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## Wyoming

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## Wyoming

Rain insisted at the edges of the cloth flapping  
 At the hungry ribs. The trail passed through the swollen  
 Wagon howling at its exit like a half-born child.  
 Wet, brown calico glued the woman  
 To the wooden seat, her neck a blue vase,  
 Thin, delft. Her baby was a troubled poem  
 Sleeping on the floor. She felt like rain, she was  
 Becoming drops of water, the drops were streaming  
 Through her flesh. Oxen held the water  
 On contracting backs. She felt the left front  
 Wheel slip on wet rock she'd seen  
 Glistening ahead. The left rear hoof  
 Of the left ox slipped on the rounded edge  
 Of the rock and his haunches dropped as the hoof scraped  
 Down the glinting surface. The baby cried.

[In this space there are no words,  
 Only wind and rain and edges,  
 An infinity of edges, of planes  
 That overlap and slide across each other.  
 They are the color of the desert.]

And then the world stopped.  
 The rocks beneath the wheels softened then disappeared.  
 The wagon became a boat on smooth water  
 As the falling ox floated up then forward.

She felt her milk come in,  
 Felt the hard fullness contract,  
 Felt the milk mix with rainwater  
 In the fabric of her brown dress.  
 The rain running through her slowed then stopped  
 As her flesh came together.

She drug her wet skirt over the seat  
 Into the back of the wagon.  
 She unbuttoned the backwards dress  
 And the baby climbed into her lap.

## II

The night before, they'd stopped the wagons early.  
She'd unyoked the oxen, washed clothes,  
And eaten breakfast biscuits.  
She and the baby had gone to bed in the wagon box  
While hunched clouds simmered in the west.  
Now morning light rubbed their fretted surface,  
Fabric on a washboard.  
Yellow clover, newer for the rain,  
Fed on ground assumed by other wheels.  
She held the baby on her lap  
And pulled the smooth black shoe.  
She hooked the five buttons,  
The baby's flesh crowning  
The top of the shoe at the final closure.  
They stood.  
She had never felt so tall.  
Not even the mountains were taller.

—Kathryn R. Ashworth