

Crèche

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Staunching blood with her rough hem,
she watches as he blinks out darkness,
arching for better air beneath the dull
gaze and fetid breath of oxen and ass.

Rubbed clean, she sees in his eyes
not love but need and gently palms his
wet head dry, sticky with birth dough,
and brings his mouth to her small breast.

Coaxing, she seeks to firm the seal around
her nipple where his tongue rasps cat-like,
each suck's pain undoing the sublime
warmth of his breath on her cold chest.

She knows she has received her promise:
deliverance from Joseph's coarse kindness,
the smell of dung straw and smoke, the hard
laughter rising from Bethlehem's full inns.