Elegy for the Old Thinking

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When the theoretical physicist explains that he’s found the same self-correcting codes in nature that run a browser,

I imagine the forsythia at my window administers a program for when to bloom or drop its leaves. Gravity’s the odd man out, which is to say that the apple will fall to ground as long as moon orbits earth. I tell my baby that the stars in the sky are not just lights but places to go. The theoretical physicist says he was only trying to solve some problems that no one thought there were answers for.

He says learning supersymmetry is a bit like having babies: you focus on the benefits, not the pain. I think about the loss of my childless life, and then, all of the times I thought I was essential before. Maybe that’s the real loss. Outside my window, the branches and roots cancel out each other, so all I see are electric yellow blossoms framed in green frond. When you ask a physicist a question he’ll give you a number and the range of uncertainty. If you ask me how old my daughter is, I’ll say 12 weeks, two days, but if I count back to conception, she’s a full year, maybe 384 days, a range of uncertainty implied by my use of maybe. Somehow—perhaps it’s the same invisible pattern of zeros and ones pulsing in leaf vein—even when I sleep, my ears tune to hear her call, and since she’s so small, I know that when she cries, it’s out of need. When she’s older, it still will be need, though I’ll miss holding her length in the cradle of my arms, how my heartbeat is enough to sooth her to sleep. Make me the tree or the apple, let her be gravity or light.