

Old Sailor

(on not watching the bonfire in the heavens)

The days move on. You go by other signs;
you don't look up, don't steer by the stars,
or veer off into cults and odd obsessions:
summoning spirits or reading tarot cards.
You're not a doubter, but prognostications
are not something you are prone to swallow;
especially if they deal with the heavens —
that non-existent dome over hollow
space. Doubt settles in normally with age,
like cholesterol quietly silting the veins.
I didn't waste the night, looking up
for astral fireworks that never came.

Disbelief was not something I grew up with.
Doubt and trust I always played by ear.
Perhaps they could tell the minute or the hour
when that comet-dust would singe our atmosphere.
But what matters is the eye did not see
those space salamanders, ephemera, wraiths.
There's nothing like a coat of speckled rust
to line the keen edge of faith.

The nights move on; you go by other signs:
it is not dreams I wish to talk about.
The body speaks of its premonitions:
and you must always hear the body out —
the voice of the vertebrae, the neck's sudden crick,
a bulge somewhere — the shabby heraldry of gout.
The knock at the slowly closing doors of the heart;
Will you hear the first tap? The chances are slim.
And when the body plays a certain note
dreams follow quiet as a silent film

On the same track.
You move to the next act —
a time comes when you don't know if the curtain
goes up or down. The other day I found,
what I took for a smudge upon my glasses
was actually the first sign of a cataract.

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