

Picnic by the Inland Sea

by D. Nurkse

We understood we were hurtling into space
at eighteen miles per second, clouds of atoms
charged and polarized, each alone
in the abyss, and you wore your summer dress.

The light under the poplar was mottled
but the shade of the pines was feathered.

We were bundles of self-cancelling voices—
flight and response, punishment and reward,
hostile adoration, panic and certainty—

from long before the Bronze Age,

yet we made our own promises

by suppressed coughs or sneezes

and sat a little apart

but sometimes our eyes brushed.

We sipped Montepulciano from a paper cup

until the bottom darkened

but still it was not evening,

still the world was ending,

already we resented the breeze

for choosing and marking us,

still a song too short to sing

moved two famished sparrows

like pawns from branch to branch.