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Man with Lantern, Approaching

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MAN WITH LANTERN, APPROACHING

from a painting, anonymous, circa 1920

At first, from so far away, he could
have been a firefly, only
the heart-glimmer of his flame
visible in the darkness. The cone of light
he traveled in we were blind to,
like dusk when it irretrievably has gone,
the night's unseen penumbra.

But there were stars then, a feathery edge
of timber on the foothills,
and the clay road leading out
across the meadow. We watched
a long while as he came toward us,
hauling the flicker of his lantern,
the bright slice of dirt he walked on.

We saw as well how he carried a blackness
impenetrable as tar, how the stars went out
around him and the night closed in
like a great and silent mouth, and how—
just as he passed the fence gate—we could see
only him in a spiral of brightness and shadow,
how he was many feet aloft, but walking and smiling,
just as though he were of this earth.