American Footnote: Pioneer Woman

This is a view of American history: a slow continent unrolling at the pace of tired oxen. You watch from the back flap of a covered wagon headed west. your green and carefree days fall one more day beyond recovery with every sundown.

The western trek never moves west for you. Not for you’re the hurrah of mountains on the sky, only prairie, folding and folding itself into nostalgia.

Lashed to the wagon, your grandmother’s carved bureau, your delicate china, destined like you for a sod shanty wherever the oxen give out. You’ll scrape dry alkaline soil to sow flower seeds from rainy eastern gardens, fuss your daughter into starched pinafores against the west’s odds. She’ll ride bareback anyway.

You are forever caught in a split vision. The others go west facing west, or are born west, giving themselves utterly. You alone never quite arrive, riding west as you did, facing east.

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