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The Loveliest Country of Our Lives

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The Loveliest Country of Our Lives

The trains crawl from the stations
slow as the locomotives
in last century's tintypes.
North Dakota stretches away, a long dream
of wheat. We sleep as the cars hurtle
forward between fields and the memory
of fields. . . .

At Glendive we awaken,
stare into the moon-dry arroyos
as if for the question our dreams
kept trying all afternoon to ask,
like passengers who gesture through
plate glass to children smiling
and shrugging from the platforms.

The question had something to do
with buttes rising and falling
like waves of an inland sea,
the warm Pliocene of our recollection:

What was it we were going to become?

The cottonwood leaves go on quaking,
noddng agreement with every assertion
of the wind. The question blends imperceptibly
with its answer like a life continuing,
an ocean of fields being slowly drained
of wheat.

We shift position, the moon
fixed in mid-heaven, instructing travellers
in the reliability of light. The train
crosses the Missouri on its steel trestle;
the water is rippling and wheat-colored,
a dream of river with an answer
for every memory of fields.

We are passing
through the loveliest country of our lives.

—*Carolyn Wright*