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poem

A Question for Neuroscientists

Valerie Laws

Where does a memory sit, when it's at leisure?
 Where does it cool its heels, await our pleasure?
 For whenever we are shown the busy brain,
 We see the thoughts and memories entertain
 Us, but always like honey bees in a hive,
 Entering and leaving, keeping themselves alive
 In restless motion, either coming in and out,
 Or from lobe to lobe, bustling round about.
 In through the senses' portals in endless flow,
 Or out through speech or action, what we know
 Flickers from cell to cell like summer lightning,
 The dendrite forests darkening and brightening
 As something being stored, or being recalled,
 Is passed round like a parcel: never stalled?
 Never at rest? Or are there hours or days
 When a memory's not moving? When it stays
 Still, drowsing like a sleepy drone,
 Not being thought on, just being left alone.
 So where's its home? Its niche? Its nest?
 The place it hangs out when it needs a rest?
 In the nucleus at a neurone's heart?
 In many neurones? In what part
 Of cell or lobe or brain does it reside
 While waiting for the call to come onside?
 And in what shape or form is it recorded,
 Until it comes forth, smiling and applauded,
 Twinkling, a galaxy of stars, each spark
 Peppering our consciousness through dark
 Times and good: soothing, aiding or warning,
 Awake or in dreams, to make us smile at morning.
 If thought, like light, can be particle, or wave,
 What is memory's photon, how is it saved?

To recall them is to move them, so which cell keeps
 Each of my honeyed memories, while it sleeps?

Selected by Femi Oyeboade. Published in *The Hippocrates Prize Anthology*, Hippocrates Press, 2012. Valerie Laws is a novelist, poet, performer and tutor. Visit her website at www.valerielaws.com
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