



DAWN DUSK

DAWN / DUSK ISSUE XV

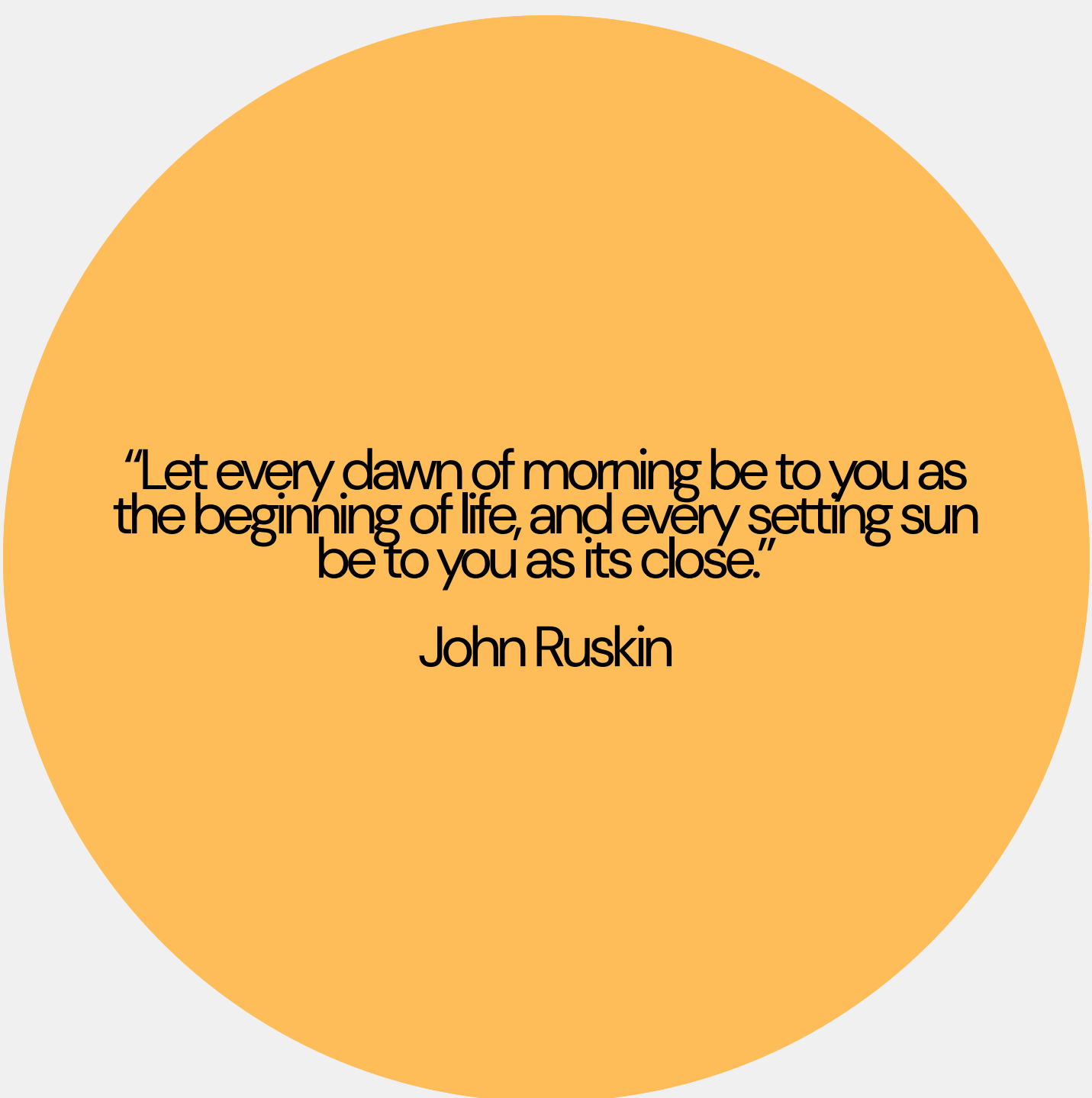
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"Let every dawn of morning be to you as
the beginning of life, and every setting sun
be to you as its close."

John Ruskin

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Autumn Williams is the author of the chapbook "WAVES" and the number-one bestselling collection "Clouds on the Ground". Her poems have appeared in *Wildscape Literary Journal*, *Flare Magazine*, and *Arcana Poetry Press*, among others. She also earned a silver medal in *The Wishing Shelf* Book Awards. Her work is influenced by the chronic illness she has, Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, but is written to be universal. Williams lives in Texas with her husband and their children.

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Tania Costea is an emerging artist based in Amsterdam who began painting two months ago. Working entirely from memory, she creates intuitive landscapes that explore atmosphere, transition, and emotional presence through colour and light.

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Alex DeBonis has published work in *Eclectica Magazine*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Hartskill Review*, and *Esquire*. He is a professor in the English Department of Bethel University and lives in western Kentucky with his family and two spoiled dogs.

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Thao Vu graduated from Eastern Nazarene College, National Taiwan University, and is writing her debut novel through the MFA program at Virginia Tech. Her recent and forthcoming work can be found at *Bending Genres*, *BULL*, *FlashFlood*, *Fork Apple Press*, *MockingHeart Review*, *THIMBLE*, *Villain Era*, *Zin Daily* and at www.vuqythao.com.

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Mahmoud Elmardi is an award-winning Sudanese visual artist and novelist. His work explores identity and cultural memory through abstract expressionism. A Katara Prize recipient, his paintings have graced several American journal covers and international exhibitions, bridging heritage and modernity while documenting the resilience of the human spirit.

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John Muro has authored three volumes of poems, including *A Bountiful Silence* in 2025. He has received four Pushcart nominations, three Best of the Net nominations and multiple commendations for his work. John's poems have appeared in *Acumen*, *Belfast Review*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, *River Heron*, *Sky Island*, *Valparaiso Review* and elsewhere.

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Chandra Persaud writes on topics such as grief, mental health, identity, and the immigrant experience. Her work has been published in *Pictura Journal*, *Epistemic Literary*, *Defunkt Magazine*, *PHIL LIT Journal*, *Mouthful of Salt*, and elsewhere. You can find her on Instagram: @pieces_of_acp.

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Yuu Ikeda (she/they) is a Japan based poet and writer. She loves mystery novels, western art, sugary coffee, and japanese comic "Jujutsu Kaisen." She writes poetry on her website: <https://poetryandcoffeedays.wordpress.com/>
Her latest poetry collection "Her Favorite Broken Glass" was published by *Island of Wak-Wak*.

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Minahil Tariq is a Pakistani MBBS doctor. While studying medicine, she observed her surroundings to redirect her thoughts. Every part of our surroundings are there for purpose and it secretly whispers us the reality that we often ignore.

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Paul Allatson is a cultural critic, writer and academic editor based in Sydney, Australia. His short stories and poetry have been published in anthologies and literary outlets in Australia, the USA and the UK. He is working on a collection, "Little Intimacies," from which this poem is drawn.

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Isabel Fontes is a Lisbon-born writer living in London. She is the author of several published books, and her work has appeared in literary magazines and anthologies across the UK, Europe, Canada, the United States, and Russia, including the Russian literary journal СРЕДА (SREDA). She was awarded Third Place in *HollowPoint Press's* inaugural The 300 Project. She promotes transformative arts and Portuguese culture. On Instagram, @isabelofontes shares glimpses of her creativity.



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Emma Datson is a emerging Australian rural artist, photographer and poet exploring her voice. With poetry including found poetry and photographs being her focus.

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Rohan is a writer from Mauritius. When he is not writing, he spends his time with his cats in the Sun.

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Najib Joe Hakim is a documentary photographer, artist and photography instructor. Hakim is the President of the Board for the Network_of_Photographers_for_Palestine; a founding member of Class_Conscious_Photographers; recipient of the Rebuilding_Alliance_Storytellers_Award for a trilogy of Palestine projects; a Political Art Fellow at the Yerba_Buena_Center_for_the_Arts, and a past nominee for the US Artist Fellowship.

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Mikaila Nalbantova is a speculative fiction writer with a focus on the epic, the folkloric, and the Classical. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming on *Apex Book Company*, in *Club Plum*, *Tension Literary*, and others. You can find more of her work through linktr.ee/mikaila.nalbantova.

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Tash Leviton is a London-based mixed media artist. Working primarily with collage, I create colourful and experimental compositions that construct surreal environments and imagined worlds.

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Lynn Hess is a retired teacher who, for thirty years, simultaneously conducted weekly poetry-writing workshops for students in grades K through 8. Her writing has appeared in publications including *Rattle*, *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, *The New Verse News*, *The Spoon River Quarterly* and others.



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Paula Appling is a poet and editor from upstate South Carolina. She has been published in *The Road Not Taken*, *Toasted Cheese*, *Caveat Lector* and *The Writing Disorder*. She has recently published *Shadow World*, an unsettling poetic journey. She lives with her husband and 2 cats.

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Barbara E. Hunt has publications across North America, UK, Netherlands, Scandinavia, Australia, France, Germany, resulting in a Pushcart Prize nomination from Swedish publication. Most recently, Devon, England and mid-western USA. Her climate-change collection *Rowing Across the North Atlantic* and forthcoming *What Is Is* (at writersplayground.ca).

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Stephen Jackson is a working-class writer who lives in the Pacific Northwest. His poems appear in numerous publications, including *Allium*, *The Branches: A Journal of Literature and Philosophy*, *fourteen poems*, *Prairie Fire*, *the International Human Rights Art Movement anthology*, *A Human Voice*, and the *Washington State Queer Poetry Anthology*.

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Ailin Sha is a poet based in Boston, Massachusetts. She studies English at Harvard College and currently serves a two-year term as the Boston Youth Poet Laureate.

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Simon is a ND writer from England. he is a member of the *All Seasons* writing group. He will be publishing a collection of contemporary Gothic poetry later this year. He seeks stillness and solitude.

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Alyson Hagedorn is a High School English teacher living in Dutchess County, New York with her husband and two sons. She earned a bachelor's degree in Journalism from SUNY Brockport and later received a Master of Arts in Teaching English from Stony Brook University. Her work will appear in forthcoming issues of *The Hoolet's Nook*, and *Things Left Unsaid (Words that Matter): An Anthology*.



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Winnie Peregrine is an artist living in West Texas. She has an MFA in Nonfiction from the University of South Florida and she always has a cat near her.

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Melissa McNair is a freelance writer living in the Saratoga region of New York with her husband, children and two dogs. She has been exploring the mysteries of goddess spirituality for nearly two decades. In her spare time, Melissa enjoys gardening, nature walks, making jewelry, and attending music concerts.

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Amanda Conover writes poetry that is often surreal-leaning, mystical, and confessional. She is the Poetry Editor for *Carolina Muse* and holds an MFA from Arcadia University. Her poems appear in *Atlanta Review*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Lumina Journal*, and elsewhere. Find her at www.amandaconover.com or on Instagram @amandamconover.

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Eden Van Leeuwen (she/her) is an autistic Australian writer, artist, and author of *Fire Bringer* (2021), which she later adapted into an audiobook. Some stories from *Fire Bringer* were first published in *Twisted Tax Tales* (*Vivid Publishing*, 2017) and *Backstory* (2019), an online magazine managed by Swinburne University. Her poetry has also appeared in *Divergent Minds* (2023). Holding a Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing and Literature, Eden's work is driven by a deep interest in mental health, identity, and the hidden forces that shape how we understand ourselves and the world around us.

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David Cook's stories have appeared in the *National Flash Fiction Anthology*, *Ellipsis Zine*, and more. He's a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee. He lives in Bridgend, Wales, with his wife and daughter. Say hi on Instagram @davidcook1001 or BlueSky @davidcook.bsky.social.

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Aidan Ashton (they/he) is a non-binary poet from Yorkshire with an affinity for moths and rot. When not writing, they enjoy vampire films, fibre crafts, and collecting sheep bones on hikes. Their favourite poem is "Wasps' Nest" by Michael Schmidt.



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From San Diego, CA, **Kelsey Overstreet** discovered her passion for painting in her early teens. She is an accomplished abstract painter and printmaker, working with water-based paints, oil sticks, thread, and spray paint. Overstreet received her MFA in 2018. Say hello at: @kelsey_overstreet or www.kelseyoverstreet.com

RAIN DOVE - 51

Sriyukta is an India-based poet and writer whose work explores identity, the inheritance of grief, and the search for selfhood through minimalist verse. Their writing has appeared in *Parcham Magazine* and *Aporia Literary Journal*, where their triptych, *Flesh over Flesh*, was selected as an Editor's Pick.

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Catherine McGuire is a writer/artist with a deep concern for our planet's future, with five decades of published poetry, six poetry chapbooks, a full-length poetry book, *Elegy for the 21st Century*, a SF novel, *Lifeline* and book of short stories, *The Dream Hunt and Other Tales*. Find her at www.cathymcguire.com

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Roberta Winters is a writer, photographer, and artist born and educated in New York City, currently living in Sacramento, California.

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Overwrite the Sun



I won't wait for tomorrow. I drive before dawn.
The land is enchanted now— covered with shadows
that will disappear soon.
I've never been here.
This night sky won't overwrite the sun's landscape,
the way a lighted first view
would stop me from seeing strange shapes in the dark.
These fields are a new ocean.
I live to be here, in the quiet dark,
ahead of morning. I insist on magic—
on trees in the distance that are currently an island—
on a new place held as memory
before I see clearly.

The Place Before Morning



In the Neighborhood Twilight



At dusk I hear the pink drumbeats
of the high school marching band.
They fall on tree leaves down the block
like rain or wind-blown holly berries.
We're an audience of half-listeners,
sweeping dust out garage doors
or watching a dog nose the grass,
so I'm surprised when I feel a tug
of something like grief,
a desire to recover what can't be.
I sift through the usual old pains,
but this isn't any of them.
What is it about these sounds?

The volley of drum taps, cymbal crashes
meant to stir a stadium of hearts
powder the neighborhood,
jewels tossed by a sky god.
In that purpling air I stand
and have a twilight thought,
remembering the everyday story
of driving to work, to school.
And nothing, nothing prepared me
for this splendor of rhythms
skipping down the sunset.
And what I conclude about myself
and about my neighbors is:
We don't deserve this.

A Turtle's Riddle



I.

Years ago, I was dispossessed. After mum died, the turtle offered to buy the house and everything in it. The tulip garden, Tibetan paintings, the skid prone sedan, hundreds of books, everything that was once mine, my last dog – Bruno. Then, when I came back to town, like a travelling exhibition returned to storage, the turtle lent me a bed. A cycle of dispossessing – in June of missing years or when I sat at the diner downstairs and heard Monk played in a loop, when I found my black coffee vapid and the vintage green banker lamp on each table a dread, it was time to quit the blueberry pancakes and walk out on another sultry night in the city, with my work clothes on, meaningless cards and keys, I walked to the station, I went back to my no longer home. Staggered sleep, an overnight bus meandered up the mountains. I got out at the last stop, a town wobbled by stillness and veiled in dawn mist. I walked the cobblestone street until sunrise. The turtle was waiting on the patio, like he had been attached to my shadow all along, quiet and watchful. His eyes protruded, pitch black, his mouth pressed shut into a thin line. An old turtle of only a few words, he was wrinkled and dyed in the color of an abyss, wholly benign except for his sturdy legs, which hardened over the years, grotesque by dead skin and scales, as though scutes were chiseled from his shell and glued to his legs. I laid my hand on his shiny shell, putting him onto my shoulder. “Welcome back,” the turtle said, and a while later, in the brevity of a petal and a breeze, he called my name, “Lona.”

A Turtle's Riddle



II.

The days grew shorter, up here in the mountains.

I didn't want to leave Lona, if it was my choice.

The mist rose to our window, I awoke with Lona next to me, asleep. I withheld the urge to touch her eye lashes her hair her lips her long limbs, my little eldest daughter inside this grown-up body so much bigger and puzzling to me. Shortly after the divorce, she undressed and showed me, "Look, mum," the things her body went through. "I need you," she reached out to me, her embrace a prayer, knowing I couldn't bear to look and my own battle I couldn't win. She was Lona without a last name, tattered all the way from her fingernails to her uterus. Back in the house where I used to spoon feed and bathe her, our heads in bed, I told Lona she was pushed into the world covered in excrement, because I didn't know how to push. She was my first and everything went wrong with being first. "Not until tonight," the midwife assured us before stepping out for a smoke, though she was mistaken. "You were the most agreeable first born," I said, dreamingly, "my prime, as should be," the garden wet from rain, overgrown ivy consumed the house, summer insects feasted on large petunia pots and melted into a rainbow. When my senses returned, I was suddenly a woman with child. Asleep, two women on an adolescent bed. I covered myself in her wounds and buried them with me, my sickly body, my memories, my grief, all became food for tulips and petunias on her birthday. I could never leave Lona, should I die while still feeling alive. But not tonight.

A Turtle's Riddle



III.

She was born after the morning rain.

I was down on my limbs, crawling days on end to reach the little pond her father dug that summer. My head poked out from the mud, I shuddered when her mother screamed, frantic footsteps rushing from the patio into the bedroom, then in a burst of light, I heard her cry for the first time. Strong and genuine. Lona, Lona, Lona, I whispered her name on my slow descent back to the lake. When her parents were still well and around, every Sunday, they took Lona to the café on the water and ordered something sweet. Her mother bought food for fish and birds and put bits of it into her cupped palm. I couldn't see her face because of the duckweed, but her laugh, what they called a golden childhood. I never thought to intervene at her lowest, between the warm baths and suffocating meals, but I knew the look on Lona's face that night. "Bruno! No! Bruno, stop!" She rushed to my side when the dog tore into my leg and flipped me stomach up. "Let him," I thought, these scratches and wounds, the pain rushed blood into my long dead heart. Lona, I had held out for so long, mined my fortune, mocked and mauled for this moment. Lona, let me do my part, let me correct every peripheral and unpaid debt, lost balloons and wrongful accusations, if it was true what your mother believed, that the spirit lived on whatever shell or form, so I would.

Guardian of the Dawn's Gate



Alla Prima



At this hour, with day slowly dying,
the sky could well be a linen canvas
placed atop an easel of furrowed bark
and a vertical fork of branches framed
by the far hills and the lateral spillway
of dusk that runs across the threshold
of heaven and, like some adept apprentice,
the wind's deftly blending and extending
an intense palette of colors – wet on wet –
applying additional layers before any one
hue can settle long enough to congeal
although the imperial blues and plum
indigos seem to bleed out towards
the furthest edges of clouds where they
linger well past sunset proving, perhaps,
the kindle, gush and smolder of color
is never truly eclipsed nor extinguished
by shadows, starless nights and whatever
else passes for darkness.

If the promise is everything returns to love



then, I will haul this grief
behind me until I can hoist it
onto my back until I can
hold its wet face between
slackened palms and then,
balance its weight on my
fingertips. I will do it—
keep crawling through
the gloom. Make myself
mythical. I will teach my bones
to loosen until they go soft
until they split wide like a
mouth until I can raise a
garden from the opening
and then at last, shape
this grief into another name.
Sometimes, I do not know how
to call a thing anything other
than what it is. I do not know
a way forward, but that has
never stopped me from kneeling,
looking for reasons to remain.

Dusk



Vivid orange dyes the horizon.
Stillness soaks into loneliness.
I'm free,
with the soul of a human
and tears of the moon.

The Heart of Clearing •



Dawn



On the light side of the dawn chorus
our lips separate
and release the birds
that roost nightly on our tongues.

The Cup on the Shelf •

It sits on the kitchen shelf, chipped slightly at the rim, its glaze faded into a soft, comforting dullness. A cup, once white and bright, now the colour of old clouds and forgotten days. I used to drink milk from it when I was seven years old. Warm milk, always with a teaspoon of honey, stirred by my grandmother's hand.

She had a way of making everything seem softer. Her home smelled of flour and lavender, of boiled water and old books. I used to visit every Saturday. She'd call me "petal" and let me crack the eggs into the cake mix, even though I'd always get bits of shell in. I'd sit cross-legged at her kitchen table, my small hands wrapped around that cup, listening to stories of her girlhood, of ration books and dance halls, of a time when life was slower, harder maybe, but not so heavy.

I hadn't thought of that cup in years.

But the other day, I found it tucked behind a line of mugs in my sister's kitchen—the last of Gran's things to survive the house clearance. I held it like it might dissolve, and for a moment, I was there again: a child in my grandmother's warm kitchen, my knees dangling off a wooden stool, laughing at something I can no longer remember.

Now I am older, and the world moves faster. Responsibilities pile like unread letters. I check my phone too often, forget people's birthdays, and leave my tea to go cold. But that cup, cracked, imperfect, unchanged, reminded me of a version of myself untouched by expectation or fear. A time when a sip of honeyed milk could fix everything. Or so it seemed.

The Cup on the Shelf •

There's a beauty in the broken, I've come to believe. Like the Japanese art of kintsugi, where broken ceramics are repaired with gold, the flaws become part of the story. The cup is not perfect, but it has survived. And so, have I.

After I left him, after the silence and the control and the way my laughter dried up—I thought nothing would feel soft again. I thought I had lost the part of myself that knew how to feel safe, how to feel joy. But healing comes in strange forms: the sound of birds before dawn, the kindness of strangers, the slow rediscovery of things I loved before I forgot myself.

Now, I drink my morning tea from that old cup. Carefully, with two hands.

There's a crack down one side, barely visible, but I know it's there. I run my finger along it sometimes, not out of sadness, but out of respect. For what was. For what remains.

The cup on the shelf is no longer just a vessel. It is memory. It is proof that we break. That we heal. That the past lives on, not as a weight, but as a thread. A whisper of honey and warmth and simpler days, echoing into a future I now hold gently in both hands.

Indelible out the back[•]



Golden boy



The golden rays of the sun washed over my squinting eyes as I gazed, mesmerized at how his hair caught the light, glowing like it's part of the sun itself. Everything was bathed in a warm orange hue.

The light fell on us like honey, slow, thick, gilding everything we touched. My favorite time of the day, where my love and I would linger on the balcony and unwind from the day's weight.

I watched his scintillating green eyes with newfound ease from the shadow he cast on me as he stood up from his chair across from me to go inside.

I lazily leaned against the balcony walls taking in more of the sunset. The birds were chirping and there was a smell of smoke that lingered in the air but it was not as irritating anymore. I looked down onto the empty playground many storeys below the apartment complex, as the metal caught the sunlight like a thousand stars on the ground.

I sat back up in my chair. He returned with a cup of coffee and a newspaper tucked neatly under one arm as he sat down with and handed me the cup with a sweet smile I could never get enough of.

"And none for you?" I teased. "Either you are being very generous, or you are plotting something."

His chuckle reached me like a memory, warm and already fading, just like the setting sun he was blending so well into. I took a sip, not minding the coldness and the day-old taste. He kept stealing glances at me over the edge of his paper, and I pretended not to notice.

Golden boy



After a while, he folded the newspaper and smoothed it out the best he could before handing it over to me “You should really read this,” he said with a sense of seriousness that contrasted with our laid back moment.

“Oh, you know I never need the news when I have you in front of me” I replied as I held the newspaper to my chest anyway. His smile lingered a moment longer, soft and knowing.

The skies darkened with the smoke as the winds abruptly changed. The sirens started blaring again.

“Let’s go down to the shelters this time” he urged, already moving towards the door. I quickly followed him before pausing and looking back at the newspaper on the balcony table.

“Come quick,” he called, his voice carrying from the hallway behind me with the same tone of urgency as before.

“I will just grab the paper” I replied. “We can do the crosswords while we are down there.”

“No! Leave it, come now” his words resonated. I kept walking. His voice got more frantic now: “Quickly. Come on.” I reached the table.

The paper laid there on the page he pointed out earlier.

My feet stopped. My breath did too. On the page facing up was his photograph, still, framed in the obituary section. Smiling like he never left.

Golden boy

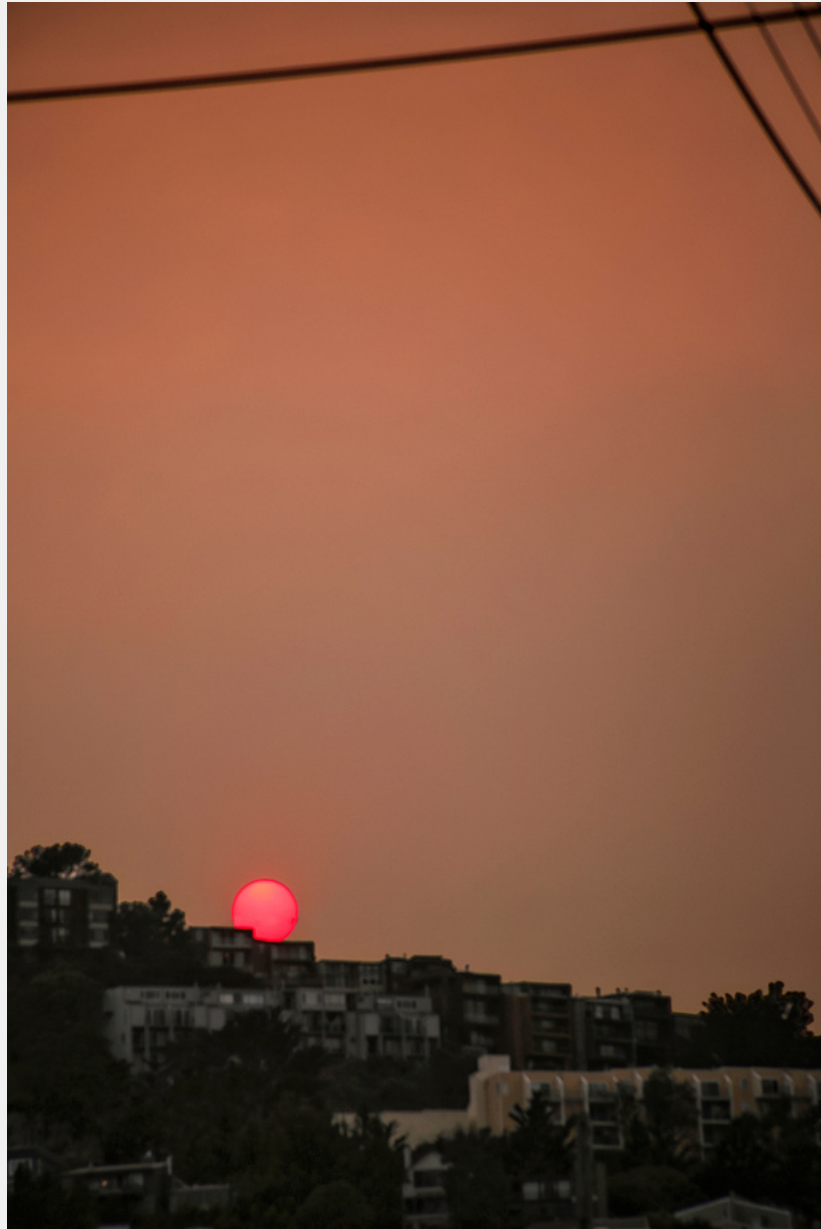


His voice had ceased to reach my ears.

That sight scattered my thoughts like glass, sharp and impossible to gather. My eyes darted from that newspaper and the day-old coffee mug on the table trying to reconcile the warmth of his smile with the ache that was spreading through my chest.

The sirens were the only thing that kept playing in my head, as it was slowly being replaced by the humming of a drone growing louder and louder before the sound dropped out of the world.

Cherry Sun



Daybreak



I'm alone in the house when I awaken, even though it's barely past four a.m. and the sky is still gray with a darkness made ashen by streetlamps. Mom must've already left to join you and Dad at the hospital. In theory, that means it's her shift now, but Dad won't come home until he can take you with him.

I turn on my side beneath the covers and stare out the window at the muted sky. There will be Post-its waiting for me all over the kitchen—Mom's usual excess of notes, written whenever I'll be left alone for an undetermined swathe of time. "Already fed Caligula. Don't let that lying cat fool you." "Please defrost chicken." "Eat real food, not just junk! We have plenty of leftovers <3" "If your grandma calls, tell her to text me." "I love you." "Take out the trash." "Expecting package. Please bring it in." I imagine the last three years distilled into a massive amalgamation of all her Post-its, starting with the first: "Your sister is sick. Picking her up from sleepover."

It had been sitting on the corner of my bedside table, that first note. Just the sole Post-it, since Mom had expected it to be a quick drive to your friend's house then back again. A consequence of a common case of the badly-timed flu. I remember Dad was on a work trip that Friday. I remember he booked an early flight home after you started seizing in the car and Mom rushed you to the hospital, and the doctor started saying the kinds of words that only existed to me in TV shows until our parents sat me down to talk—voices unbearably slow and gentle—about what was the matter with you.

They got better at those talks over the years. They learned to speak almost casually, like parents watching their child dying before their eyes was something that happened every day. And, I suppose, it is. And, I suppose, no matter how familiar all those parents become with their warped reality

Daybreak



of outliving their children, they also never lose the edge of tension that lingers in our parents' speech. That strain that constricts every word on its way through their throat, clinging to that operative word: *dying*. Something in progress, yet incomplete.

Still, you live.

Outside the window, dawn begins its ponderous ascent. Gray becomes blue becomes violet. The sky is a bruise, something purple and yellowing. A sore spot upon the universe. I imagine some cosmic god prodding the earth with a finger. That old instinct to touch where it hurts.

I think of you. Lying in your hospital bed.

Your long-awaited surgery was scheduled for this morning. Mom never shares percentages—she calls them bad luck and morbid—but Dad's the type soothed by numbers, so I can usually count on him to tell me your odds. Yet, even he wouldn't tell me how likely you were to make it out of this attempt whole and sound.

I wonder if the surgery has already started. "Morning" is a vague span of time. When does the day stop dawning and officially become? How long does this breath last in which you are alive and poised beneath a knife that could see you enter the day better or not at all? Schrödinger's Sister.

From where I lie on my side, I can still see the moon in the sky. It's faint; a sickle. It will be subsumed by the daylight once the sun completes its rise. I would give anything to freeze that crescent where it lingers before the dawn. To freeze the sunrise on the horizon and live out the rest of my natural lifespan beneath the jaundiced twilight, right here in my bedroom. Me, always groggy on the verge of wakefulness; the day, always on the verge of its bloom,

Daybreak



never to see itself wilted by another dusk—golden and scarlet petals folding beneath the line of the distant mountains into a withered nightfall. With existence halted, I would never finish high school, never finish growing up or have children of my own, never so much as feel the sun on my bare skin for one final moment. I'd never see Mom or Dad again, or the rest of our family, or my friends, teachers, neighbors, strangers.

And I would never see you again, either, but it wouldn't matter. Because you would be alive. Forever.

Moon Surf



So Many Poems Are Sad



I want to write a morning poem,
not a moaning poem
that blackens skies and fails to note
the sunrise.

I want to bottle summer's bracing scent
and spray it as my year-round best perfume.
Time cannot foresee what it delivers--
hauls of heavy hate or weightless bubbles
splashing opalescent sprays of laughter.
Let others choose to watch for bluer water.
I'll climb the morning mist to hug the light
and shout, "*Another day, another gift!*"

I want to write a morning poem,
not a mourning poem.
I want each dawn to carry one more chance
to love, to live, to linger
loving life.

Dusk



Darkness

whispered its way across the woodland
stilling the forest.

Twilight tamped down bird sound, and
silenced squirrel chatter.

Only the wind and water continued their conversations.

Trees, ancient in their bearing,

made themselves silhouettes against the deepening night sky
providing darkened cover for their residents.

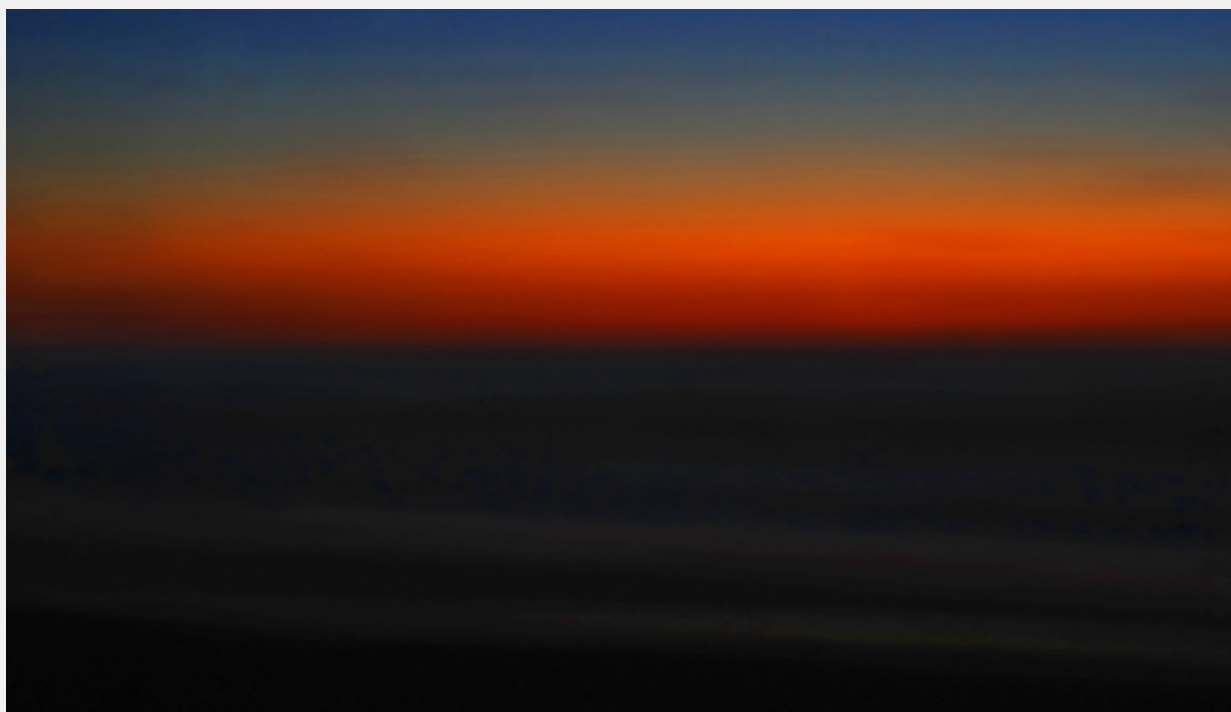
Nightfall quieted my brain too,

offering me a chance to be still
and create peace within.

Only the rhododendron's white flowers would not be muted,

their fluorescing lingering on
until morning light.

Red Dawn



Intertidal



zone that liminal space
between high and low green

sludge-line and mud flats where
patience lives made visible

like little sailboats anchored
with their noses pointing inland or out

to sea, tugged by slow swelling current. Waterline.
Not knowing this is where we live

until age like boat-prows reveals
we're not propelled by garish sun

but moonlight draws us. More
than dark and light day

and night offers our elemental
watery essence up to lunar drag. Where

once each day we stretch and flex drawn
by gravitational might till we can know

we know the invitation exists to reach
out for the galaxies.

Insomnia



If you drift to sleep, dreams will overcome you, you must
lie awake, release the mind into a state of arrested consciousness,

unleash it to the mercy of being, revealing a high of resistance,
breaking down when you realize it is light out—unaware of how

you failed to notice sleep come—unclear until the sun
drifts away with the day, how many days of your life now?

If you lie too still the heat will overcome you, you must
think to move, while keeping the body static, a skill you should

have learned as a child, watching flowers grow motionless
in the garden, realizing now it is dark out—not knowing how

you failed to notice night fall—watching the moon as it
arcs across the night sky, how many nights of your life now?

Garden, sealed



Me and my Shadow



Dear Deirdre,

I'm at my wits end with a personal problem I've got and it's getting worse. It's about me and my Shadow. You see we're not getting along, which is a shame as we were close.

It used to be good going out with Shadow. We had a right laugh swapping places, you should have seen the look on the people's faces when we did that. But even then the Shadow could be silly, running off, though the Shadow always returned with a sheepish grin on its face.

No, it got bad after me and Shadow had a row. Shadow asked why is it that whenever you lead that I must follow? And then get this, Shadow had the cheek to say that there must surely come a time when I must follow the Shadow! My Shadow repeatedly answers back and insists on having the last word. People are saying that my Shadow is more interesting than me. They laugh at Shadow's jokes, they never laugh at mine.

Since then me and my Shadow have been arguing and fighting a lot and the wheels have come off somewhat on our shadow self synchronicity. My Shadow can barely stand being in the same room as me, it tells me I smell because I don't shower enough. My Shadow's always in the shower, how many times a day do you have to wash your hair?

I am beginning to harbour a strong dislike of my Shadow. Gets me thinking all kinds of nasty names to call it, names that are too vulgar and filthy to divulge in a respectable family newspaper that you work for Deirdre, for example It's getting purposely out of shape, as it no longer has the same nose or shoulder frame as me. Sometimes Shadow grows smaller, at others it looms bigger. I can't seem to trust Shadow. People comment that I look nothing like my Shadow anymore.

My shadow has deliberately slowed down so that we arrive separately at places. The number of times I've got to an appointment on my own and my Shadow is nowhere to be seen, leaving me waiting for Shadow to come sloping in.

Me and my Shadow



At parties it's getting really embarrassing. People are talking as I enter the room on my own, my Shadow nowhere in sight. They say, "Where's your shadow tonight?" and "Have you given it the night off again?"

Me and my Shadow are living increasingly separate lives. The things I like to do, Shadow doesn't like them. It's taken over the tv, like where I am watching a nice nature programme and the Shadow will turn over to some noisy rock band, start headbanging and air guitar.

My Shadow has started swearing, smoking and drinking. It gambles a lot too and expects me to pick up the tab. My Shadow tells me I'm a boring old stick in the mud.

Increasingly I am left alone in my home as my Shadow stays out till the early hours, comes home swaying and singing, "The Wild Rover" at the top of its voice and waking up the neighbours, worse it parades round the house in nothing but its socks and runs into the garden shouting off the odds, urinating over the plants and upsetting all the neighbour's dogs. I'm just tired of apologising to the neighbours the next day constantly saying, "It's not me, it's my Shadow".

Worse, I've noticed my Shadow is now getting a lot more letters and parcels than me and gets nearly all the phone calls.

You know, the other day we were out and I overheard people talking about us. They said, "Oh that's Shadow, who's the peculiar figure standing next to Shadow? And the other replied, "Must be Shadow's mate, but I'm afraid I don't recognise it as anyone I know".

If this carries on I fear that we'll swap places or I'll end up in ignominy becoming known as the Shadow's silhouette,

What do I do Deirdre, I fear I'm fast losing my identity.

Yours sincerely

Mr Anonymous.

While You Died in the Next Room ●

I brushed my teeth while you died slowly in the next room. With the bitter taste of baking soda and spearmint thick in my mouth, I listened as your son read from the bible.

Setting aside the pain and trauma of his childhood, he spoke to you, pouring his need for your salvation down your throat and you let him, giving him this one last gift from a father to a son. Though your throat is restricted and your tongue atrophied months ago, you drank it down. It was the first meal you'd had in years.

The space between us was heavy with years of resentmentment; me, resentful of my own father for what he never did for me and you and your son resentful of each other for the years that passed where you couldn't find forgiveness. And so, I brushed; hard and erratically, whitening my teeth and staining them with the blood seeping from my gums.

Your son's counsel continued. Your chest was bare except for whatever was left of the greying hairs that once spoke of your heritage and masculinity. Dressed in a pair of America-blue boxer shorts and an unbuttoned polo, the feeding tube that's taken up residence in your belly was angry, emitting the pungent smell of a body decomposing one organ at a time. When you start to suction the putrid phlegm from your lungs, I gag on my toothbrush. You are no longer the man my mother married all those years ago. This version of you, all weak and drippy, and the color of infection, is not how I will remember you.

Brushing harder, I spit the bloody paste in the sink, unable to get the taste of mortality out of my mouth. I spit out thoughts of my own father in the same state; a catheter in his penis, his dignity on the bedside table and the sins of the father spread out before him for visitors to behold.

While You Died in the Next Room ●

Brush, bleed, spit!

My mind races with imagined fantasies of my father's future passing. Will he give me the grace to pour my needs onto his lap while he dies? Will his end be accompanied by my forgiveness of his worldly sins? Will he set me aside, as he always has and go selfishly from this world? Will he ask for my mother as he takes his last breath? Will I carry the weight of his rejection and disappointment to my own death bed?

Brush, bleed, spit!

Brush, bleed, spit!

When your son has finished his testimony, I rinse my mouth letting the coolness of the water wash away the metallic bite of my bloody gums. I imagine this water like a mico-baptism meant for my tongue, washing clean the daggers in my words and thoughts so they can be reborn into something less murderous.

Spitting the last of my resentments into the sink, I dry my mouth, praying silently that your passing is peaceful; that you go from this world to the next with the knowledge that your work and your life has left a mark on those who were touched by it.

I pray a little harder for my own father and a little harder still for my sons. My words are a whisper kissing the reaper's ears. They speak of my hope that this generational tale of the things we carry and the things we pass on shape themselves into something new.

Abstraction Dusk



Liminal Light



The late afternoon sun
Bathes everything in gold-kissed light
A glow in the final throes of life

Creeping

Towards the dark
This liminal dance of light and shadow
Darkness descends

Dancing

In the dark
Fireflies and peepers wake from their slumber
The Wandering Stars begin their march

Across

The sky
Is midnight blue with
Shimmering silver stars

Sharing

The sky
With colorful auras
Dancing through the heavens

Look up!

To the sky
And witness the song
That sings with pictures and memories

Creeping

Towards the light
The sun transforms the hidden
And sings a glowing love song to the Earth

ars poetica



a poem is a liminal space
locked in a garden behind heavy door
guarded by heavy door behind heavy door.

each door a portal to the veins of the poem
or sometimes a big bite of flesh smelling
of goldwood and rusted Chrysanthemums.

these words are doves floating
in the water of the wind as shapes
become sung into one realm or another.

the paged ink akin to blood
the same way a tree will sap if forced
to part with its fluids.

and so the sap sticks to something
more substantial. lingers its sweet
to the surface of your brain

until you can remember the why
of this folklore. how the point was never the doors
or what lists of flower fingernails

and mapled organs and rotting
visions lie in the leftovers of the liminal.
to create is to bury another realm,

to hand-select which alternate garden
is unearthed. to act, after one portal
is concealed, as if you're just waking up

when you dig it right out of its homemade grave,
stealing these leafbones and wordsyrup
from whatever god rules this world.

Night in Daylight



Before



We stand at the edge of the ocean, our favourite place, or it used to be, before, when we had a favourite anything. Favourite place, favourite food, favourite books. That's all gone now.

We skim stones over the water into the blood-red sunset, like Mammy once taught us. They make no sound as they glide weightlessly across the sea into oblivion.

We are two, my twin and I, but as always, we move as one, bending down, grasping stones, straightening up. We hold our stones, using our fingertips to explore the stories each tells in its nooks and crannies. Then we hurl them away. We've enough stories of our own.

When we leave, we sing sad songs, the ones Mammy would croon at dusk before she'd go to her cold room to suffer another night with Daddy, before the neighbours told the police about the noises they'd heard and the police took Daddy away, before the foster home we hate with the shrew-faced old woman who laughed when she told us we couldn't see Mammy any more and laughed again when we cried.

We climb the steep path up, up, up to the top of the cliffs where the world falls away, arriving exhausted and panting for breath, the moon just becoming visible now and ready to bathe everything in a monochrome light. We used to picnic here with Mammy (though never Daddy), before, back when we were a family, not simply two brothers with no place.

We stand at the precipice, hand in hand. We will not glide. We are not weightless. We will simply plummet. Like Mammy did, before.

Beforees



These cruel beforees have forced us here. Soon there will be just one more before to add to our story.

We look at each other. We nod. As always, we move as one.

cicada



shadow-puppet light
below the god-drenched mountains;
streets like still rivers
pooled quiet in the gloaming
deepen to photograph blue.

in adoration
one by one, the streetlamps wake.
buzzing hymnals rise
unseen spirits of the wing
hollowing bodies to song.

do the streetlamps sing?
the day's eulogy is read
in thrumming tymbal.
white light and risen voices
calling the night to come home.

Before the Storm



Rain Dove



A kiss
on a sleep-warm cheek
fingertip
tracing
the gentle swell
of your breast

A morning beside you—
sleepy adoration
in the half-moons of your eyes
lips mumbling
a love song
my rain dove.

Sun peeks—
a shy maiden
waiting on her mistress
for you to rise,
to bathe you in warmth.

Please let me stay
beside you,
my soft sanctuary,

Today
And tomorrow
And tomorrow
And after.

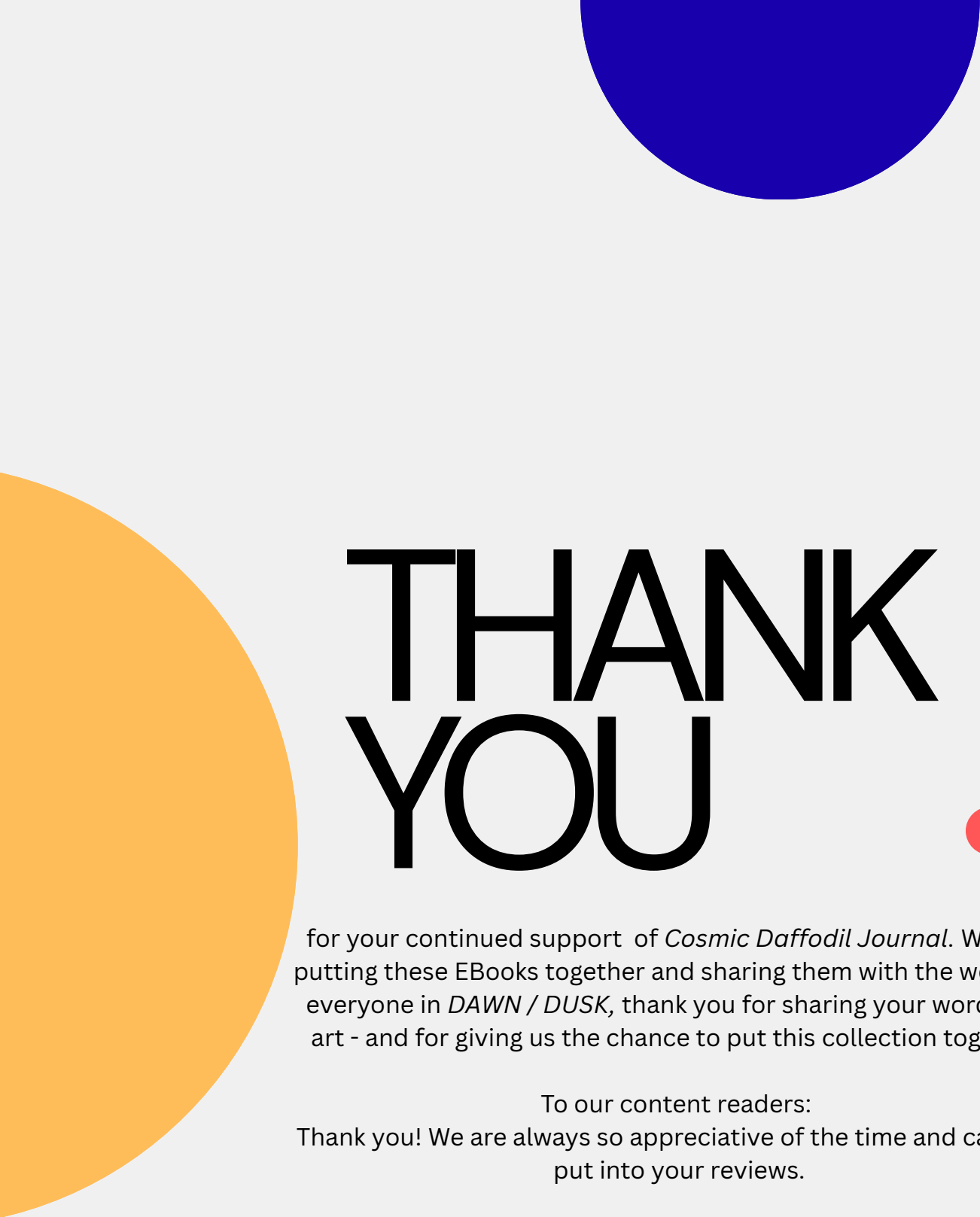
As Winter Unclenches



dawn inflates with bird chatter
their wild swoops from cherry to feeders
their lilt mingling with lilac perfume
something inside me lets go; breath
has more space; tendons ease.
Now that breeze has no icicles,
now that movement isn't a brave act
(cold muscles aching to sit again)
I move around the yard I must leave.
I watch plums blossom for the last time
ask myself if there will ever be better
than this March morning – shell-pink blooms
denim sky bleaching
into a quiet green day.

Dusk in Rego Park





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With love,

Madisen D'Ascenzo

Kelly Brocious