



PHOTO BY MATTHEW HARPER

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Travel by Starlight

BY STEPHANIE L. HARPER

The map has led me to this unsought future
but I've come to cosset its every unfolding

like an aging cottonwood learns to curl its roots
around the creatures born in the forest loam

Still in the starlight of dreams I often return
to that course I used to wind through the rural Midwest

& immerse myself again in late summer's haze
of primroses columbines & great hay rolls

all drowsing along the twilight roadside I drive
past the cornstalks' muggy throngs reaching

their nascent fingers to wrest the last sun-drops
from the dome's milky yawn until the oaks

grow drunk with nightfall & the winged hosts
soused among their leaves all break into song

to wake me to my life

a map on its head:

East has become west & west east
for the Northern Lights always inviting

themselves to swim on my horizon

Though I'd have once been glad to drown
in the luminescent breath of such interlopers

I now see their hold on me was only fleeting—&
that tonight's reverie was no more solemn nor less

gratuitous than it was to mistake the crackle from
my gas fireplace I must have dreamed

for a memory



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