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The First Shadows of Dementia

Alan Steinberg

She walks with one foot here, one foot there,
my sister of so many years, my beautiful sister,
caught between certainty and disaster,
the clarity of the moment before her,
but which one—which one?
And all the promises of tomorrow—
what of them, what of them?

It's soon to be my birthday, she knows,
her calendar full of dates and obligations
she cannot remember.
With a smile and a frown,
she tells me how memory
can fade like the moon in clouds,
and asks if she has sent me a card.

I tell her if she has it has not landed.
I tell her it does not matter.
I tell her we are beyond
such signs and symbols;
that we love each other in the here and now.

I tell her that to love like this
means we have loved for many years,

for love doesn't grow in clouds
but in the heart's dark soil,
and it takes a long time to grow,
and a long time to wither.

A few days later the card lands,
full of printed words of devotion
and my sister's own strong hand
telling me the words are real.
And she sends a picture of our mother
long gone, who loved us both,
telling me she understands,
telling me she knows
the past is only a mirror
and love the open door.

Alan Steinberg works
at SUNY Potsdam.
Email address:
steinbal@potsdam.edu