

Pulsations from Cygnus

Kaye Boesme

So nearby, so far away,
lies an oracular priestess,
its program running,
the abandoned tripod seat
circling forever,
dispensing data from afar.

We waited so long — years: first the message sent out, traveling so long
we thought perhaps it hadn't enough power to give us what we needed.
Other teams responded, the preprints a flood. Then, silence.

Its signal streams —
blueshifted, redshifted, and now
we know its companion
black hole from
the radiation
of matter falling far in.

At your birth, my eldest grandchild, we cast out the question — what will become of you when you are twenty and yet young, at thirty and holding hope close, at fifty and shining bright, at seventy in the autumn of your life.

When we told it
who we were, what we aspire to,
it gave us so much more.

The oracle knew
that we had destroyed
ourselves and could not stop.

One round trip: Nine years, eleven months, eight days times two — the data tables as cryptic as any future-casting vision. We teased out their meanings as if any of us could know anything for certain in a universe so vast.

Acid seas, it knew.
The crying whales beaching,
it had foreseen this.
Bees and butterflies
dead — of course —
and the dissolution hate brings,
the fires breathed across the Earth,
our future floods and famines.

At twenty and young, do not pursue biology — pursue mathematics.
Geometry will open up like Platonic solids giving forth every secret of

their interiors, landscapes you had never thought to love that entice your sharp-beating heart. At thirty and yet hopeful, sleepless from the conference, do not go out to the bar with your colleagues even though your heart is thirsty for reassurance and your mind for relief. You alone will live.

Who publishes this?

Maybe we all

stopped speaking.

A career spent waiting for answers

only to find them

given neatly, bluntly,

our trajectories unfurling.

At fifty, publish the paper you dared not until the crowds scream electric. At seventy, do not shrink back from unrest in the streets. Hold a sign with your daughter and her daughter. Never stop sharing the table no matter how broken your heart, and you will die without regrets.

It knows us. It will know us.

Still we ask, dreading its answers,

these inquiries our obsessions

compelling us

even as our initiates publish

analyses of wandering stars

and probe a galaxy filament

hanging like a rope

suspended
from a garden wall.

On cotton, we printed its admonitions, the pages heavy. We bound it with red thread like the cut throat of the finest white goat. Who knows if you will use it. Who knows if I had known all that I now know about my life that I would have woven myself in the same way — without waiting for the pattern to weigh down these wizened hands.

When I look up
the unknown looks back at me.
All stars are many —
shadow-partners dancing.
Sometimes I hear
the oracle singing its songs
even when my ears are free.