

*Charlie Langton*

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

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.