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Updraft and Breathing with Boulders

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Updraft

Carol Barrett

Outside Mother's Café, a man in waders
and hoodie blows leaves from the patio,
jetpack strapped to his back

like an astronaut's gear. Any moment
he could rise with loose billows
of aspen into the bloom of clouds.

I sip my out-of-season berry smoothie,
wondering what heights might be
imagined for ordinary leaves.

Near the window, two women perch
on high stools, one in dreadlocks
and brown leggings, the other's coif

ribboned with grosgrain. They are
trading stories, sympathy mulching
the tendrils of words. Outside

our guardian gardener stoops to untangle
bits of crinkled paper from the rounded
clumps of grasses and prickly pines,

hitches a wide shovel to his shoulder
and departs. Thus we make our small
order of things, our breakfast of what

has been and what may be, eyes
on the sky, its wind-stoked
summons, its dogged waywardness.

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Breathing with Boulders

Carol Barrett

Skies undulate with the landscape
here – plains curving like blown glass
while tumbleweed skip the road,

bump along like gyroscopes
catching in the sage. Patches of snow
still cling to earth where rocks

shelter them from the afternoon
sun. Ahead, three horsemen, and dogs
guiding cattle down the gulch.

I slow, then slow again, keeping
pace with the land where I have come
to let the losses of the last year

roll out, their shadows lending
a cautious look back. Already
in the rear-view mirror the clouds

have turned steel blue. Now the cows
wend across my path, despite
running dogs barking commands.

I slow, and slow. One chocolate cow
meanders in front of the car, stops.
I nod. I wait, the revenant gap

between this one and a swaying
comrade growing. I allow
the space she has signaled, grace

seeping into my braked body
like a damp rain on the prairie.
I breathe with the boulders.

Finally, she resumes her journey,
deliberate as the wind on Highway 31.
Another follows. Another. I watch

the whole lumbering parade.
Such are the guides I am given,
timing exquisite as lichen

tracing patterns in the rock.