

ELLIOTT HIGHWAY

Friday, after lunch, we tried heading north.

We turned the car loose to pursue its shadow,
like a raindrop crawling the wrong way.

Our filament of road draped from the treeline brow
of one bald dome to the next, through taiga,

moraine, seven thousand years of huddled trunks,
out to the sea ice and the unreadable wilderness.

Enormous laboriously seething clouds towered up white
to deny the sun across all the river drainages;

they couldn't manage it, though; what were they thinking?
They were just visiting from the other wilderness,

where our parents left us, where Jesus withdrew,
where the bear mauls and the lines are always drawn.

Both lanes empty most of the way. At each silent vista
the limestone talus horizon miraculously rose again, despite

the unfinished maps, and the irrelevant stories, and the buckshot
signs, and two dewlapped souls who saw us for what we were.

But we turned back only seventy-eight miles out,
where the long asphalt syllable finally stammered its coda:

runt spruce, tundra sedge, graveled floes, braided
distance, a few caverns and crevasses of cyan sky.