

NEWBORN IN ZION NATIONAL PARK

CODY LUMPKIN

—for Jade Wade

In other parks, I had passed
toddlers on hikes strapped

to the backs of their pack mule
fathers, transported like little

Cleopatras, their white pudgy skin
saved from burning by sun shades

and paddler's hats, the slather
of sunblock emanating from them.

But I had never seen one so young,
so fresh out of the womb at the edge

of wilderness and commerce, asphalt
and sandstone. Its parents not letting

pregnancy, birth, and its expected
adjustments get in the way of a good trip.

At the Big Bend of the Virgin River,
where tourists hop off the bus tram

to crane their necks until they hurt
just to begin to see the sky

above the pillars of rock, a newborn nurses
on a bench in full view, no towel

covering it for the sake of some false
modesty. No one seems to care

in this amphitheater of the vertical.
The mother, her nipple brown like sandstone

after rain, had lifted her sweaty shirt
as a plateau lizard clung to the warmth

of a nearby boulder. With eyes closed,
her hair stuffed behind a wet bandanna,

she rocks the child. Even though the river,
swollen with snow melt, thunders past

the bus spot, I hear her humming,
a low rumble of her own determination.