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Acquiring a Love of Nature

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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

explodes 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

that 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.