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Billy Albright
A Letter Left by Lew Welch, May 1971

Last night, as the sleet rattled against
my cabin roof, and my hand shook steadily
from too much coffee and too little food,
I heard the final snap of that thread
from which I've dangled for years.
A soft click, Gary, like a light
switch flipped to OFF, or the even
softer crackle of the bulb's extinguishment.

And I saw myself . . . as if my spirit had ridden
the breath of a *wichasha wakan*, his ceremonial
smoke offered to the wind. I drifted skyward
to a Sierra ridgeline and into the shelved rock
of her lair: a cougar, whose litter suckled
nothing from the emptied teats. Too weakened
to hunt, she could not survive
the stress of the next cold night.

And I saw myself a part of this ring
of bone, knowing the *wichasha wakan* and I
and the cougars were always one. Hidden somewhere
among the rocks, the ghost of Hui-k'e teases,
"Who do you think you are,
the emperor's son Mahasattva?"

By noon, Gary, I shall kneel at her side
in the clear stream of it all, flowering and opened.
As she partakes of my offered flesh,
I'll growl harmony to her mealtime prayers.