

Susan B.A. Somers-Willett

Celestial Music

The astronomer's father strings the blonde guitar
and sets the box to ringing, its pear-shaped

wood soft and light in the hands of his student:
a body learned. This chord patterns the hall, an invisible math

of three notes wearing a bright routine into the air
as water falling on stone or a wandering

star pacing its black corridor. Galileo remembers
this lesson as he grinds a spyglass lens into the mortar,

his small glass dish curved to receive the far-traveling
light, and listening to this friction he envisions

a lute's fine arching neck measured in frets,
the highest notes achieved by a careful tension

in the strings like crystal ringing clearly
beyond the pitch of the glass—it can hardly

be contained before the pattern turns weird
and shifts: this the last of his father's eerie vibrato

resonating in the body's pale whittled cage. In winter,
Galileo stands on the terrace whispering his daughter's

well-wrought Catholic name like a pale music
into his icy fingers: *Maria Celeste*: his breath

steaming the lens and a coiled sketch of the moon's
intervals shivering its yellow edges in the wind. Practice,

Galileo knows, makes the new instrument grow fine
and so he wears the cool notches of the spyglass at twilight,

he sharpens the tines to click in their brass wheels
like the stars click in the sky's blue cylinder

rapidly spinning into darkness: it says it is night
and so it is night: the shining Braille made visible
within the music box and its dark wandering tune
struck from this cold, miraculous sphere.

He will pluck out the lights as they orbit this room
until the sky like a song is felt and felt

deeply, its brassy tools polished and loved,
its brilliant measures hovering and now

coming into startling view. He will work all his life
to steady the instrument, to hold the dim stars in

his field of vision against the rhythm of his breathing,
against the wild music of his own moving heart.

You may
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an unfu
lurking
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glitterin
a barre
a goat i
lacerate
and Thi
with fai
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