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Sundowning

(Excerpt from the long poem *Into the Bardo*)

Deb O'Rourke

In the afternoon, Mom's still
with us, still painfully awake.
When I arrive, she hugs me,
exhausted, contrite.

Then, again, we face the fight.
For, as sunset's rosy window
darkens to black, Mom's tender
ways morph again into rage.

Nurses call this *sundowning*,
the onset of night madness in the
deeply sick—their grace
receding with the light: comfort
and sanity swept away

like flotsam
on the retreating tide of day.

Medication is conveyed in a clear acrylic
pipe. A devout smoker, she expertly
surrounds us with mist—my
Mad Queen morphed into peevish
caterpillar, huffing
contemptuous vapour as
again we trail that
white rabbit, tumbling
into the deep
pall
of the Night.

As the ward supplies the sound effects,
Mom's tattered retinas are screens
for hallucination to project. Quick
figures clatter, flit from view.
Disembodied yelps, whispers, pings,
squalls, code blue calls don't help.
Even to me, my explanations ring
of obfuscation. I, too, begin to
see malignant life in gently stirring
bedside curtains, in shadows
flicking over dingy walls.

About the Poet

Deb O'Rourke is a writer, artist and educator of settler descent, born in Calgary and living in Toronto, Canada. Her work is influenced by adventures in hitchhiking and motherhood, and employment in factories, schools, and long-term care. Her prose appears in various news and cultural publications. Email: deborourke@milkweedpatch.com