

Net Work

Start with the words
Gather, swirl, swarm, nest
Orbit, too, both a thing and an act
Funnel like cloud or concentrate
Even the present a thing that has a chance
To turn into something else

One magnolia, a dozen oak
Then a canopy of cloud
It's never, none of it, just one thing
The way synapses light up
Like dewdrops in a spiderweb
Like snow flurries in an updraft
Like starlings in murmuration
The world under microscope
The worlds beyond telescopes
A wormhole and a porthole
A nursery and a Petri dish
Oh, rock candy condensation
Chaos and order are friends
Like the cracks in a vessel pieced back together
And where the light pours in

How do stars know what to do?
How, too, a school of fish?
These wet nets of night fishing
Spangled splendors caught in the light of day
Everything that lets fly
Everything we know by looking up
All this reflection and refraction
So much sympathetic resonance
Winking, twinkling, blinking back

Some trees don't start to branch until
They spread a network over everything else
All node and ray and weave
Like making maps
Like caning glass
Like warp and weft and loom
Strings plucked
Rocks tumbled down
Everything at once reverberating, still

It has all come to, come from, come down to this
The sound of hogs we never see
Eating the acorns, turning the land
A whole herd krinkling their way over rocks
Like dew, like stars, like nebulas
A billion galaxies hidden in one dark spot

I cannot so much as leave the dentist
Until the astronomer behind the desk
Explains to me a cosmic multiplicity
The mystery of never knowing
If you are in a black hole
If everywhere life begins like this
I am stuck still a while, standing there
Like a boulder in this current rush of words
Worn down like molars
My own mouth full of teeth long ago traced in wires
But from that ordered orbit
Slowly pulling back to crooked paths
There's nothing for it
There is no moving forward until I've witnessed
With this star student
The unspooling narrative of how the universe began

It is complicated and it goes on forever
But I will tell you
One part I can't forget
The vision of everything connected
All of it, always, connected
Spun out from a single point
Think about it the sky watcher says
What doesn't that explain?

A. Kendra Greene, occasioned by Sherry Owens and Art Shirer's collaborative sculpture
"Learning to Fly" embodied in *A Gift from the Bower*, Splendora, Texas, 2023