

The Road Not Taken

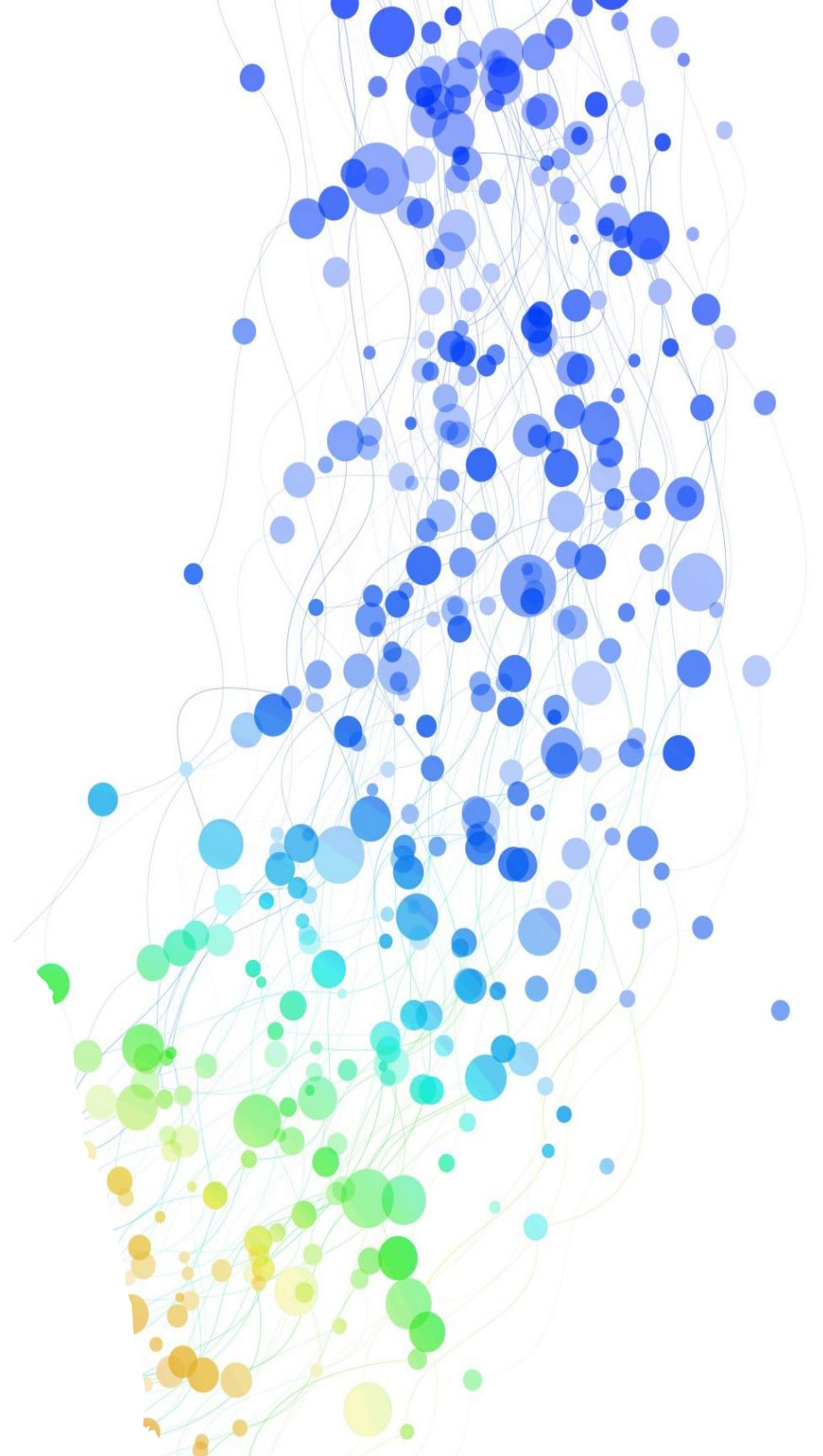
BY ROBERT FROST

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.



I Lost My Talk

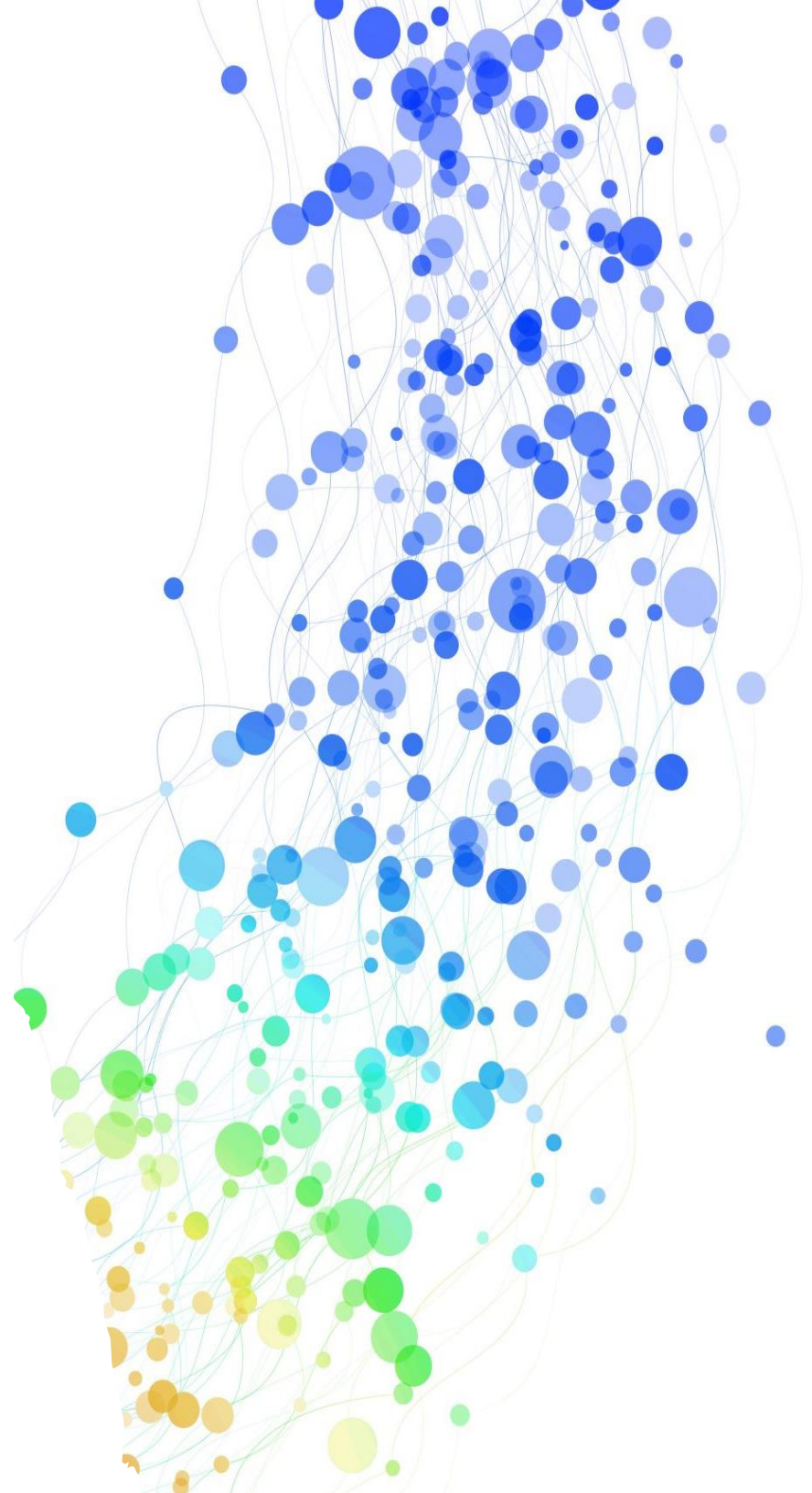
Rita Joe

I lost my talk
The talk you took away.
When I was a little girl
At Shubenacadie school.

You snatched it away:
I speak like you
I think like you
I create like you
The scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk
Both ways I say,
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,
Let me find my talk
So I can teach you about me.

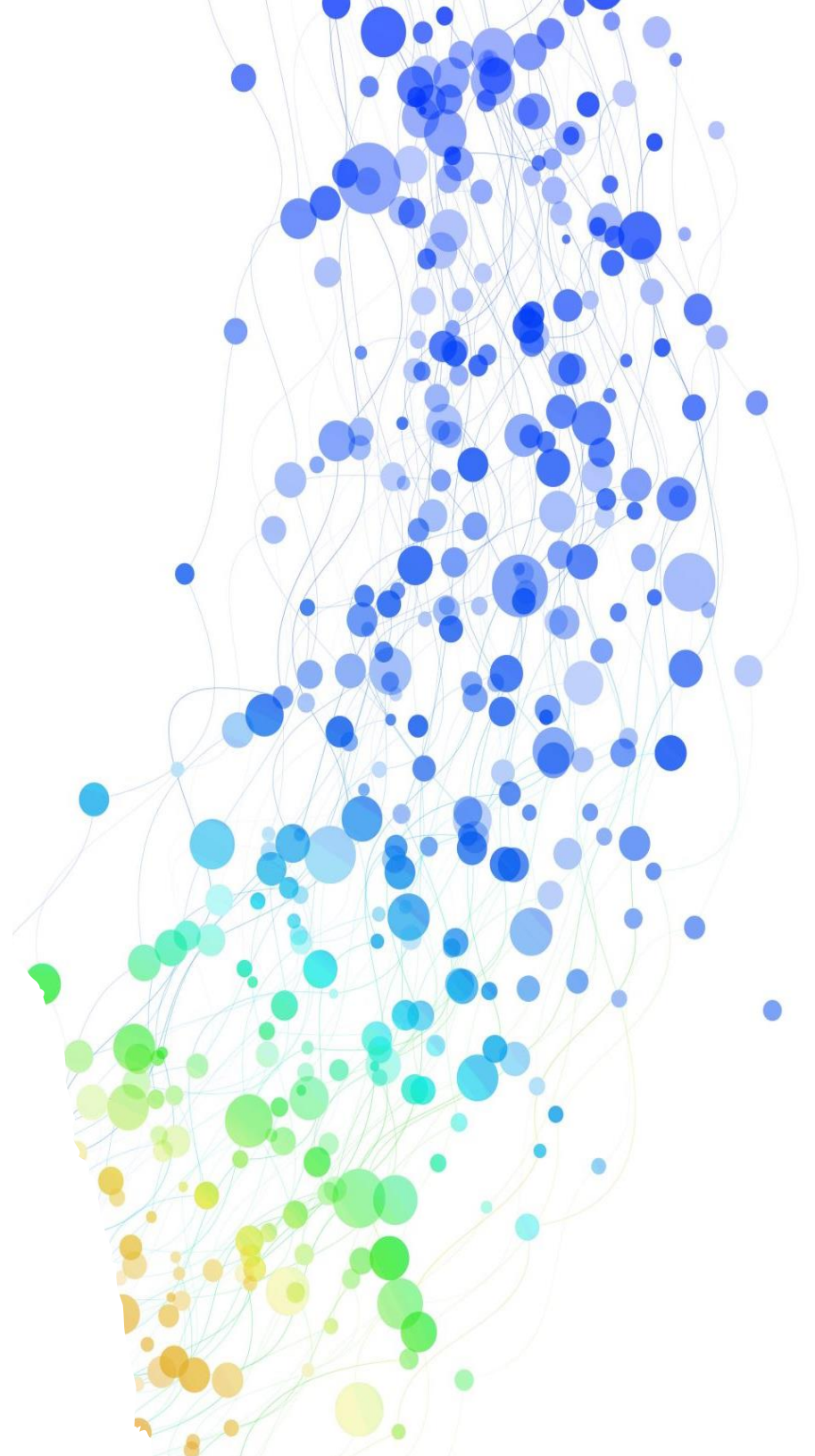


Fire and Ice



BY ROBERT FROST

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.



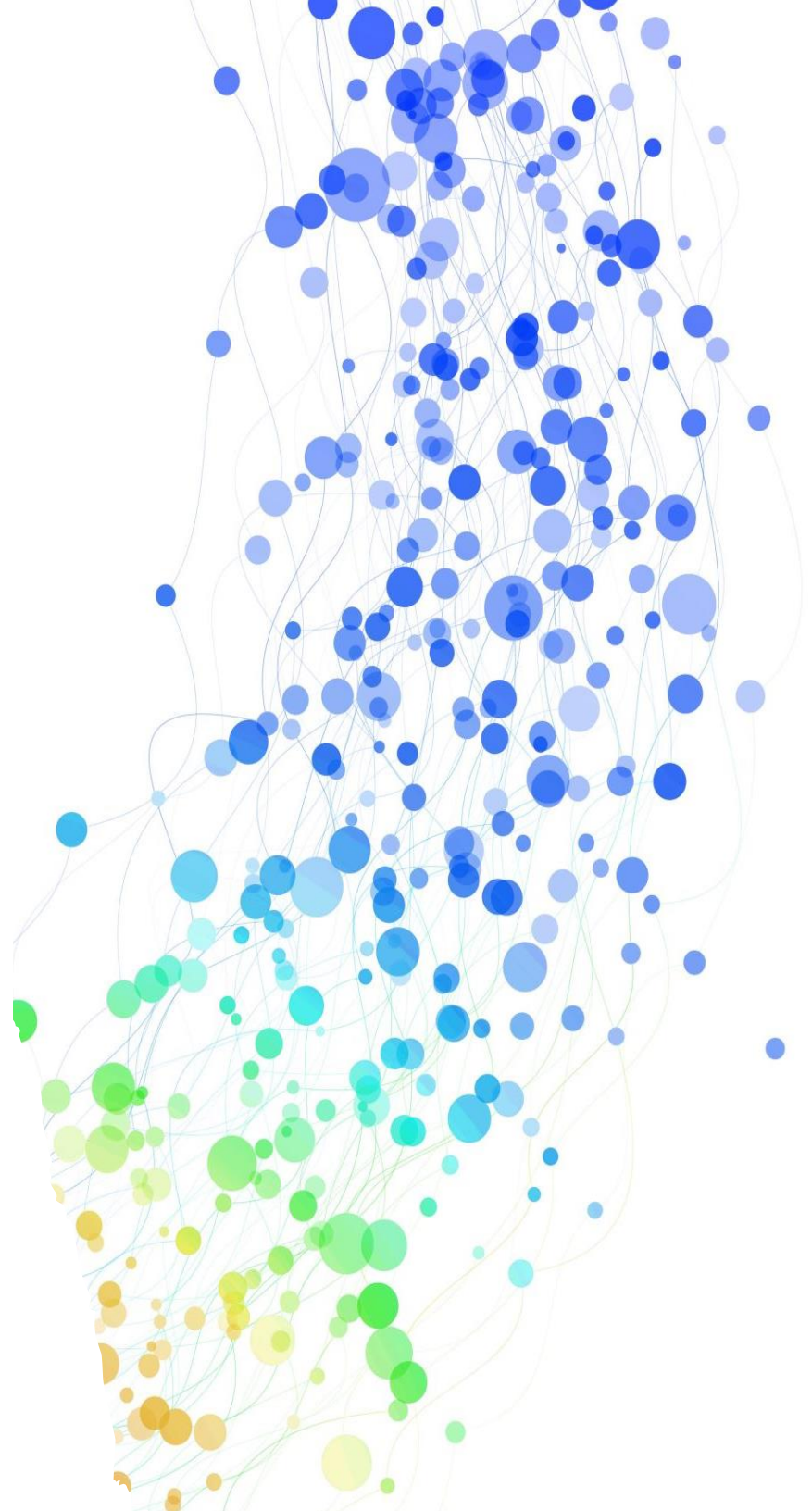
We Wear the Mask

BY PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

Why should the world be over-wise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
 We wear the mask.

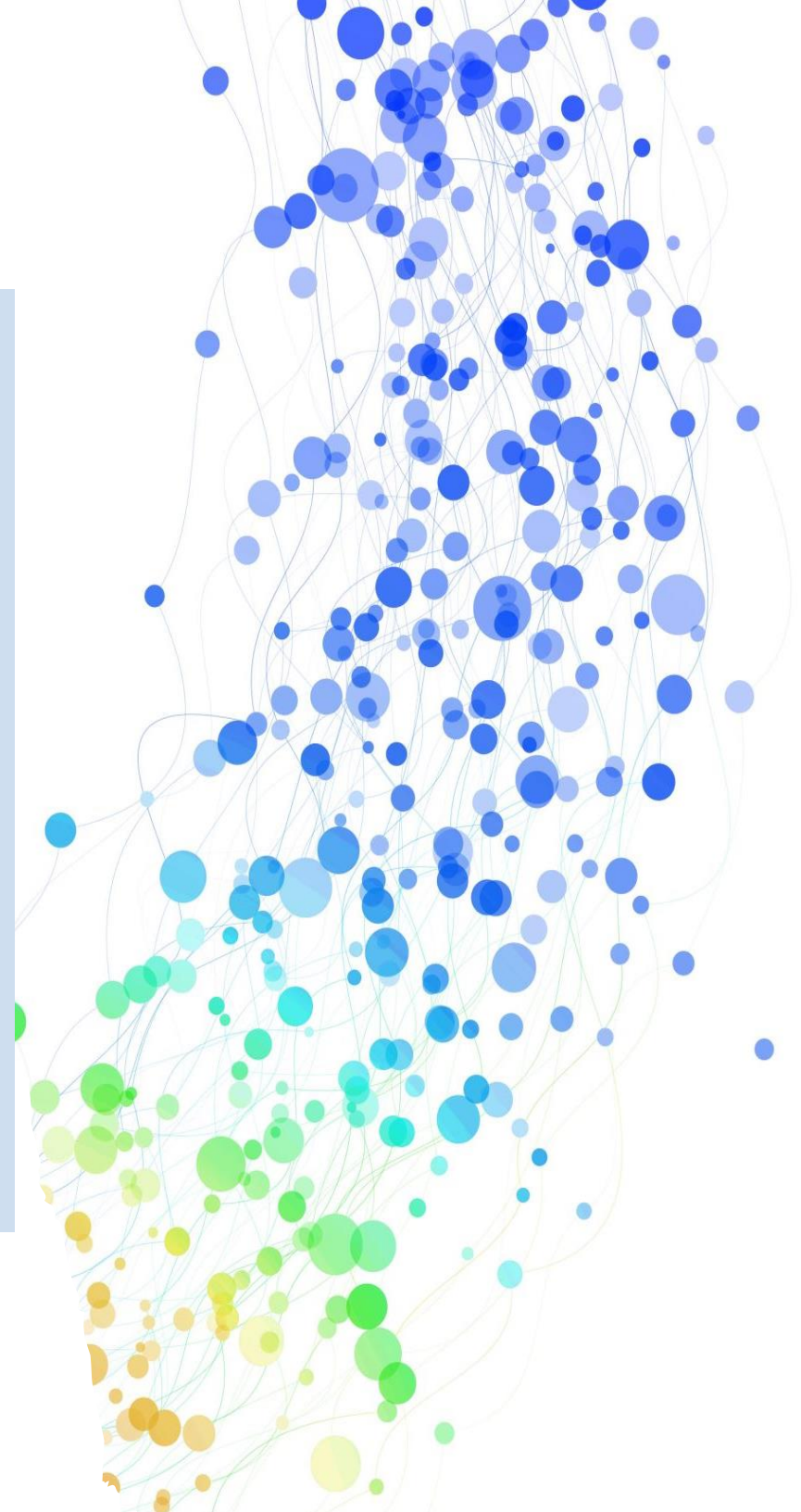
We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries
To thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;
But let the world dream otherwise,
 We wear the mask!



Ted Kooser

Tattoo

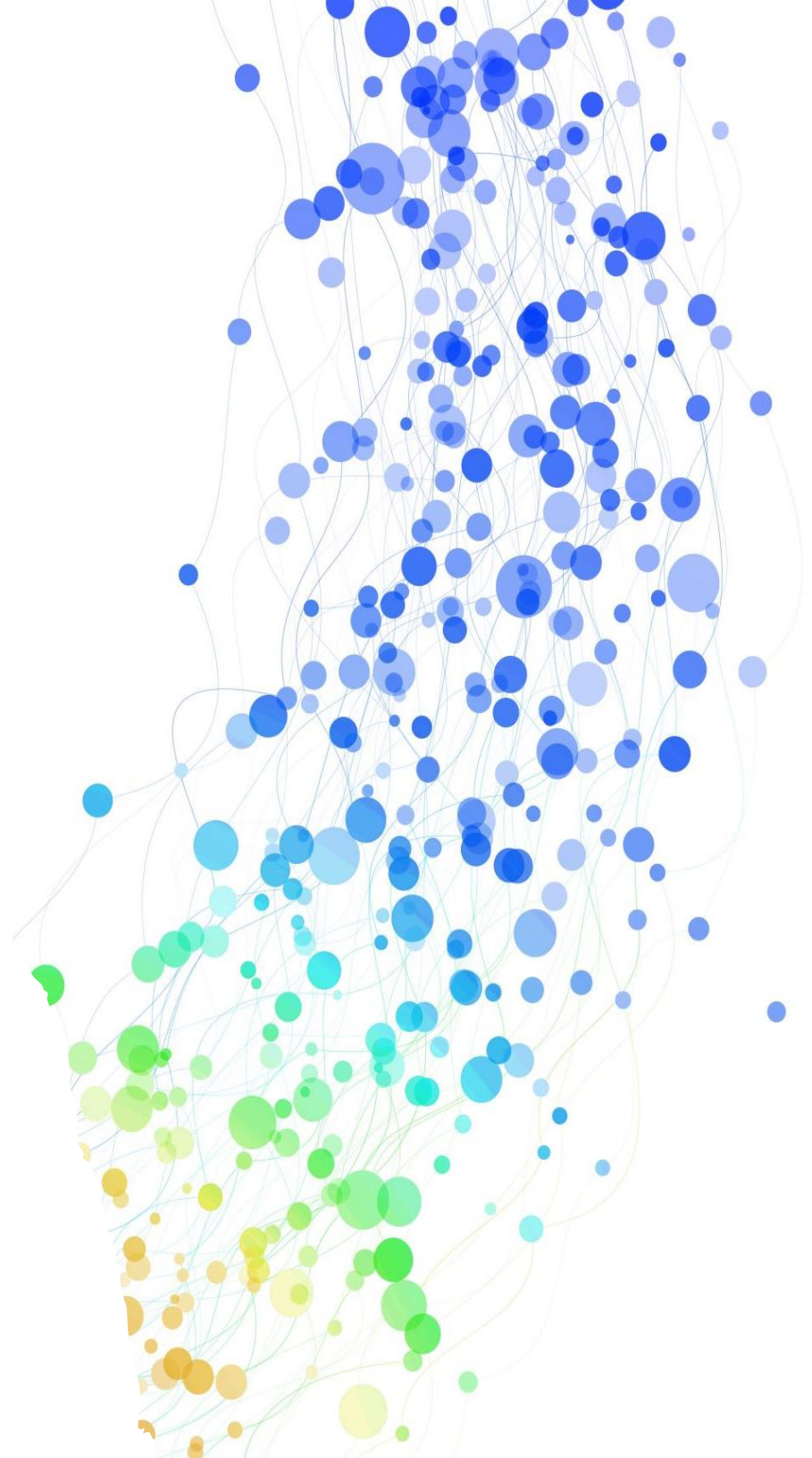
What once was meant to be a statement—
a dripping dagger held in the fist
of a shuddering heart—is now just a bruise
on a bony old shoulder, the spot
where vanity once punched him hard
and the ache lingered on. He looks like
someone you had to reckon with,
strong as a stallion, fast and ornery,
but on this chilly morning, as he walks
between the tables at a yard sale
with the sleeves of his tight black T-shirt
rolled up to show us who he was,
he is only another old man, picking up
broken tools and putting them back,
his heart gone soft and blue with stories.



America

BY CLAUDE MCKAY

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life, I will confess
I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate,
Her bigness sweeps my being like a flood.
Yet, as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

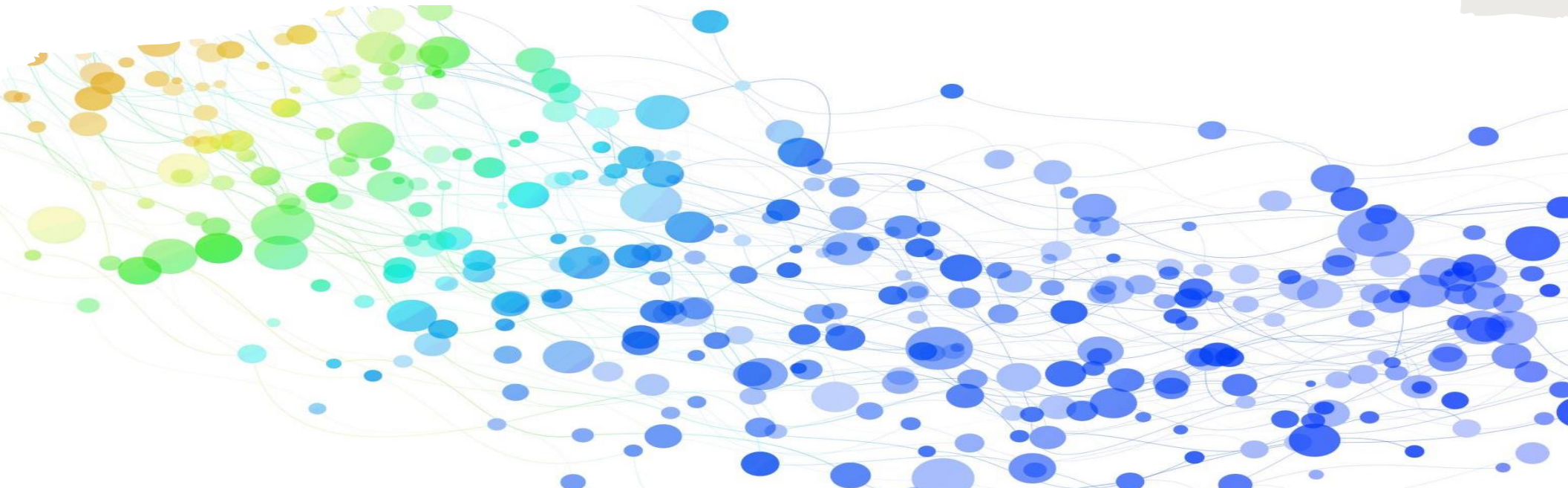


Lies I Tell



Sara Borjas

A woman has a window in her face: that is the truth. I look like my mother: that is the truth. I want to tell you I am not like her: that is the truth. I am ashamed walking in a woman's body: that is the truth. I wish to take back everything I say: that is the truth. A window can be a mirror. It can also be a door: that is the truth. As a girl, my mother slept in a shack with no windows and one door: that is the truth. My grandma would slam windows: truth. A mother's hands are stronger than God: truth. We often use fruit to describe a bruise, like plum or blackberry: truth. My mother's window blackberried: truth. My mother's door peached: truth. She loves peaches: that is the truth. My father could not stand them in our house: that is the truth. We had three doors and nine windows in our house: that is the truth. A woman has a face in her window: truth. A father has a window but I don't know where it is: truth. *What burrows is the peach fuzz*, he said: that is the truth. I have never been close enough to a peach to eat one: truth. The worst things last on the skin: truth. I don't like not having things: truth. My father has one door but I can't find it: truth. Not all windows open: that is the truth. One night I see my father crying in the yard, head in his hands: that is the truth. I make things up that I want for myself: that is the truth.



At the Gym by Mark Doty

This salt-stain spot
marks the place where men
lay down their heads,
back to the bench,

and hoist nothing
that need be lifted
but some burden they've chosen
this time: more reps,

more weight, the upward shove
of it leaving, collectively,
this sign of where we've been:
shroud-stain, negative

flashed onto the vinyl
where we push something
unyielding skyward,
gaining some power

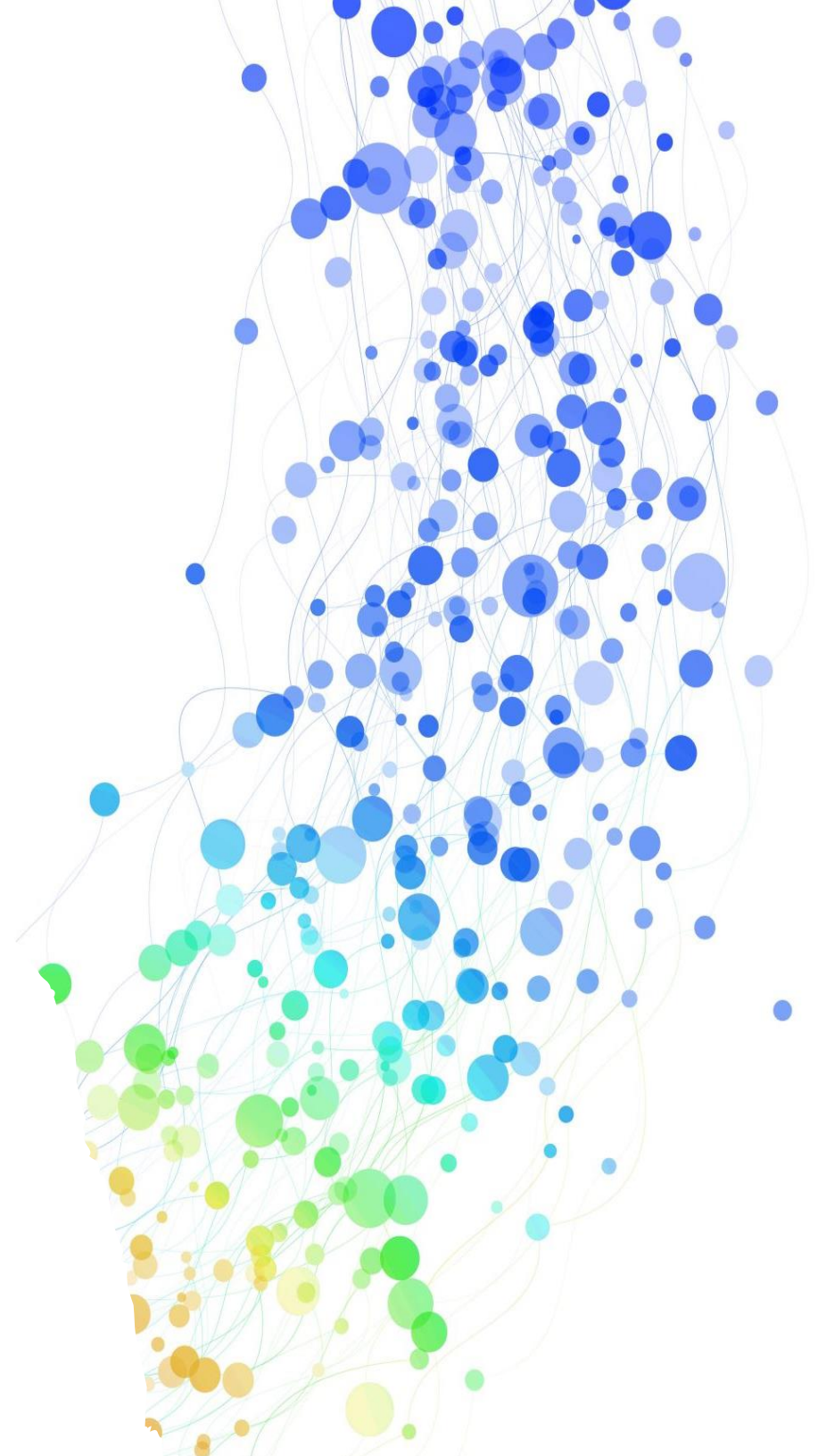
at least over flesh,
which goads with desire,
and terrifies with frailty.
Who could say who's

added his heat to the nimbus
of our intent, here where
we make ourselves:
something difficult

lifted, pressed or curled,
Power over beauty,
power over power!
Though there's something more

tender, beneath our vanity,
our will to become objects
of desire: we sweat the mark
of our presence onto the cloth.

Here is some halo
the living made together.



Fifth Grade Autobiography

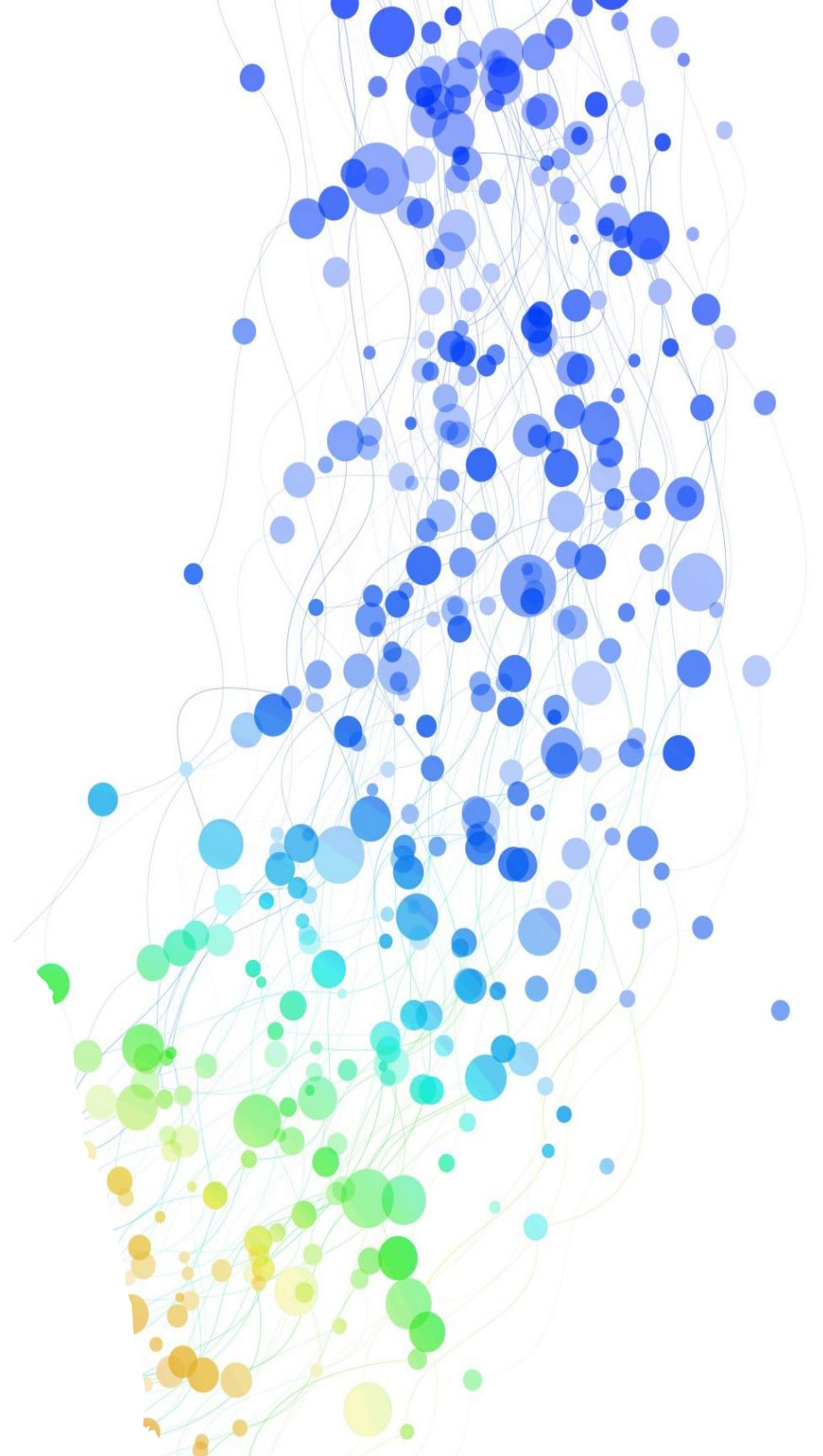
BY RITA DOVE

I was four in this photograph fishing
with my grandparents at a lake in Michigan.
My brother squats in poison ivy.
His Davy Crockett cap
sits squared on his head so the raccoon tail
flounces down the back of his sailor suit.

My grandfather sits to the far right
in a folding chair,
and I know his left hand is on
the tobacco in his pants pocket
because I used to wrap it for him
every Christmas. Grandmother's hips
bulge from the brush, she's leaning
into the ice chest, sun through the trees
printing her dress with soft
luminous paws.

I am staring jealously at my brother;
the day before he rode his first horse, alone.
I was strapped in a basket
behind my grandfather.
He smelled of lemons. He's died—

but I remember his hands.



THE FACEBOOK SONNET

By Sherman Alexie

May 9, 2011

Welcome to the endless high-school
Reunion. Welcome to past friends
And lovers, however kind or cruel.
Let's undervalue and unmend

The present. Why can't we pretend
Every stage of life is the same?
Let's exhume, resume, and extend
Childhood. Let's all play the games

That occupy the young. Let fame
And shame intertwine. Let one's search
For God become public domain.
Let church.com become our church.

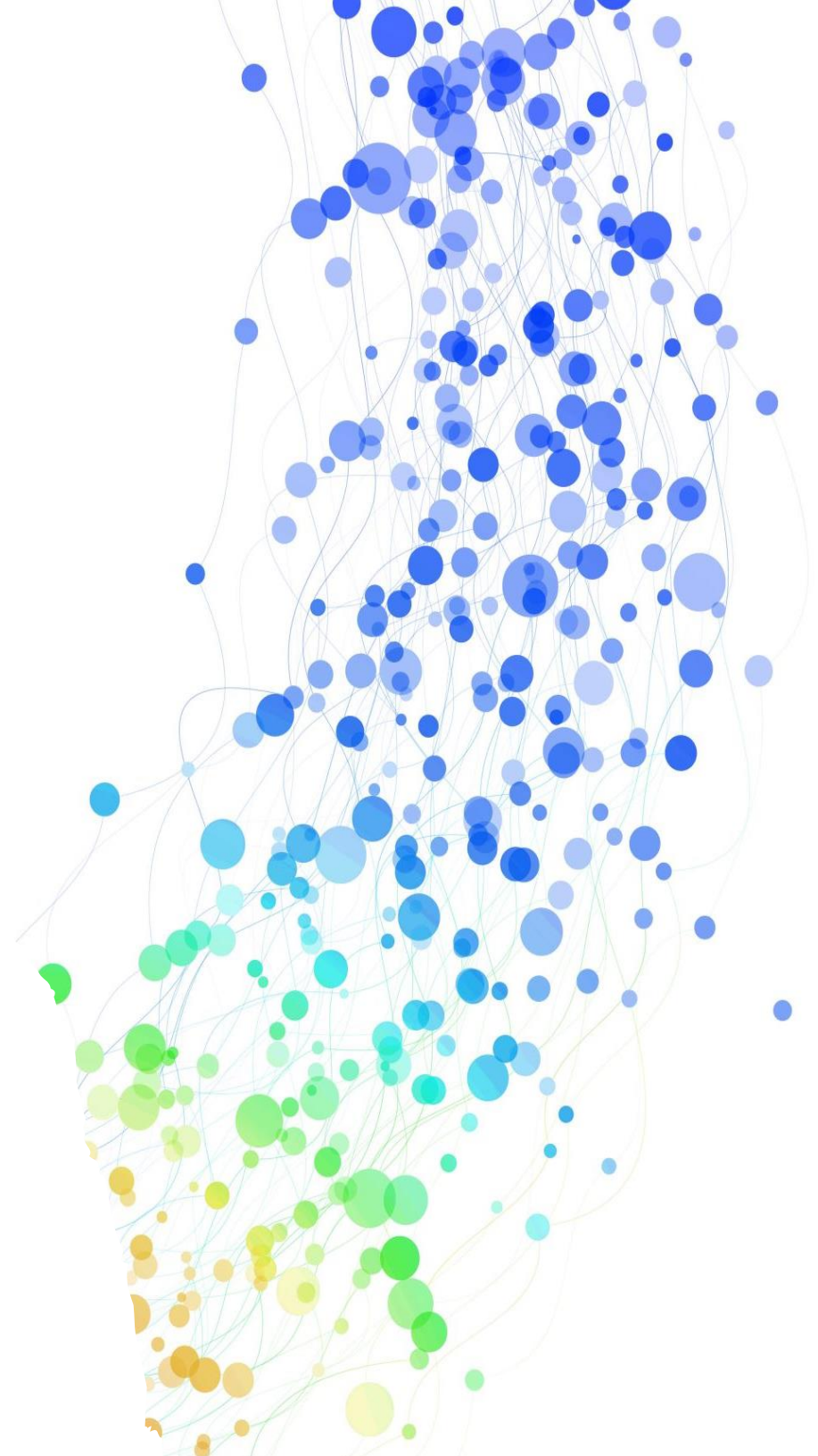
Let's sign up, sign in, and confess
Here at the altar of loneliness.



Manifesto of the Lyric Selfie

Becca Klaver

Our “I”s.
They are multiple.
We shuffle them
often as we like.
They can tag us.
We can untag ourselves.
We’ve got our
to-be-looked-at-ness
oh we have
got it.
We peer and cross.
Go lazy.
We’re all girly.
We’re pretty selfie.
We write our poems.
We write our manifestos.
While sitting in the photo booth.
While skipping down the street.
We think: if only my camera
could see me now.
There is a tranquil lyric
but we recollect emotion
with the speed of the feed.
We pose to show
the spontaneous overflow
of powerful feelings.
There are no more countrysides.
There are no more churchyards.
We smudge our vistas.
We flip the cam around.
What is burning in our little hearts?
Hashtags of interiority
licking like flames.
We had been reflective.
We have been reflected.



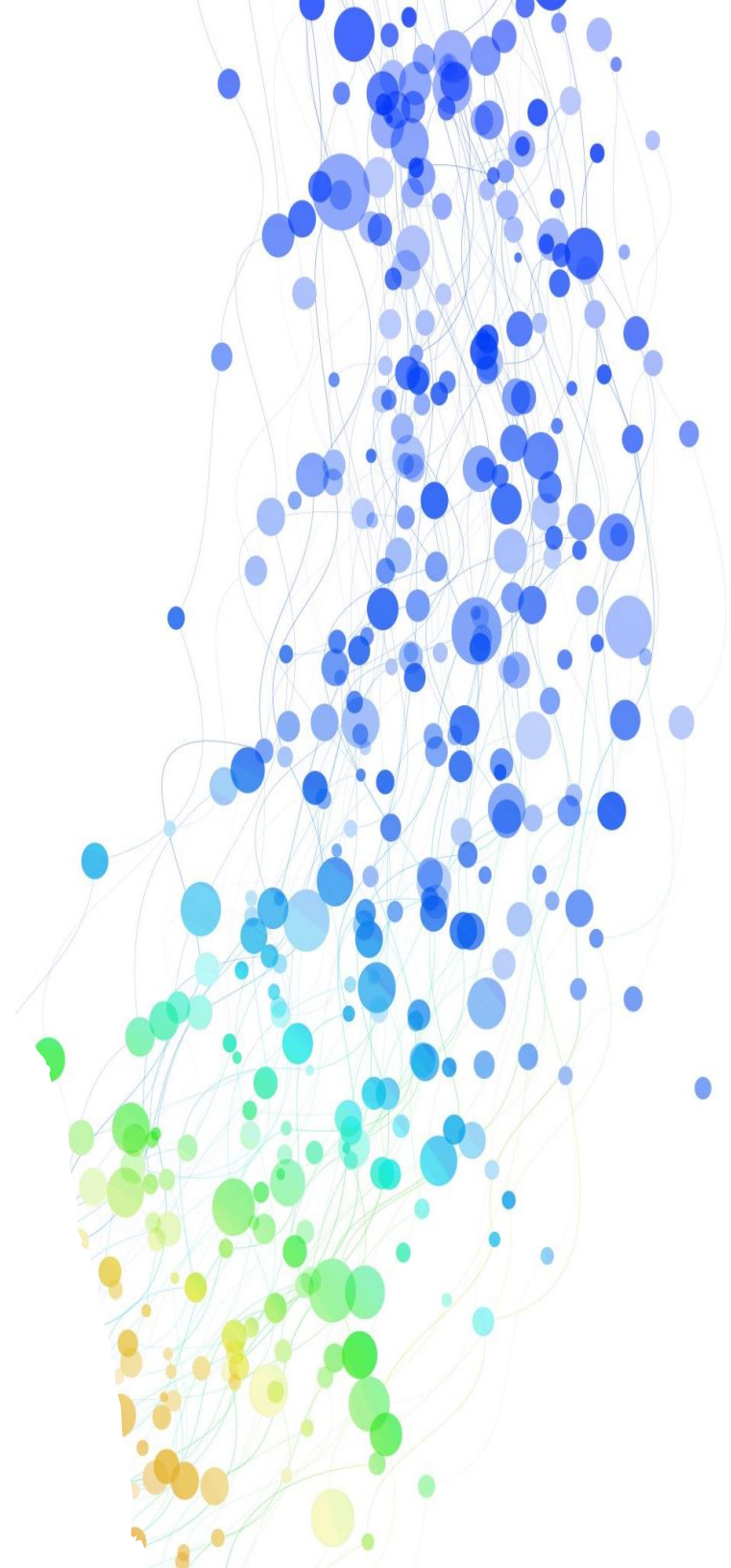
Miracles

Walt Whitman - 1819-1892

Why, who makes much of a miracle?
As to me I know of nothing else but miracles,
Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,
Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,
Or wade with naked feet along the beach just in the edge of the water,
Or stand under trees in the woods,
Or talk by day with any one I love, or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love,
Or sit at table at dinner with the rest,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive of a summer forenoon,
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds, or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sundown, or of stars shining so quiet and bright,
Or the exquisite delicate thin curve of the new moon in spring;
These with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring, yet each distinct and in its place.

To me every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same.

To me the sea is a continual miracle,
The fishes that swim—the rocks—the motion of the waves—the
ships with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?



When Giving Is All We Have

Alberto Ríos - 1952-

*One river gives
Its journey to the next.*

We give because someone gave to us.
We give because nobody gave to us.

We give because giving has changed us.
We give because giving could have changed us.

We have been better for it,
We have been wounded by it—

Giving has many faces: It is loud and quiet,
Big, though small, diamond in wood-nails.

Its story is old, the plot worn and the pages too,
But we read this book, anyway, over and again:

Giving is, first and every time, hand to hand,
Mine to yours, yours to mine.

You gave me blue and I gave you yellow.
Together we are simple green. You gave me

What you did not have, and I gave you
What I had to give—together, we made

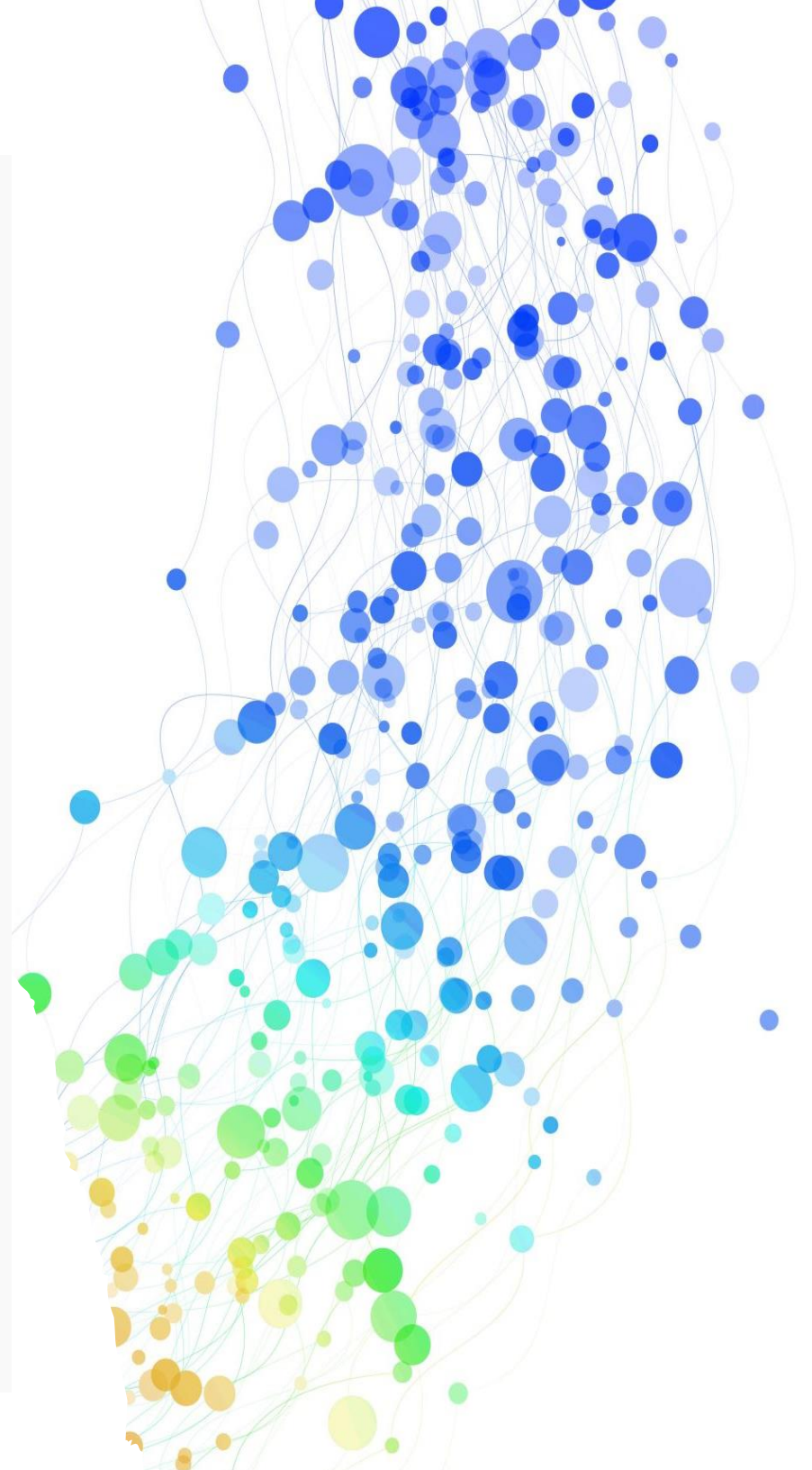
Something greater from the difference.



Ode to Dirt

Dear dirt, I am sorry I slighted you,
I thought that you were only the background
for the leading characters—the plants
and animals and human animals.
It's as if I had loved only the stars
and not the sky which gave them space
in which to shine. Subtle, various,
sensitive, you are the skin of our terrain,
you're our democracy. When I understood
I had never honored you as a living
equal, I was ashamed of myself,
as if I had not recognized
a character who looked so different from me,
but now I can see us all, made of the
same basic materials—
cousins of that first exploding from nothing—
in our intricate equation together. O dirt,
help us find ways to serve your life,
you who have brought us forth, and fed us,
and who at the end will take us in
and rotate with us, and wobble, and orbit.

—Sharon Olds

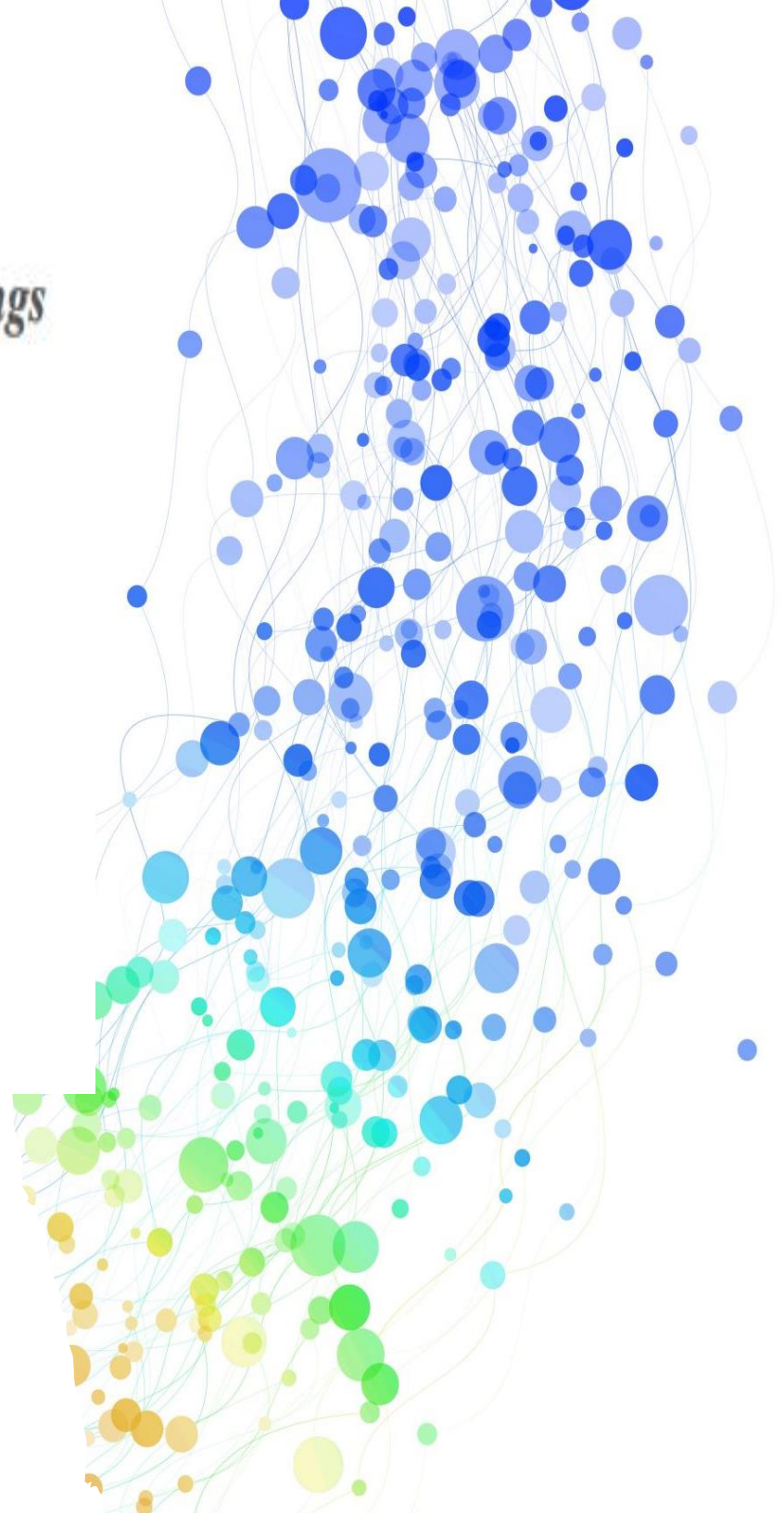


a total stranger one black day E. E. Cummings

a total stranger one black day
knocked living the hell out of me--

who found forgiveness hard because
my(as it happened)self he was

-but now that fiend and i are such
immortal friends the other's each



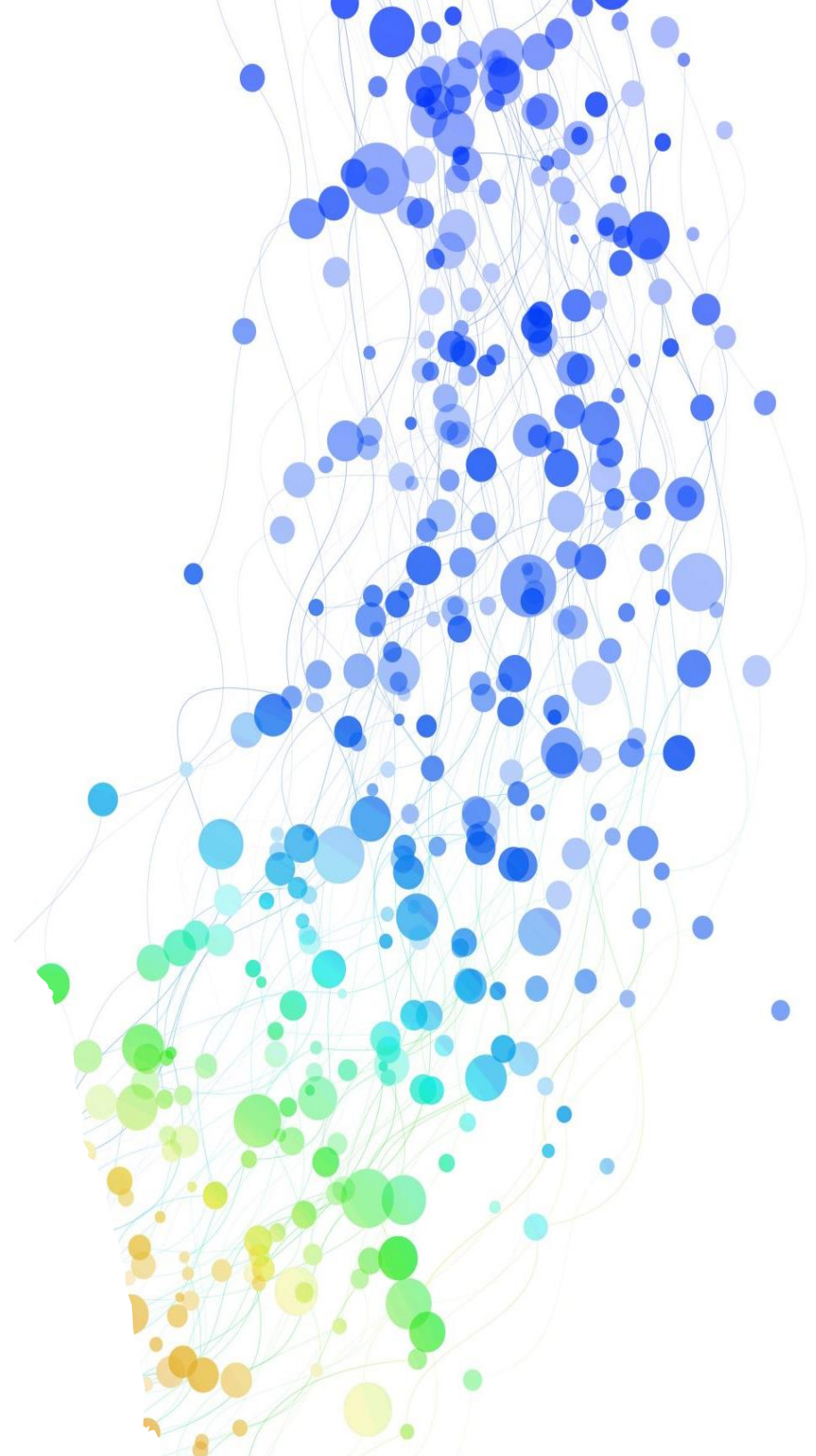
I died for Beauty, but was scarce by Emily Dickinson

I DIED for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
“For beauty,” I replied.
“And I for truth,—the two are one;
We brethren are,” he said.

And so, as kinsmen met a night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

WE ARE
TEACHERS



We Real Cool

Gwendolyn Brooks - 1917-2000

THE POOL PLAYERS.
SEVEN AT THE GOLDEN SHOVEL.

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.



Snow By David Berman

Walking through a field with my little brother Seth

I pointed to a place where kids had made angels in the snow.
For some reason, I told him that a troop of angels
had been shot and dissolved when they hit the ground.

He asked who had shot them and I said a farmer.

Then we were on the roof of the lake.
The ice looked like a photograph of water.

Why he asked. Why did he shoot them.

I didn't know where I was going with this.

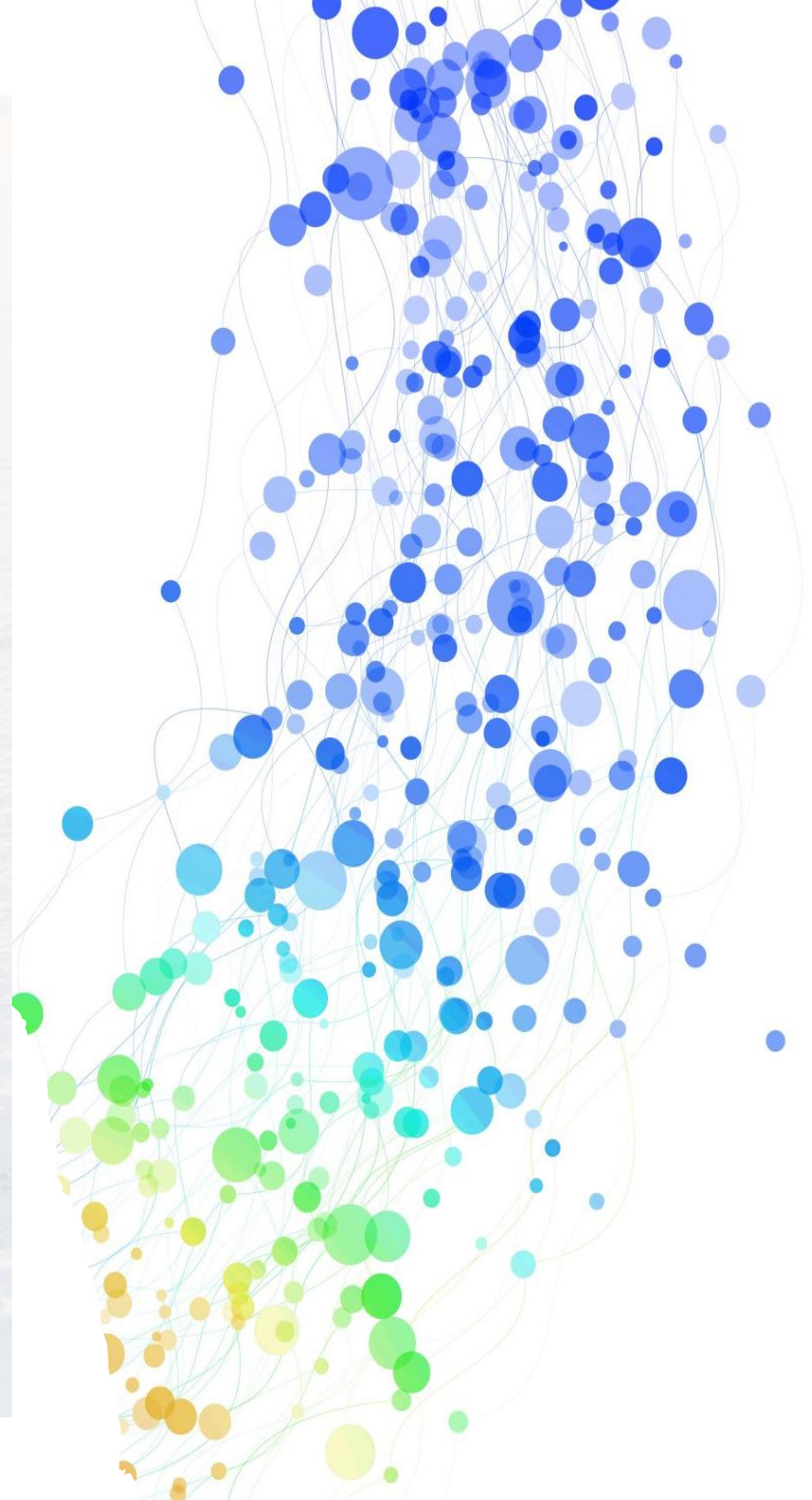
They were on his property, I said.

When it's snowing, the outdoors seem like a room.

Today I traded hellos with my neighbor.
Our voices hung close in the new acoustics.
A room with the walls blasted to shreds and falling.

We returned to our shoveling, working side by side in silence.

But why were they on his property, he asked.



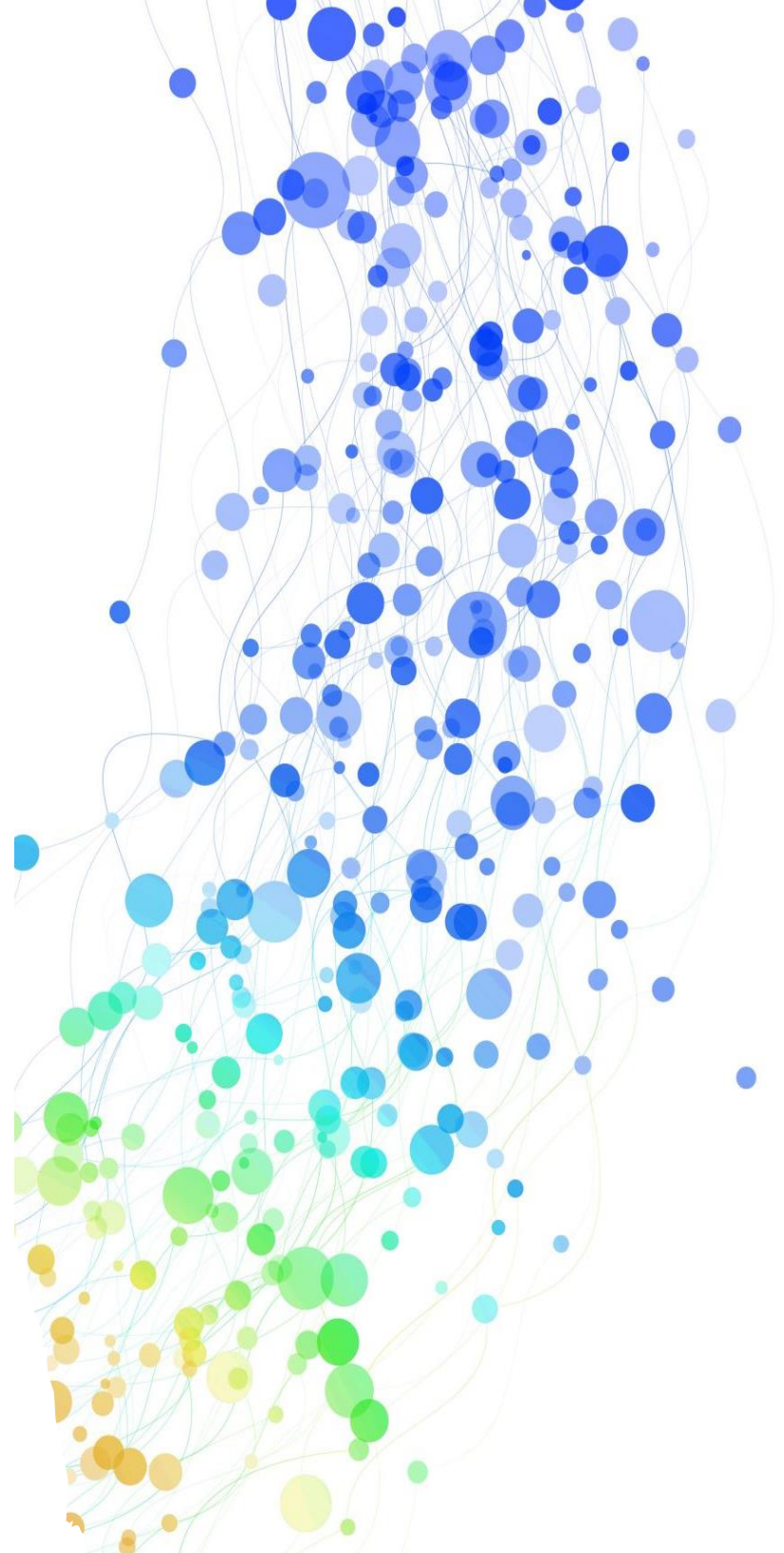
This Is Just To Say

William Carlos Williams - 1883-1963

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold



Billy Collins

Another Reason Why I Don't Keep A Gun In The House

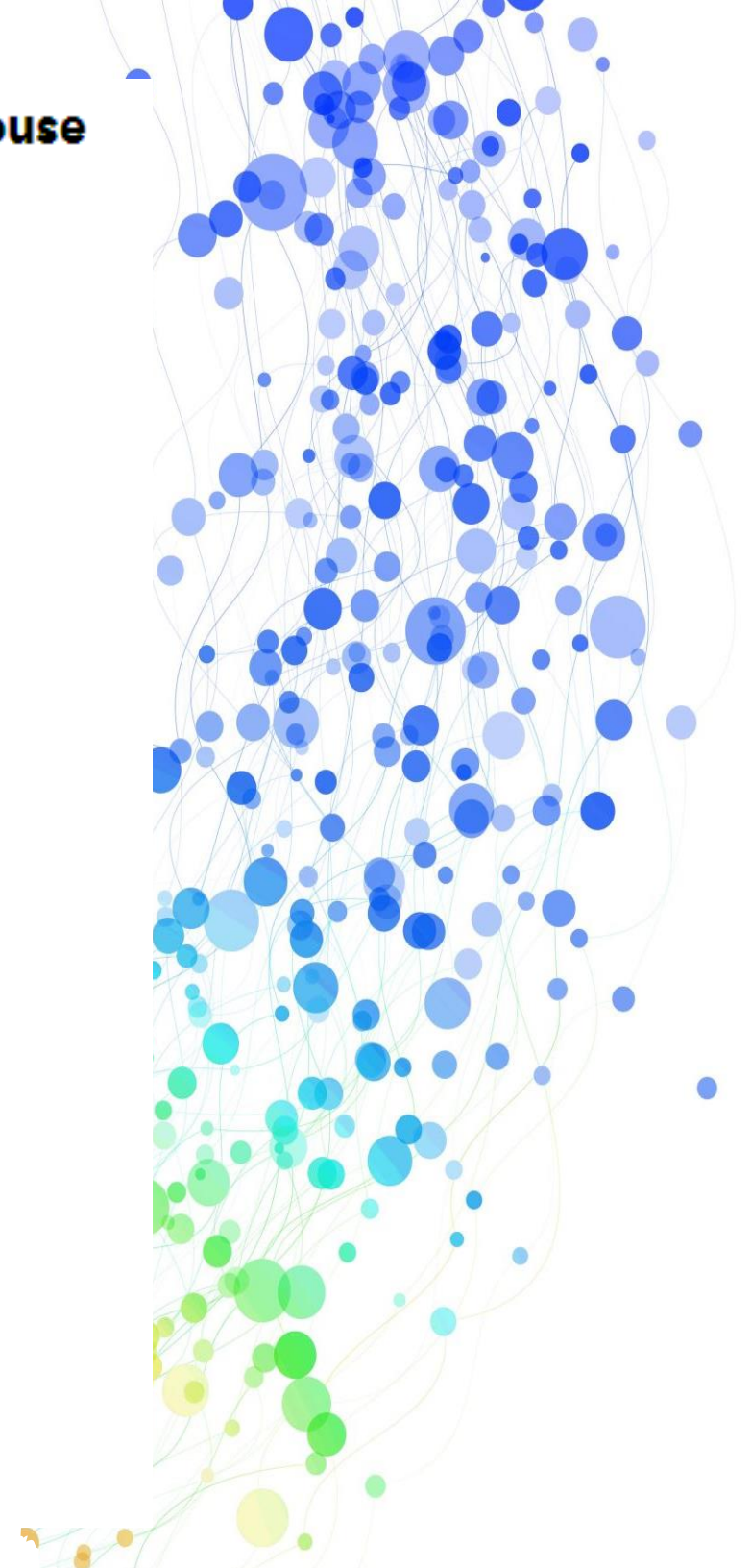
The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.
He is barking the same high, rhythmic bark
that he barks every time they leave the house.
They must switch him on on their way out.

The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.
I close all the windows in the house
and put on a Beethoven symphony full blast
but I can still hear him muffled under the music,
barking, barking, barking,

and now I can see him sitting in the orchestra,
his head raised confidently as if Beethoven
had included a part for barking dog.

When the record finally ends he is still barking,
sitting there in the oboe section barking,
his eyes fixed on the conductor who is
entreating him with his baton

while the other musicians listen in respectful
silence to the famous barking dog solo,
that endless coda that first established
Beethoven as an innovative genius.



That Sure is My Little Dog

Eleanor Lerman

Yes, indeed, that is my house that I am carrying around on my back like a bullet-proof shell and yes, that sure is my little dog walking a hard road in hard boots. And just wait until you see my girl, chomping on the chains of fate with her mouth full of jagged steel. She's damn ready and so am I. What else did you expect from the brainiacs of my generation? The survivors, the nonbelievers, the oddball-outs with the Cuban Missile Crisis still sizzling in our blood? Don't tell me that you bought our act, just because our worried parents (and believe me, we're nothing like them) taught us how to dress for work and to speak as if we cared about our education. And I guess the music fooled you: you thought we'd keep the party going even to the edge of the abyss. Well, too bad. It's all yours now. Good luck on the ramparts. What you want to watch for is when the sky shakes itself free of kites and flies away. Have a nice day.



Eating Poetry

Mark Strand - 1934-2014

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.

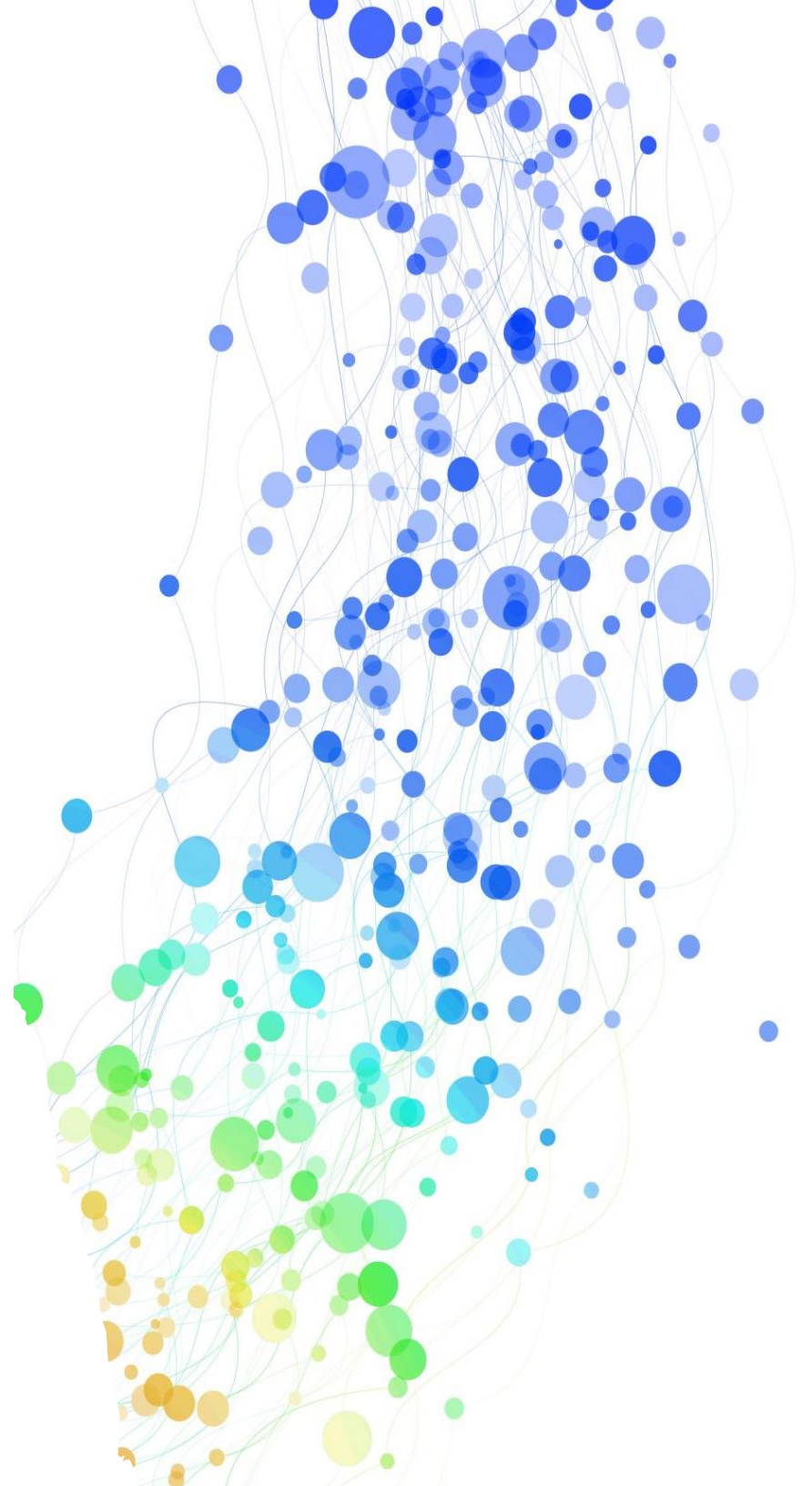
The librarian does not believe what she sees.
Her eyes are sad
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

The poems are gone.
The light is dim.
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,
their blond legs burn like brush.
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

She does not understand.
When I get on my knees and lick her hand,
she screams.

I am a new man.
I snarl at her and bark.
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

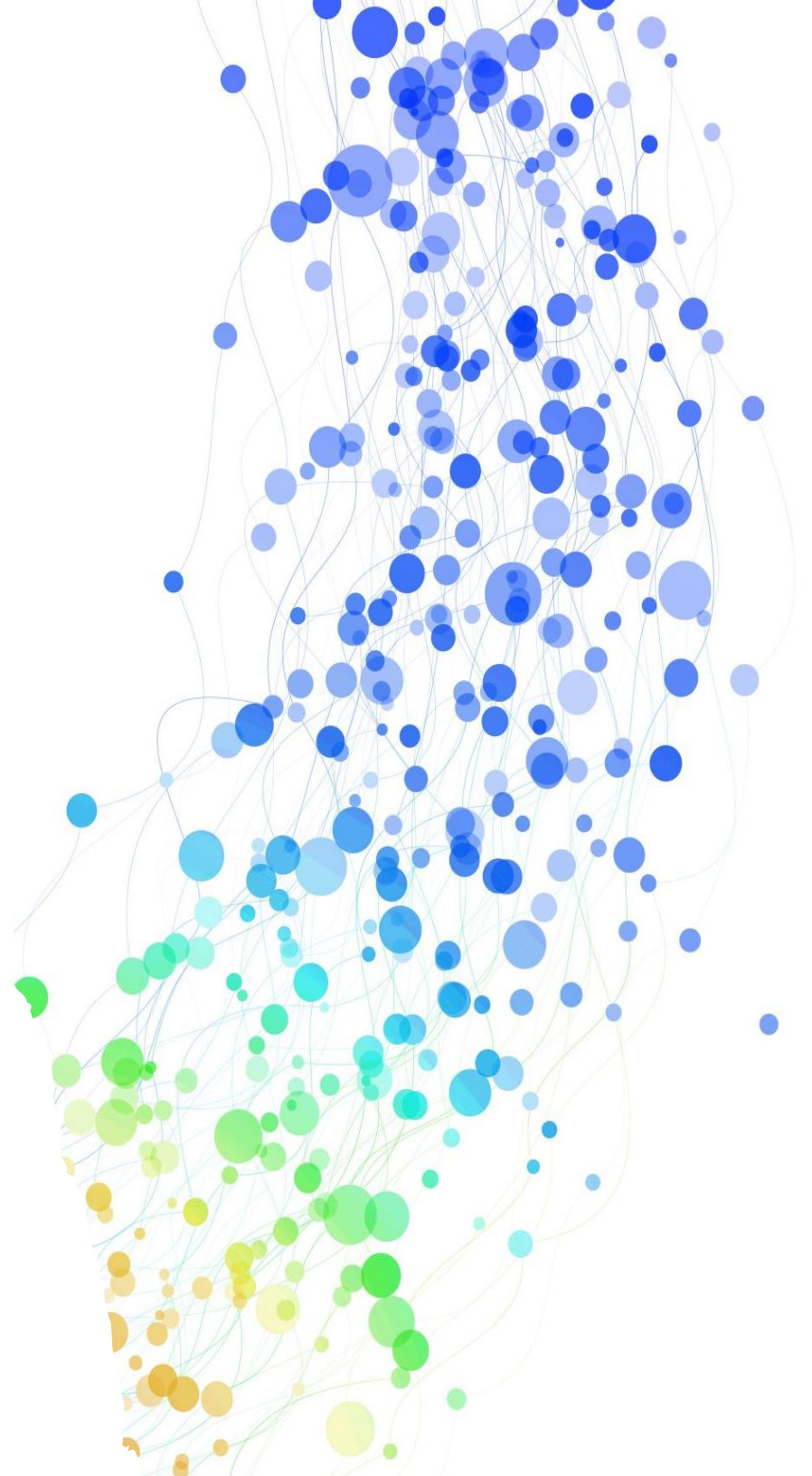


A Dream Within a Dream

BY EDGAR ALLAN POE

Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
Thus much let me avow —
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less *gone*?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.

I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand —
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep — while I weep!
O God! Can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?
Is *all* that we see or seem
But a dream within a dream?



There Are Birds Here

BY JAMAAL MAY

For Detroit

There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphor:
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,
I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti
a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about
and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.

