

Tap Tap Tap

By Jasmine Schwam

Grandfather's finger taps the air,
a soft drum beneath the California oak,
light folding itself around his pointer finger

I mistake the moment for a leaf,
the world's oldest costume,
a veined hush pressed flat
against bark.

tap tap tap...
He summons a smaller truth.

The leaf quivers, exhales,
loosens its disguise,
becomes breath,
becomes moth,
becomes the unmasking
of what I never waited long enough to see

A beauty built for staying unseen,
soft colors that gleam and shift.
I was lucky enough to catch its whisper,
but I never stood still
for its music.

The oak hums its age.
The moth folds shut,
recloses its secret
that I promised not to tell.

Blend in, and maybe
the world will leave you whole.
Stand out, and perhaps
judgment's teeth will chew you out.

Learn to press yourself
against whatever background
keeps you safe...

Stay hidden too long,
and you forget
what your own colors look like...

Grandfather smiles, knowing
wonder...
light, motion,
a creature choosing
its own visibility,
its own vulnerability,
its own victory.



Grandfather leans against the old oak,
it's bark a map of it's life.

Every year it chooses to stand visible...
tree rings showing it's growth.
He taps the trunk the way he tapped my shoulder.

The oak keeps standing,
Unblended,
Unhidden,
Unafraid.
Why press yourself flat against the bark
When you carry whole seasons inside you?

The world taps my shoulder.

tap
tap
tap

Asking me to look.
Asking me to choose what I show.
Will I be the moth or will I be the oak?

