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The End of the Day

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ANN STRUTHERS

The End of the Day

To watch the sun set at Wadi Rum
we ride across the desert on benches
in the back of the 1950s pickup,
past the petroglyphs on the red rocks
to the outcroppings smoothed by eons
of time with sand in their teeth.
The princes in their sheepskin cloaks
breast the January wind from their new jeep.
Sun diffuses from marigold to pale peach,
persimmon, coral, cerise, sheen of crimson.
Clouds' edges lit with gold
like Bible pages, finally suffusing
into cool mist, fine as silk.

Lawrence and the Arab army
camped here, exhausted but exhilarated
because the Turks at Aqaba thought
no one could cross the fierce wilderness
behind them. Camels ridden hard,
men ridden harder by their fantastic hopes,
tomorrow their triumph. I can still feel
it here where Lawrence sat, knowing the sun
that evening set on an age, and he must have shivered
as I do, as he thought of what was to come.