

o ri 'en teer ing: (awr-ee-en-teer-ing)

One night I dreamed I was locked in my Father's
watch
With Ptolemy and twenty-one ruby stars
Mounted on spheres and the Primum Mobile
Coiled and gleaming to the end of space
And the notched spheres eating each other's rinds
To the last tooth of time, and the case closed.

—John Ciardi, "My Father's Watch"

Latitude: 41.307N

Longitude: -88.146W

My father bought me a little wire ball. It popped open to make a hinged sphere with thin black lines of latitude and longitude.

With me on his shoulders, we stopped to stare at the statue of Atlas, carrying heaven and a see-through earth. The prime meridian I recognized. An iron planet on an iron man.

Latitude: 39.952N

Longitude: -75.164W

All of father's place names indexed, an armchair appreciation as he shouted for dinner, those below us would take a broomstick to the ceiling to complain.

He did not choose this life willingly, but took it in spite. He chose Philadelphia, among other places, and before any line could be drawn, we moved again.

Latitude: 39.840N

Longitude: -88.954W

Anyone worth his salt, father said, by the length of a hard day worked, by the height and revolution of the sun, snow on your shoulders, shadow at your back.

A rise or fall in barometric pressure, one latitude to the next, we learned as children, to gain or lose time, gauge his temper, we all got where we were going, more or less.

Latitude: 42.909N

Longitude: -85.763W

He did away with us. What utility, what accuracy. All these threads, to unravel them now, abandoned satellites, lost telemetry.

His calculations eventually ruptured under the weight of blackened cells. As proof of his guilt and contrition. A weak vessel. A navigator's Dead Reckoning. How quickly his ship receded.

Latitude: 42.403N

Longitude: -86.273W

The pocket watch he left behind. Cracked beveled glass, stiff counter-motion, always ran fast. We threw it off the deck and into the lake he never wept.

We shredded the sails and pitched everything, yet the winds whittled, held west, what sway he held over us, held fast. Years go by and nothing moves.

Latitude: 39.83N

Longitude: -75.441W

A given star to occur at a given time. Skies tumble over. Salt over the shoulder for good luck. Telescope to the sky, our small bodies vanished from Father's azimuth.

When the skies were overcast, father withheld his blessing, by the light from the shadow of a wild goose, by the urgency of rain. Where he went, there was no good map, no good route.

Latitude: 39.960N

Longitude: -75.605W

The sky held out hope with a sunset by the phases of the moon, by his skin turning from white to yellow, breath paused, the way a tossed ball pauses momentarily.

These events, a finding, orienteering an end to means, all the far-flung stars, consumed and collected, when shadow—then pray to keep up, if we're able.

Latitude: 39.449N

Longitude: -75.716W

We did not keep time well, father said, we were negligent and slothful, however, namely, to the task, against the assault of decay, it is not clear if he knew, he too fell short.

In fathoming the behavior of light, here in the coiled balance of our kitchen, mother argued over entitlement, eventually the matter was dropped. In the end there was no end.