Watching the Perseids

By Isabel Rogers

The parrot, Einstein of birds, who can count and reason calmly in our tongue while outliving us, disdains the ostrich. For all its sprint records, the ostrich will be remembered for hiding from the truth. You can’t outrun stupid.

We the people hold some truths to be self-evident: our magnificent brain in a body that can’t flee, can’t smell fear, can’t hear death, can’t see straight. Even so, our retinas, with rods and cones as intricate as any telescope array, evolved to see a predator slide out of oblique shadow and give us time to bolt.

We survey our closed dominion until we look up in August to find comet dust flaring in the night.

This vastness, this vertiginous awareness mocking gravity on our speck of now, wakes us with a recalibrating jolt.

But soon our familiar star will claw toward us in seven-league boots from the east, drawing its Valium thread across our planet as if to cloak a birdcage to muffle questions that blink through dark matter and would pour over us until we drowned, dreaming of amnesia.

Isabel Rogers won the 2014 Cardiff Poetry Competition, lives in Britain, and is the Hampshire Poet Laureate 2016. Her debut collection, Don’t Ask, was published by Eyewear Publishing in 2017.