

## Astronomy for Beginners

You were eight and fishing for planets and stars, slopping  
a bucket of rain into the back yard.

You were waiting for cloudless dark, expecting  
the pinpoint reflections of Rigil Kentaurus or Mars  
to crystallise under your nose, or a constellation –  
whole and in tact – to glaze the surface

like a web of frost. Or what if the moon  
grew hard and dense in the water's depths  
like some knuckle of dinosaur bone – you'd need  
a landing net. But only Polaris proved itself  
in the liquid lens, then dissolved  
when you lifted it out on your fingertip.

A Russian telescope didn't help:  
some camera obscura inside the tube  
flipped the map of the galaxy upside down;  
in the peephole eyepiece, families dangled from ceilings  
like bats, and sheep hung from green clouds  
by their hooves. You were thirty by now.

Tired of the stake-out, tired of panning  
for sunspots and fool's gold you traded  
starlight for bird life, birds with their costumes  
and songs and shows. Once, in a shoulder of sand  
on Windermere's west shore, a dunnoek curtsied  
while eating bread from your open hand.

Old brightnesses, old loves. And now you're  
scanning again for omens and signs, apple bobbing  
for hyper giants and white dwarves, calling down  
deep space onto a blank page, trawling  
for angels and black holes with a glass jar, knowing  
we're dying, knowing we'll never make it that far.

Where did that tin of luminous stickers go?  
And the solar system mobile spinning  
on near-invisible thread? When she left home  
you crashed out on your daughter's bed and woke  
in a Navajo cave, a remote language of light  
coming steadily into creation overhead.

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