

*A**i*

Waking in January

by Karen Southall Watts

Exhaustion has settled in for the winter,
coating my bones and heart with lead.
The pain of crawling out of bed,
exaggerated by the cold, even though the heater roars
trying to hold the air at sixty-five degrees,
stabs and stings.

Annual renewals pile up on top of the holiday bills,
and I wonder if car insurance or groceries will
be my luxury for this month.

I see now that New Year's diets are born of empty
cupboards,
and not will power, just as
poverty and sorrow don't have to seek us,
but only linger near, until we're too tired to escape.



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The Sisters

by Debra Kaufman

One is snake-strike quick.
Her voice is whiskey husky.
Everyone is too this, too that.

The other is half a moon away,
the one who asks, considers,
climbs a tree for perspective.

One disturbs the water.
The other lingers by the well,
light streaming her hair.

They both have a knack
for showing up whenever.
First one, then the other.

I invite them to stay.
See what it is they have to say.



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After Deep Sadness, Small Joy

by Debra Kaufman

The birdbath is full from last night's rain.
A mockingbird spills down, lands on the rim,
tilts its head, listening. It bows, dips its beak,
sips, tips up. Its throat warbles down
the fresh water. It repeats this twice, then
lifts off. It or its mate begins to sing
from the blossoming dogwood
the scraps of sounds learned from jays, wrens, cats,
Jeanne's piano, the mailman's whistling—
so much it has gathered in its short, fierce life



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Orange Push-up Pops ***An Ode sung to Demons by Imagine Dragons*** by Michael Holland

Childhood poolside Sherbet

“Marco...

...Polo”

our childhood’s water-stage.

Diving board Diva, Jack-knife the lifeguard, hold-your-breath-
underwater-winner.

The pool;

Great equalizer, wrinkling skin, young or old

Your dad launching you toward the deep-end; “1”-bounce-“2”-
bounce-“jump!”

Your mom; “30 minutes, to the second, after lunch or you will cramp
and drown!”

Orange-Sherbet push-ups =

The concession stand tiny window

Dripping-brown Bare-feet on black-rubber mats

Small hands reaching in for change

Orange Sherbet reaching out to the blistering Son...

Rend ---- “the crunch of bone when it is sundered” --- dis·sev·er

Then Voldemort bought-away the healing water to cure his Manhattan
Concrete

Palace

From the crackling parking lot, We Saw the rented trucks trundle “it”
past 5th Ave.

red-lights.

Orange Push-up Pops!



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“Do You Swear”

by Michael Holland

“Do you Swear? So help you...

-I never pulled in her driveway!-

‘Hanna, how old are you, now’

=16=

‘Tell the Court what happened’

=We met at the mall, the day before school=

=My brother and sister got their shoes...=

=I was upset my mother didn’t have the money=

‘You have to pay for your school supplies’

‘Your Mom didn’t have enough to pay for school supplies’

=Mom asked if I wanted to ‘go see your Dad’ for the money=

‘Where were you sitting’

=Front seat... I got out of the car, knocked on the front door=

=*Jamie* and all were watching TV=

=*Jamie* came to the door and asked ‘what’=

=‘I need to speak to my Dad’=

You need to leave!

=She pushed me to the porch edge with her finger on my face=

‘Did your mom call you to the car, to leave?’

‘Was the car on the street... was she standing in the driveway’

| Come on Hanna... We’ll leave |

‘Were you crying... At any time did your mom step into the driveway?’

‘Could your Mom see *Jamie* touch your face’

‘Call Madison’.

Madison come up here

“Do you Swear?” =I do=

Are you nervous? =I don’t like talking in front of people=

How old are you? =14=

‘You and Hanna got different fathers?’ =yeah=

‘Tell us what happened on August 27th



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Another Day, Another Dead Cat

by Michael Holland

O Propitious day!

Every night survived, rolls around anew another sparkly day;

Wake Smiling! Hello Sun! Let Frolic your inner Gid...

...Hold.

Is that cat supposed to be shaped like a basket ball?

Call the Vet.

Clean the Cat Carrier.

Warm the car.

Where is that junk towel?

Carrier into back seat.

Driving to Vet.

Cat whining the vet-whine.

Consoling the cat, over NPR.

Past the dairy... full of prowling cats.

Past the volunteer fire department, “drive thru pork dinner next Saturday”.

Into the Vet and wait; together, they suss out which cat of 18 on file, this actually is...

“Puffy, you say? Any symptoms?”. ‘Yes, quite spherical’

“We’ll sort him out!” (I picture Herriot letting out the gas with a stout auger).

Back home, the fateful call: et feles occidere

a few insensitive... well, several insensitive comments and it’s banished to the shop.

A few more hours and the fateful call: “Go dig another grave, while I retrieve my dead cat”

Stones, roots, finally smooth, cool dirt. The post hole diggers dance a rickety Jig.

It’s ready, Sandstone. Sandstone was our savant. He’ll be missed.

Another day, another Dead Cat to bury in the cold red clay.



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Reflection

by Kathia Kerr

Through the silver stained glass
She stares at me.

Hands on hips,
Pink scars stretching boldly
Across her flat chest.

She is not who I was.

And I struggle to see
Who I am now

In this unfamiliar image.

Her eyes shine,

“Overcome.”

Her lips smile,

“Persevere.”

But I'm not ready yet

To see past

The pain and fear

Of biopsies and surgeries,

Of drainage tubes and binders.

I can't let go yet

Of stages

And prognoses,

And a future full of scans until...

But she won't let me finish

That sentence.

Instead she turns my gaze

To brightness: freedom

From the bloody weight of cycles,

Constrictions, and caring

About opinions.

“This is not an ending,”

She winks.

“This is your beginning.”

I see so much strength in her,

So much wisdom.

I see what she has done;

This miracle of switching the poles,

Turning negative into positive.

I'm proud of my flip side!

Of this warrior

Clearing a path of hope

Through the dark tangle

Of my fears.

She is not who I was,

Compliant, hidden and quiet.

She is free and fierce and

Uniquely beautiful...

She is not who I was.

But she is who I am

Becoming.



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Bliss Within a Mess

by Mandy Al-Bjaly

The baby is hurt and cries for me.

He runs to his fallen lunch plate, then tearfully reaches for me to hold him.

I hug him, kiss his little face, and then gently place him on my lap and begin to rock.

The big boy also wants to cuddle. I make room on my lap for his larger, yet still soft body.

We rock peacefully back and forth, one hugging me and the other licking peanut butter off his fingers.

The little dog approaches, sad, wanting to join us on the comfy rocker.

I think there is not enough room, but hearing her little desperate cry, I tap my knee twice and summon her to join us.

She happily leaps onto my lap. Suddenly, there isn't enough room.

Her body is lying on my shoulder, neck and head. Her fur is going in my ear.

That is when we start to giggle.

The little black dog finally gets comfortable curled up with the big boy, and then her playful kisses start.

She kisses me on my ears and mouth as I try to turn away, only stopping to lick the generous baby's pointer finger that is tempting her with its peanut buttery goodness.

We continue to rock, a little less quietly than before, and I realize I have three people in my lap that love me. I smile.

I inhale the fragrance of the big boy's freshly shampooed hair while the baby pushes his wet, messy mouth onto my left sleeve, laughing mischievously.

The baby is about done with this moment. He slides off my lap, then adorably holds up his sock, shocked that it is off his sweet little foot.

He then runs off to see what he can do while mommy is otherwise occupied.

The big boy still wants to rock with me. I hold his head tenderly under my chin and pat his little bum rhythmically.

I realize that this is bliss, and it can be felt and enjoyed even within a mess.

The moment ends just a touch after, but it is enough to remind me I have all I will ever need.



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Nature Disturbed

by Frank T. Robinson

Who turned my Garden of Eden into a mega shopping center?.....
leaves to concrete
a beautiful lake at night
to a traffic jam at 5pm rush hour

Nature disturbed—

I wonder how the small animals and insects must've felt
when they saw the bulldozers coming
Leveling all the trees

Once again man and nature are at odds
as Mr. Developer and Sierra Club both praying to GOD
for a solution

Nature's fresh air gives way to carbon dioxide and ozone pollution
Why, one may ask??

The end factor is the money

What value is there in that tree, that creek, or grassland
Created by GOD, destroyed by man

Vibrant colors of green overshadowed by dull whites and greys
developers roaming to disrupt zoning amidst the chaotic and political
melee'

at the end, seeing nature being disturbed has my vision blurred

Still, I wonder how the small animals and insects must've felt
when they saw the bulldozers coming

Now I feel this emptiness inside,
ever since I heard nature cried

The tenants that hailed higher property values
forsook the benefits and preservation of nature with no hesitation
that contributed towards this environmental degradation-
end result, no shade, no beautiful scenery, no trees for the birds

Nature disturbed—



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Caldera

by Karen Southall Watts

After the explosion,
after the wedding ring has been thrown out the car window,
and the red-hot, melting, anger has emptied and collapsed,
a hollow appears.

You spend years filling the hole with cool relief,
forming a placid lake of denial and discontent,
the moss of resignation covering all.

Yet, acceptance cannot change the nature of the soul,
this burning, pulsing, thing just below
the surface of propriety.

The eruption will come,
either in fiery, stupid, bursts of frustration,
or as a passion that burns all in its path.
And then, where will the villagers hide?



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Drat! Those Gnats

by Cecelia Vassar

Drat! those gnats they fly so fast,
they bug me 'till I cry at last.

How dare they fly around my nose
and make me smell their hairy toes!

They think my eyelash a diving board
to jump to where they were before.

And when they land upon my food
that's the last straw to ruin my mood!

Ok, you wanna play?
I'll trick you so you go away.

I'll set a little trap for you
by putting sugar on my shoe

and when you land and start to munch,
I'll jump in a puddle and ruin your lunch!



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Bread

by John Hughes

Ground from the grain of the threshing room floor.
Sweet grains of corn, wheat and such.

How did the first bread maker know
to grind this, mix it and put it in heat?

So essential to the survival of person kind
From early humans to my kitchen.

Survival food for so many
blissful food for me.

From BC to AD it has survived.

Thousands fed by mere morsels
so the story goes.

Rationed and plentiful
processed and homemade.

A moniker for money
that drives so much of our lives.

A life force fed in a jar.
the smell and texture and taste
so loving and warm and kind.



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TINY LITTLE BUG

by John Hughes

Tiny tiny bug
walking across my journal page
so tiny it's hard to imagine how he is made
the size of a pin point
full of organs and stuff
how his life is so different from mine
what do his horizons look like
is he driven by instinct or reason
how does he make choices
his purpose seems so clear as he walks along
is he worried about where he will eat
is he worried about being late
is he worried about being stepped on
are there people who are driven more by instinct
than reason
are they worried about where they will eat
are they worried about being late
are they worried about being stepped on
Tiny tiny bug.



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Floating

by Jamie Everhart

floating in the surf...

I see castles in the sand
lovers hand in hand
and shadows darting in the
waves

yet in my mind
there is only me
the endless sky and time

floating high above the
clouds...

with room for thoughts to
drift
they often seem to drift
your way

how I loathe the days
when there is only me
the endless sky and time
floating by the stars above...

I could be dead
but God laughing
makes a point

no one sees darkness
without being
alive



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My Old Souls

by Jamie Everhart

I stand alone
counting the countless eyes
in my mirror
dreaming of endless roads
that ended with me
when I rewind the clock
my old souls fly home
over mountains
sailing on merciless seas
praying to foreign gods
in their forgotten tongues
they are the sinners and saints
the rich and poor
the strong and weak
all living all at once
now back inside my head
where they whisper
about the time I have left
as I turn to face
a new day



*A**i*

Dandelions

by Lily

A spot of sun against the grass suddenly takes me back,
To times afore the light slunk away
Dandelions clutched in soft hands;
An offering of sweet sunny smiles
Muttered words of comforts, one hears and sighs
Soft dapples of sun, the warmth of a cold spring day
Bittersweet memories of a love gone away
Look and see
The golden petals fluttering in wind,
Gilded flowers to be laid on a golden head
Be at peace with those
Memories of love sweetly sighing.
Buds verdant and hopeful
Clouds of snow scattering across green hills
An opening in the heart, soft and gentle
The sun does not fade
It only hides behind gray softly laid
Day into night, the dandelions sway
Taking me away to clouds on a sunny day
and love dispersed on the wind



*A**i*

Daisies

by Lily

On a warm summer afternoon
white bars cast a peaceful spell
Daisies melt into grass,
soft velvet and hard earth becomes one
Gilded golden on white velvet,
a halo when the sun falls on
gems alive and full of light
flashes of roses amongst green grass,
clover, and daisies,
nap in soft sunshine and dream
groups of sunbeams through waving trees
A warm summer breeze brushing against skin,
earth mixed with honeysuckle sunshine.
pieces of sun on velvet,
The sun come alive
sweet smiles on a gentle face
A beautiful sight on warm summer's afternoon
beauty beyond superficial
tints memories in rosy hues
never forget a love freely given



*A**i*

Come Walk with Me

by Daniel Parks

Come walk with me my Lad. It finally came, is been so fast. You have traveled far; you've learned a lot. Through laughter, tears and cherished days, you have left the past behind. Come walk with me and share your thoughts.

You have shown me more than empty hugs. Your children now, will share your love. You have crossed into the life God planned. Even through the Covid fears, you persevered the whole long year.

You care so much for others now it makes me smile; you seem so near. Come walk with me and share your thoughts.

Please take it slow and give some thought of where you want to go. The world is large and full of life, mostly good but filled with strife. Your making dreams for you to tell, about Gods love it suit's you well. I close my eyes and things appear, of memories sweet, I hold so dear. My darling Lad, come walk with me and share your thoughts.

I see your smiles when things go well. I feel your pain when you shed a tear. You are part of me; I do not know how. The love I feel for you is real. My darling Lad, come walk with me and share your thoughts.



*A**i*

The Hunters Moon

by Daniel Parks

You must look if you want to see, the Harvest Moon
above the Trees. Beyond the Lights, above the clouds so
little time the worlds so loud. What is real is, it is hard to
tell, but please look up, look down, look all around.

You must look, if you want to see. The forest floor
beneath the leaves. You must venture deep along the
Brook. Feel the sun, enjoy the breeze. Linger, linger long,
before you leave.

You must look, if you want to see. The homeless man
beneath the trees. Beyond the smiles in windowpanes, Of
families strong, not in the rain. What is real is hard to tell,
but please look up, look down, look all around.

You must care if you want to feel, the love of God, the
prayers of friends. Look all around the world so grand.
Look up, look down and all around. The journeys are
short, so please be real. Do not pretend but really care for
those in need and loved ones dear.

You must look if you want to see, the homeless man
beneath the tree. It could be you or it could be me. Look
around the worlds so grand. Look up, look down and all
around.



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Dear BLACKbird: A Love Letter to Black Women

by Shereá D. Burnett

Dear BLACKbird,

You've occupied spaces where the depth of your calls
Could not be understood—

Where your melody was dismissed
By those you longed would...

Hear you. See you. Celebrate you.

You've entered environments unfamiliar,
Shaping each one as your own,
Moving from one habitat to another,
Never finding a place to call home.

Too often, you've borne the weight of the world,
Carrying its heaviness alone,
While others spent their time
Focused on trivial matters like your tone.

They decided...

Who you are. What you are. How you should be treated.

Labeled you misguided.

Left you feeling defeated.

Nina said you were never gonna fly,
But Paul believed you could—
Even with broken wings.

Such extremes, shaping perceptions
Of what you are capable of,
Of the songs you should sing.

So many voices deciding who and what you should be,
While you, dear BLACKbird,

Were simply waiting for the moment

When you could be free.

