

Carousel

Even aging eyes still catch fire at the carousel of planets: Saturn, Venus, Mars. Or any bright pinprick of light – space station or star – that sparks in our lonely half of the sky while the sun limps off, exhausted. As she sleeps, other creatures fill the emptiness: mosquitoes, gnats, secretive snakes. 'Possum and feral cats. Or any of a dozen soft-footed, nameless shapes stirred into life by the eruption of frenetic bats – jet-black butterflies that dart and slide over our sleepy yard, searching for evening snacks in an invisible game of ring-toss that pings off human heads until – target rejected – bats zip off, reverse direction, skid to a stop, pivot and dive again like fighter jets.

Slapping our itchy necks, we cheer the acceleration of aerial combat as the moon rises up at last. Calmly, she drops darkness down with one wide hand to muffle human sight and sound. Time for bed – but bats still circle overhead, encouraging us to stay outside, to play. And all the while the carousel of planets spins, if more slowly now – revolves back to when we were barely four: twirling on our toes, arms outstretched and head flung back. Whirling until we fall down mock-dead on the uncut grass, leaving earth too dizzy to right herself and us thrilled to have relearned the trick of how to make the heavens dance.