

Eleanor Swanson

The Astronomy Book

I took the astronomy book from the shelf—
the one I bought on our first anniversary
to teach my husband the stars.
Light rolled off the slick pages.
The gray italic print of formulas
galactic dust impressed there.
I thumbed through suns and solar
systems, remembering the point
of my search: some star I wanted
to pluck out of the book to bring
on darkness and the glitter of the moon,
further spreading the farmer's brash
white floodlights over the rutted fields.
Outside together, I follow your arm,
raised toward the sky, pointing out,
a star, as you tell your colorful story
of its discovery, and how it must
have winked out millennia ago.
You sent shivers up my spine
as I thought of interstellar dust
and matter adrift. You school me—
from hottest to coldest, the seven main
groups of stellar spectra—OBAFGKI.
Oh be a fine girl, kiss me.
And I did, standing under
the faint light of millions of stars.

Flame Vine

Flame vine twists along the fence
like a garland of true fire
burning to no end.

Sun, everything is sun,
the green day floating on a bed
of ocean-scented, ocean-damp air.

I am ten and you are five.
With false bravado, I call you “kid.”
I swing on the clothesline’s

metal T, and you cry
and beg me to lift you.
I say, *here, let’s climb the tree*

instead, and I push you up
the rough bark toward
a lower branch. *Climb out,*

I say, and you do. *Swing,*
I say, and you swing, until
you fall and break your arm.

I am spanked until
the hairbrush breaks in two.
I am seventeen and you are twelve.

We sail on water brighter
than the surface of the moon,
dappled with points of flame.

We are lost at sea, desultorily
searching for a green island.
Tacking into the wind, you set

a course that takes us to a rocky
spit of land, we two against
the ocean, swelling and shifting

beneath us, like time itself.
Soon enough, I describe you
to friends, as my handsome brother

grown taller than me, long blonde
hair carried by the wind, you
are sullen and audacious

as the ocean itself .
You turn twenty and in July
remodeling a house

an electrical shock
sets your heart vibrating
like a planet sent careening

out of orbit into infinite space.
Your work remained unfinished
and they razed the house.

Until I left this city, I went out of my
way never to pass the lot where your
unquiet spirit might have still lingered.

Eleanor Swanson's fiction and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in a number of publications. Awards include a Fiction Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts and a Colorado Council on the Arts Fellowship in Literature. Her first poetry collection, *A Thousand Bonds: Marie Curie and the Discovery of Radium*, was a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. Her third book of poetry was *Memory's Rooms* (Conundrum Press). Swanson lives in Denver and teaches environmental literature and fiction and poetry workshops at Regis University, where she also is a member of the Mile High MFA program faculty.