

# Once the World Was Perfect

By Joy Harjo

Once the world was perfect, and we were happy in that world.  
Then we took it for granted.

Discontent began a small rumble in the earthly mind.

Then Doubt pushed through with its spiked head.

And once Doubt ruptured the web,

All manner of demon thoughts

Jumped through—

We destroyed the world we had been given

For inspiration, for life—

Each stone of jealousy, each stone

Of fear, greed, envy, and hatred, put out the light.

No one was without a stone in his or her hand.

There we were,

Right back where we had started.

We were bumping into each other

In the dark.

And now we had no place to live, since we didn't know

How to live with each other.

Then one of the stumbling ones took pity on another

And shared a blanket.

A spark of kindness made a light.

The light made an opening in the darkness.

Everyone worked together to make a ladder.

A Wind Clan person climbed out first into the next world,

And then the other clans, the children of those clans, their children,

And their children, all the way through time—

To now, into this morning light to you.

Joy Harjo is a writer and poet of the Mvskoke (Creek) Nation. She served as the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States from 2019-2022 and received the Harper Lee Award for Alabama's Distinguished Writer at the 2023 Monroeville Literary Festival.

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