 With animals—never sure though: think
 Of the ergot growing by Provo River and remember
 Rye fields in France and fingers of peasants
 Rotting off—(a caution: slipped symbiotic disc).

The Wasatch, alive still, living and giving life,
 Wind breaker and cloud catcher, predestining
 Utah's scene: cities in unique configuration
 On a Front, a condensation promising ballets
 And symphonies, plays and players in a world
 Not possible from sprawling towns scattered
 At random, mass lacking and centerless. Saddle
 An atlas and go see. But be back at sunset's
 Red westering, valleys shadowed but Timp's
 Top glowing from snow; and listen to sun-
 Sizzle drift into darkness and moondrone
 While star chants rise silent over the Front:
 Sustaining and shielding man—the last animal.

—Edward L. Hart