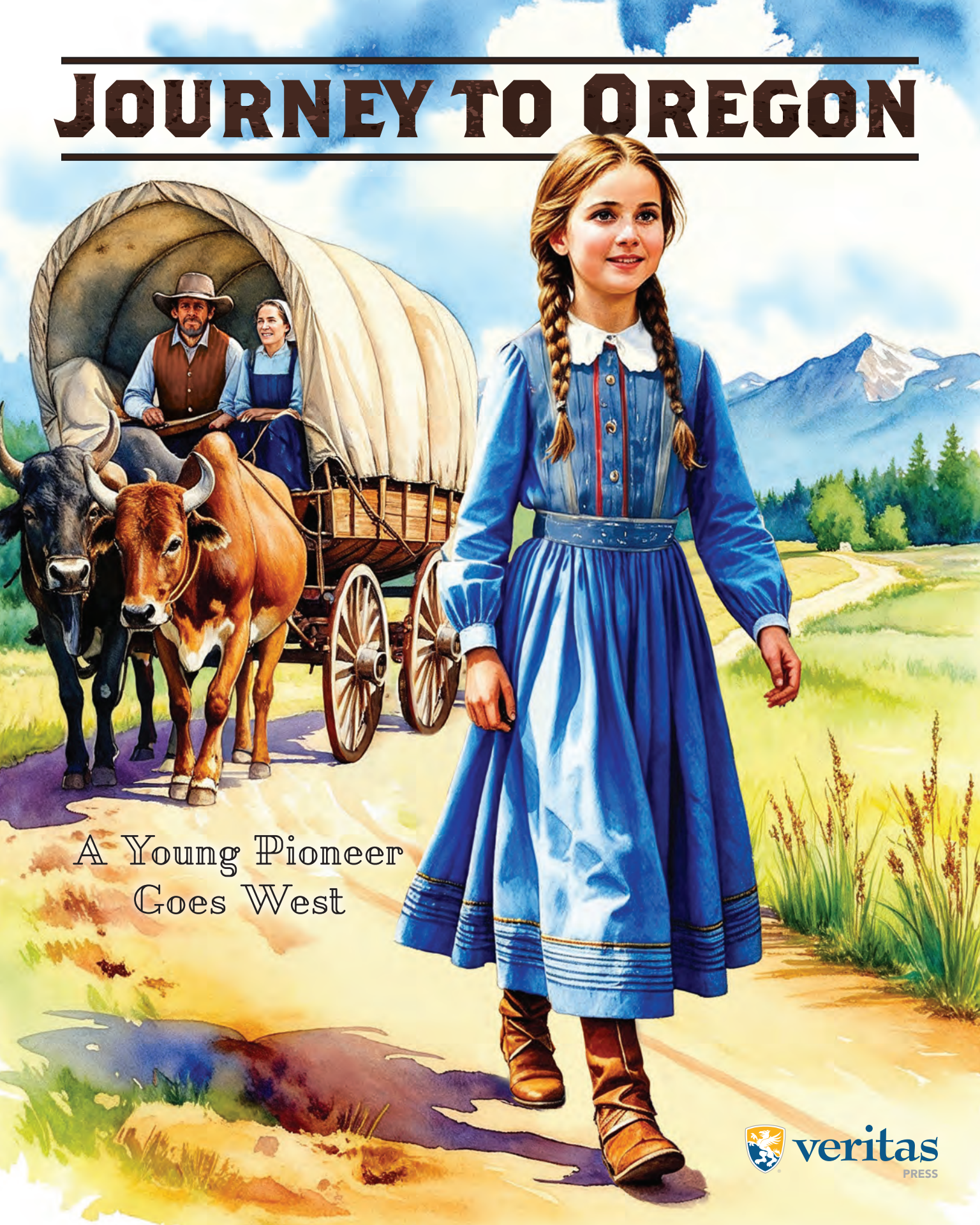
Journey to Oregon



A Young Pioneer Goes West

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A Young Pioneer Goes West

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Amelia Stewart Knight

In 1853 a young mother left Iowa with her family to move west to Oregon. She traveled by covered wagon with her husband and seven children. Her name was Amelia Stewart Knight, and she wrote down many details about their adventures. Amelia gave birth to her eighth child on the trek. She was so relieved when their challenging journey finally ended!

This book is a fictional retelling of their trip, as seen through the eyes of one of Amelia's daughters, whose name was Lucy. Let's imagine what Lucy would have written in her own diary during their journey west to Oregon . . .

Sunday, April 8, 1853

"Lucy, Lucy!" I hear Mama calling me from inside the house. I am outside making a bed for Tabitha, my cat, in our wagon. Mama sounds sad. I don't know why. Tomorrow we leave for Oregon, and I thought she wanted to go.

We live in Iowa. Mama says that she and Papa are tired of the hard Iowa winters. Papa is a doctor. He thinks Oregon will be better for our health. It seems like a big adventure! Many families are going to Oregon to make a better life. Grandma and Grandpa say maybe they will come, too, after we are settled.

We are going to live in our wagon for the next few months. Can you imagine? The eight of us and all of our things in one wagon? Well, not all of our things. Papa has been selling our linens, housewares, and furniture that will not fit. I asked him if we will be coming back to Iowa for the rest, but he said we aren't coming back.



Mama filled big barrels with food. She packed our dishes, pots, pans, and bedding in a trunk. She does not know if we can buy things to set up a house. Papa says we will have 1,000 pounds of food in our wagon. Our barrels are loaded with coffee, bacon, rice, beans, flour, and hardtack. We even put our stove in the wagon. It takes up a lot of space, but Mama does not want to cook on just an open fire in Oregon. There's barely enough room for us, but I made sure there is room for Tabitha. Good thing cats like small spaces.





Hardtack

Hardtack is a dense, dry biscuit made from flour, water, and salt. It wasn't very tasty, but because it doesn't spoil easily, it was an ideal food to pack for a long journey.


WASHINGTON
Oregon City
MONTANA
OREGON
IDAHO
Boise
WYOMING
Casper

How far did the pioneers travel?

Lucy's family traveled west from Iowa to Oregon. Very likely, they would have chosen to follow the Mormon Trail across Nebraska, joining up with the Oregon Trail in Wyoming. The Oregon Trail itself (the red line below) was over 2,000 miles long!



Saturday, April 9, 1853

Today is the day! Today we leave for Oregon! I could barely sleep last night. My head was racing with questions. Will we be safe? Will I make new friends? What will our new house be like? Did we pack enough?



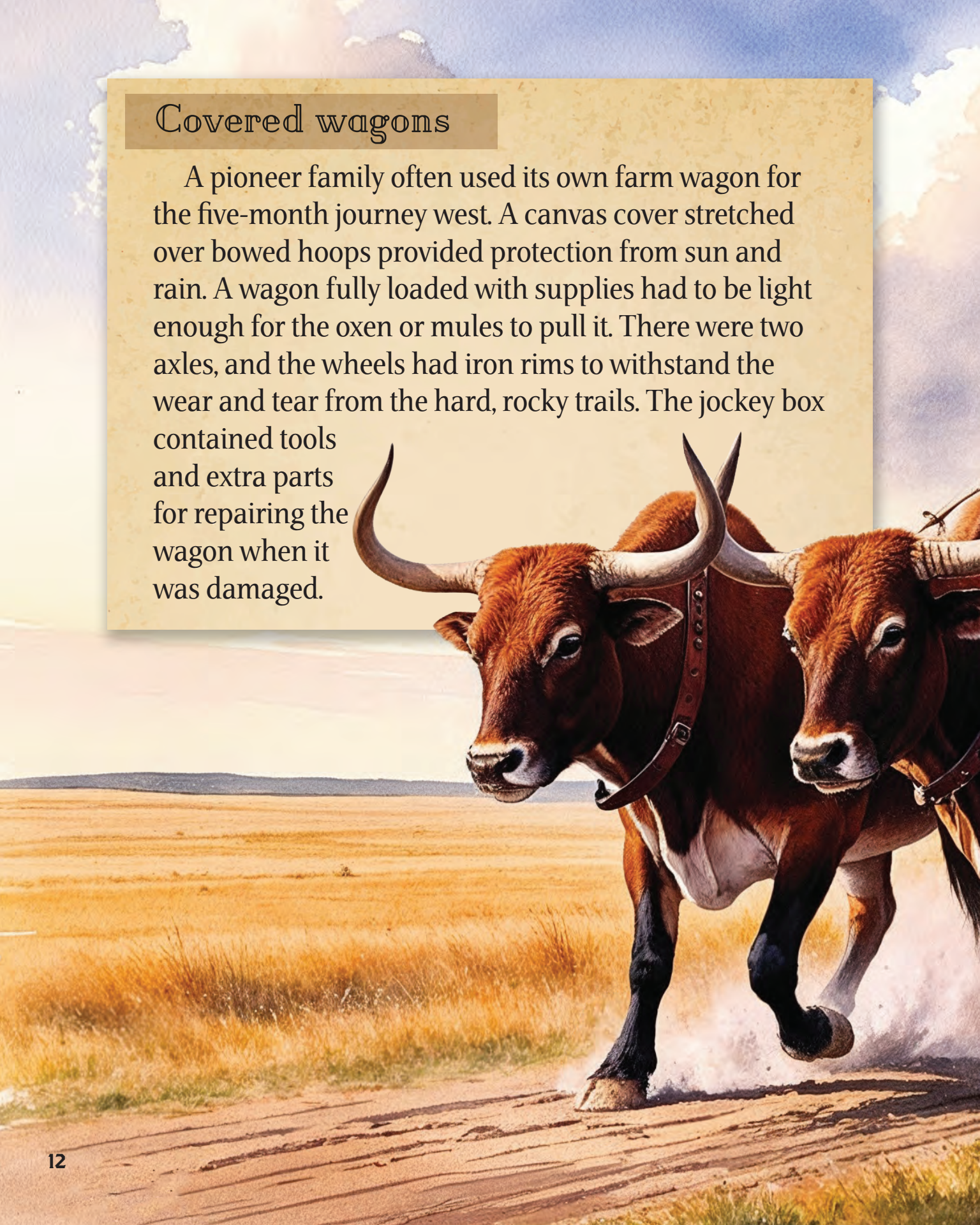
My heart is racing. I have been awake since dawn just waiting for Mama and Papa to say we are ready to leave. We have all been rushing around to make sure we have everything. Friends and neighbors have come to bid us goodbye.

We set off at 11:30. As the oxen pull us away to join the other families in the wagon train, I look back at our house one last time. I wonder if I'll ever see it again.



Covered wagons

A pioneer family often used its own farm wagon for the five-month journey west. A canvas cover stretched over bowed hoops provided protection from sun and rain. A wagon fully loaded with supplies had to be light enough for the oxen or mules to pull it. There were two axles, and the wheels had iron rims to withstand the wear and tear from the hard, rocky trails. The jockey box contained tools and extra parts for repairing the wagon when it was damaged.




cover
bows
wagon bed
jockey box
axle assembly
iron tire

Monday, April 11, 1853

In the last two days, we have traveled over 19 miles. Today we went 11 miles and camped in a school house we found. My brother Jefferson and I have the mumps. It is cold and rainy outside, and inside the wagon is not much better. I wish I was back in my bed in Iowa.



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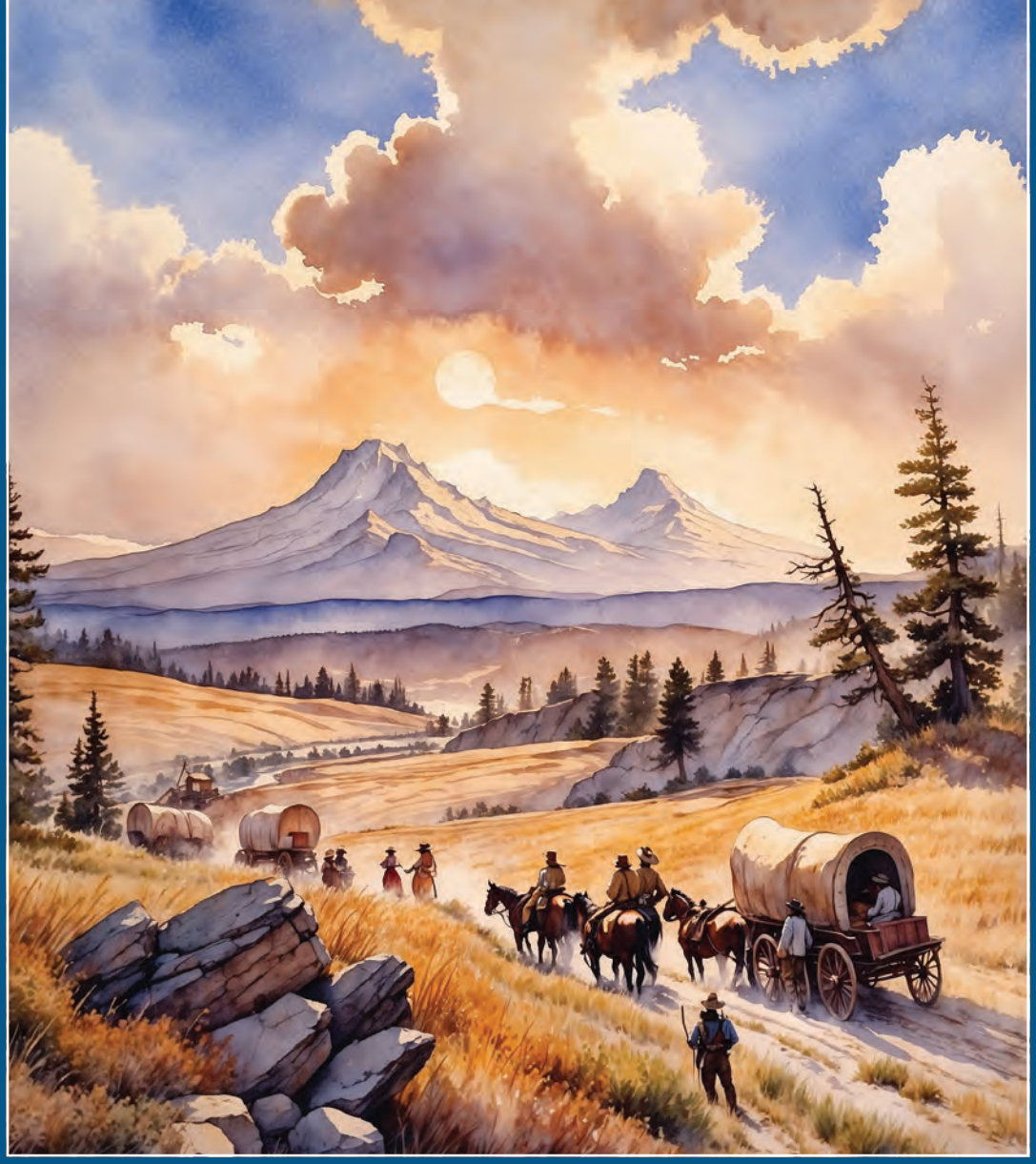

Westward Ho! Join Lucy and her family as they pack their covered wagon and hit the trail. During the long and difficult journey on the Oregon Trail, they will face many challenges: sickness, dangerous terrain, river crossings, and more. But Oregon and a new life await them!

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