

Dark Energy

Dixie Partridge

*"One of the newest, most daring hypotheses,
is that the explanation lies somewhere weird, near
yet far: in extra dimensions. As in the land of Narnia . . ."*
—Charles W. Petit, on yet unexplained mysteries of the
universe, "Science & Society," U.S. News and World Report

Mathematicians say the universe is a leaking wonder
of heat and cold: immense pressures
sucking and exhaling, not elegant
as they'd imagined . . . "preposterous."
Above our hilled skyline: an indigo fluorescence
lines a vapor trail, man's faint longevity
streaking like a mote of stellar dust,
a sub-atomic comet. As Mars comes visible,
a random arc in thought
brings *dark horse* to mind—
and the image of black traces against snow
the winter my father took me to the cutter races,
a hard-packed track sliced by blades
until ground bled through.
The winning horse, my father's favorite,
was onyx black, eclipsing champions,
all melodrama and muscled movement.

Out there, the anti-gravity of dark matter
ever expands the unknown vast . . . amazing
and no more amazing than this shadow universe
of nightfall, where reading of dark energy
after dusk, fifty years (or just moments)
since those winter races,
I've been pushed back through a narrow tack of time
until what opens out are the small nebulae
of my father's frosty breaths
that rose in a rhythm like my own,
both of us reddened with excitement and cold,
the hooves in my heart bearing down too soon
on the yellow flag of finish.

Visible from Here

Dixie Partridge

After the First Acres Sell

I put down the phone and stare at nothing,
everything of my farm past settled into a moment
like colors pushed back through a prism
gone singular and clear:
Hill farmland of my father's and grandfather's birth,
our mural childhoods . . . sold piecemeal.
My brother's long-distance
grief, my own and my sisters' cleaving
to the native speech of stones;
days coming back in a clamor of rock-picking;
short growing seasons of heat
and stream irrigation; the nearly dry creekbed,
the faint *om* of cobbles coming through an ice trace.
Out my windows now, over Horse Heaven Hills
from one white cloud
roots of the lowering sun enlarge
until colors like a whole brass chorus spread.
I go out to stand antiqued in it.
As light turns flushed, a fresco
calicoes into being, bright and shadow flicker
in cottonwoods like a second coming . . .
 slumped farm buildings straighten and mend,
 and rising along hill pasture:
 the fluid forms of horses.

Vitae

Dixie Partridge

Clearing the Farmhouse Attic for My Siblings

Lost stories stir up with the dust,
accented in Swedish: the voyage
and train rides bringing Grandmother west;
another linking Grandpa Lee's drowning
to a card shark and a debt.
Down narrow stairs we maneuver old trunks
and frames, a wooden 'twenties photo viewer.
Gauzy pieces of childhood
hover like last night's drifting dreams,
only an impression they were there
 like my long, clear memory of the field pond—
 where I believed I'd waded—turning cloudy
 when Father said it vanished during dry years
before I was born. He'd mourned it out loud so long,
pointing out that low place in fields,
we all wanted it back.

Is it what we remember or forget
that defines us most, or all we imagine in between?
We wager our days for what seems livelihood
and come to learn the forms of drought.
My father tried to teach us
 Know what you can afford to lose
 and risk less.
What we presume to discard
hangs over us like reproach.

With hollyhocks that went missing over decades
outside the lichened picket fence,
what's real keeps shifting:

 how two brothers wrecked a milk cart;
 which Navy uncle gave us nickels for music
 at the lodge where Snake River ran,
 its blackness at night a current

 I'm sure I know:

my father swept downstream, his bay horse
finally swimming him to shore
as he clung exhausted to the saddle—
 all before he had us, but I can feel the gasping
 against high rapids, smell the fear the horse could smell.
All horses are good swimmers
my father told me to remember.

Outdoors, the landscape is clear,
buoyant; no need to choose what to keep.
Morning's shadow of the hillside
scrolls up its slopes like the lifting of a weight.