

# THE DREAMS OF WINTER'S DEAD



In memory of  
Ramona Anita Epstein

2-17-1957 to 8-13-2020



& dedicated to those who are  
still here.

In 2020 my mother fell ill. Everything about her illness and convalescence that could go wrong, did go wrong. After 5 months of promises that she could make a full recovery, the doctors sat me down and said that, actually, it wasn't looking so good. While I sat in the alcove at the hospital, trying to collect myself and find the courage to go back to her room, I overheard a conversation around the corner at the elevators between two staff members. What caught my attention was that one of them shared my mother's name.

"You going up, Ramona?"

"I sure am!"

My mother died less than 24 hours later. Even after months of limbo, even with the Doctor's warnings, and the overheard conversation, I was still blindsided. Losing her was, and still is, the hardest thing I've ever had to come to terms with. And the best way that I know how to process and communicate is through my hands - be it writing, or painting, or craft.

The poem and the work in this zine are an attempt to reconcile my personal mythology about death, with the lived experience of witnessing my mother walk the path, so to speak. I've tried to imagine what it was like for her, and then share that presumed journey through the lens of the deaths of leaves and plants.

I imagine that what comes after death is a sleep - an inbetween space for the deceased. Here they stay until they enter a dream, which for the dead is a kind of waking up. Because they don't wake up to join us, they must be waking up to something else entirely. And I imagine that it is a very lovely dream that they enter, once they're ready.





The winding down is soft and the running out is quiet.  
light is there until it is no longer.  
And the vigil is held and held and held  
by evergreens, by stones  
by the branches that gently let go of what  
they can no longer bear.

The wind begs the question: *Can they be remembered?*

When all that's left is a memory of the shadows they once  
cast  
wreathed in warmth  
once new.

So the trees make a promise  
over the quiet winding and soft running out  
that the vigil will be held, and held.





Until the light returns  
the trees promise to remember how it felt to  
be wrapped up in cool, endless shade.

The sleep is fragile.

A nest like a scaffold, built of hopeful gestures  
and misremembered moments  
when they thought that they'd been seen.

But the songbirds pay no mind to what the dead believed themselves  
to be



and the wind blows through them all the same, shaking loose the  
fragile threads  
the dead had sewn to keep themselves  
to themselves.

Brightness, darkness, the skeleton of joy  
and their pale bones all shiver  
in the wind  
a breath away from breaking.

Sleeping in a brittle pause of circadian rhythms

only as long as ice is in the rivers' veins  
and snow makes their eyelids heavy.



Then when they wake up to their dreams, they do not see us standing.  
Sitting.  
Kneeling and waiting  
and crying in our cars.

They are alive in their sleep, learning how from the hugging dark is born  
everything  
And inside the blurry edges of memory and prophecy is  
everything.

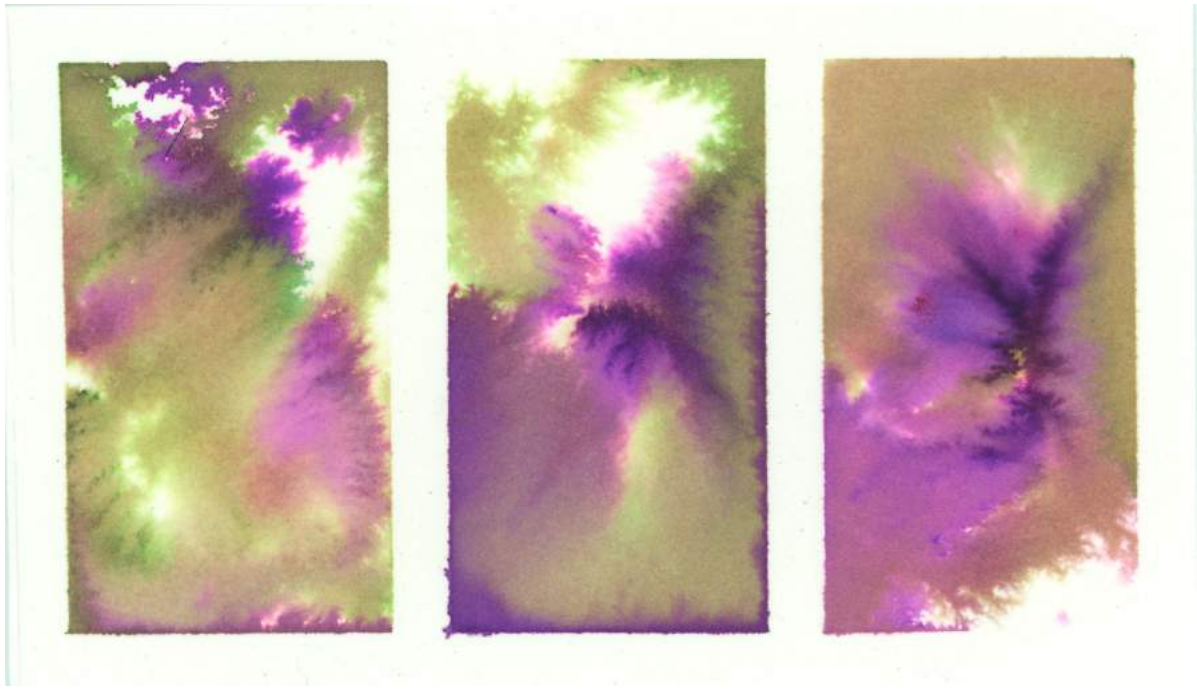
We whisper the names of butterfly colors, and we feel less lost with the warmth  
of rain on our cheeks, but the dead still dream.





They don't hear our *whenwillyouwake?*

They hear a river clamoring as it discovers that in its colorless blood is golden glittering.



They don't see us grope for what they've shed.

The leaves they dream of grow brighter than any they've left behind.

## The Dreams of Winter's Dead

i. (the death)

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Thanks for being here. My name is Raven Magill, and I created the artwork (minus the leafy doodles) you see in this zine with a combination of cyanotype, watercolor, and collage techniques.

The poem was constructed with a back-and-forth dance between scrap papers and a word processor.

It's my hope that, if you've lost someone, this work helps you to feel less alone. Or perhaps it reflects something about how you've felt in your own grief.

And if you haven't lost someone, I hope that there is some beauty here for you.



For inquiries, or to share a kind word, please send me an email at: **[raven@ravenmagill.com](mailto:raven@ravenmagill.com)**

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