

Detour

“If the stars should appear one night
in a thousand years, how would men
believe and adore . . .”

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Rushing past the night on I-81,
caught in the arterial throb
of getting somewhere in my machine,
I heard the mountain whisper:

leave the highway, come to the sky.

At first I wouldn't listen,
for destination had its claws
in me, but at Harrisonburg,
it must have fallen asleep.

Onto route 33 I angled,
perked with strong coffee
and the thought of a cigar, rock
and roll adding to the rhythm.

I began to trace the snaky curves
up Lewis Mountain, alert to deer
browsing along the top of that
dark and ancient Blue Ridge.

Then I turned off Hendrix
mauling his guitar, the hum
of my pickup's tires balancing
the light clicking of the engine.

At one lookout, the silence
kept hiding in great swells
of sharp wind racing
through the oaks and maples.

Below me the city glittered
like a galaxy fallen
from the sky, electrical indulgence
sucked from the earth's heart.

As my engine cooled, I thought of the deer
my own lights had startled,
their initial blindness as I exploded
the darkness, and I could not escape

my part in such madness of light,
for I had only to look up
to understand the terrible waste
of such bright and useless miracles.

Justin Askins