

## Night Weight

There's no other way to say it:  
we're lost.

Retracing our steps for the fourth time,  
the sun long since extinguished behind  
the escarpments, we find ourselves

in the same rocky intersection as before.  
As we clamber over boulders, squeeze

through crevasses in the desert landscape,  
I think of the trail mix crumbs and water bottle  
in my backpack, measuring the chill

on my face, wondering:  
*could we really survive the night?*

Odds were: yes. And of course,  
we'd been lost plenty of times before.

Three hundred miles to the southwest  
and a few weeks younger, I'd wound us  
up a steep cliff side, slipping around

shadowy statues of deer before realizing  
we were on the wrong road. Once back

at ground level and on the right one, the night's  
darkness was too deep, too implacable.  
We crept along the dusty caliche

at a snail's pace, our headlights revealing a couple  
yards of chalky rock and brush before

dissolving into the inky emptiness that stretched up  
to a fingernail of moon illuminating only  
the most threadbare rag of cloud.

Miles led to monstrous cows glaring at us  
in the middle of the road. When they

finally moved, I got out to read a sign, only for cactus barbs  
to claw at my calves, only to find the words eroded  
from the metal and from our throats

as frigid fear gripped us as tightly as she  
held the wheel. Two months of

road-tripping, and this was the first instant  
I realized it was actually possible to die  
in the desert, to simply disappear

into the night like a dream. Nothing spoke save  
the wheels grinding on the ground until

a red-eyed rabbit blocked our passage, zig-zagging  
to spite us as lights appeared in the rearview,  
a lone truck baring down on us,

the murderer in this dime-store story. We couldn't  
run the rabbit over—though we may be

killed we will not kill—so we sank off to the shoulder to  
let the truck whoosh by in a tunnel of gravel and  
dust. Just then, a side road, a sign:

our campsite emerged, and relieved laughter mixed  
with margarita mix and campfire glow—

*... Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love—*

I'm jolted back to our present predicament by  
the off-key echo of an 18<sup>th</sup>-century hymn.  
The voices, though earnest, were failing

to coalesce, but the night's cape was torn.  
We pass the group of worshippers;

hands point the way, the trail flattens out,  
the parking lot comes into view,  
the road snakes back to Moab.

Later, at Miguel's Baja Grill, we clasp  
hands across the table over plates of

sopping enchiladas suizas, smiling so much  
it hurts, the physicality of relief as surging  
as the adrenaline pulse of terror.

She admits her stomach had sunk upon hearing  
the hymn—*damned to hell after all*, she joked—

but belief was beside the point. As it rippled out  
that song had been a sacrament sweeter  
than wine, an ember the void of night

could not quench, the sound from those lungs  
reminding us what's lost is nothing

to what's found.