Night Vision

Stephen Edgar

Those towering and vertiginous heights
Of night
At which you crane your next to gaze
(And Dante saw ascending,
Ablaze
In sphere on sphere of crowded light,
Beyond a mortal sight’s
Earth-shadowed powers of apprehending),

Now pile their absent blackness on
Your shocked,
Unbalanced eyes, bringing to bear
Against your consciousness
And care,
And breath, and all they would concoct,
Cosmic oblivion,
Encircling and directionless,

So that, when going back indoors,
You find
The rooms, the foursquare furnishings,
The long familiar use
Of things
Estranged. The spoons are undermined.
The cupboards and the drawers,
Straightforward once, are now abstruse.

This standard lamp, that kettle — how
Bizarre
That all the turning aeons, which
Have wound up physics to
Enrich
The rudiments of a dead star,
Should set down here and now
These abstract engines to construe.

The tainted mirror has forsworn
The wall;
And from the mantelpiece the clock
In its glass dome is loud
With shock
Each gilded second to instal
Another second born
Beyond the Magellanic Cloud.