Strange Attractors

How to find them, those regions
Of space where the equation traces
Over and over a kind of path,
Like the moth that batters its way
Back toward the light
Or, hearing the high cry of the bat,
Folds its wings in a rolling dive?

And ourselves, fluttering toward and away
In a pattern that, given enough
Dimensions and point-of-view,
Anyone living there could plainly see—
Dance and story, advance, retreat,
A human chaos that some slight
Early difference altered irretrievably?

For one, the sound of her mother
Crying. For this other,
The hands that soothed
When he was sick. For a third,
The silence that collects
Around certain facts. And this one,
Sent to bed, longing for a nightlight.

Though we think this time to escape,
Holding a head up, nothing wrong,
Finding a way to beat the system,
Talking about anything else—
Travel, the weather, time
At the flight simulator—for some
The journey circles back

To those strange, unpredictable attractors,
Secrets we can neither speak nor leave.

—Robin S. Chapman