Acquiring a Love of Nature

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Acquiring a Love of Nature

Things stand out when you’re a kid stashed in the backseat of a Nash parked at a beer joint
while a mountain storm picks up near Big Bear outside San Berdoo, where you’ve been waiting
alone in the hushed, glazed lot for what seems to you like hours because it has been,
with nothing better to watch than the drifting road behind you headed glad away.
The car’s rear window merges the reflections of blinking signs with your snow-swathed view:
A pink neon martini on the unopening bar door burps three pink bubbles
that head west to the timber, three kings hunting for Kingdom Come, braving the blizzard,
scouting for a creche beneath an unlikely spruce and then, snap!, they’re back in their glass.
Snow blinds the sorry Rambler
as the rosy Magi relaunch,
and they’re gone for good.

Now all you’ve got left is ears,
radar-sharp, tracking anything
that might make a move
outside your four-door snowball—
but there’s just the darkness, humming
like it always does
when you listen very hard.
Only later you hear winter
stars and star-struck trees
harmonizing on that drone,
caroling, maybe, for Christmas,
or to keep the night
from caving in, or to raise
such a transcendental ruckus
that the obscured bar exploses in a short, loud burst
of music and laughter because
he’s come out to you!

The amber bouquet of beer
and cigarettes warms up the car
when your guilty dad
plops down in the driver’s seat
and reaches for the radio
just in time to hear
Roy Orbison warbling

Pretty paper, pretty ribbons
of blue, the same blue

dhat glows at the heart of snow,
or the blue you glimpse in the trees
as the car lights turn

toward home and a hundred
more ways to wait, that pale, odd blue
some evergreens are.