



Fioretti by the Fireside



Winter 2025 Edition

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Snowbound but not Broken

Cynthia Cuatlatl

In the tucked away town of Pinebrook, nestled between two sleepy hills and a winding river, the holiday season was more than tradition, it was a lifeline. Every December, the townsfolk transformed their little corner of the world into a winter wonderland. Twinkling lights danced on every porch, wreaths adorned every door, and the scent of cinnamon, pine, and fresh baked bread drifted through the air like a warm embrace.

But this year, something was different.

It started innocently enough: a light dusting of snow on the first of December. Children squealed with delight, their laughter echoing through the frosty air as they sledded down gentle slopes and built snowmen with crooked smiles and button eyes. But then, the snow kept coming an inch every day, like clockwork. Not a blizzard, not a storm, just a steady, relentless fall that blanketed the roads and made travel nearly impossible.

Pinebrook had no major stores. For decorations, food, gifts, and even the tree for the town square, residents had to drive to the neighboring city, thirty miles away. With the snow piling up, the main road out of town became a slippery, impassable mess.

Mayor Elsie, a sprightly woman with silver curls and a voice like warm cider, called an emergency town meeting in the old church hall. The room smelled of old wood and peppermint tea, and the air buzzed with worry. "We've got twelve days until the festival," she said, her voice trembling slightly. "And we've snowed in. But Pinebrook doesn't give up. We find a way."

The townspeople tried everything. They shoveled in shifts, borrowed plows from nearby farms, even tried melting the snow with salt and sand. But each morning, another inch fell, undoing their progress. Spirits began to wane. The air grew heavy with frustration, and the once cheerful chatter turned into quiet sighs and

furrowed brows.

Then, on the seventh day, young Leo, an aspiring engineer home from college stood up, his cheeks flushed from the cold and his eyes bright with determination. “What if we don’t fight the snow?” He said. “What if we work with it?”

He proposed building a snow packed sled route, a kind of winter highway, using the compacted snow itself. With help from the town’s carpenters, they constructed wide wooden sleds with runners, pulled by tractors and even a few sturdy horses. It wasn’t fast, but it was steady.

By day nine, the first sled made it to the city and back, loaded with garlands, candles, and crates of cocoa. The town cheered as the sled rolled into the square, bells jingling and children dancing beside it. The scent of pine and fresh snow mingles with the sweet aroma of victory.

The next few days were a blur of teamwork and joy. Families took turns riding the sleds, picking up supplies and gifts. The local baker, Mrs. Dobbins, whipped up batches of gingerbread cookies, the spicy scent curling through the streets. School kids painted ornaments with frozen fingers and glowing smiles. The town square tree arrived on day eleven, hauled in triumphantly by the largest sled, and decorated with laughter and love.

On the twelfth day, the snow stopped.

That evening, Pinebrook glowed brighter than ever. The festival began with carols, hot cider, and a surprise visit from Santa played by Mr. Griggs, the retired postman, who had the perfect twinkle in his eye. As the townsfolk gathered around the tree Mayor Elsie raised her mug and said, voice thick with emotion, “We didn’t just make do. We made magic.”

And they had.

Pinebrook had faced the snow, not with frustration, but with creativity and community. The road may have been blocked, but their spirit had never been freer. And as the stars blinked above the snowy hills, the town knew that this holiday would be remembered not for what was lost, but for what was found.

Bethlehem's Star

Julianna Britt

The guiding light of Bethlehem's star
party of three, having come so far.

Our Almighty God and King
in Mother's arms as she sings.

Baby plays with Mary's hair
soft and long, tugged from the air.

Laid in a manger where animals eat
they creep ever closer, longing to meet.

Quiet Joseph, strong and chaste,
still, three men are making haste.

Journeyed for years, at last they've come
to see their Savior who's just but one.

Presenting gifts fit for the King,
praise to the Child these men bring.

Looming threat of a jealous Herod
escape through the desert, hot and arid.

The guiding light of Bethlehem's star
party of three, having come so far.

Snow-Laden Branches

Mary Chittle



The Winter Bench

Anonymous

Every winter, when the first snow fell on the neighborhood park, Emma sat on the old wooden bench by the frozen pond.

It had been her ritual for three years. She always wore the same gray coat, the same scarf knitted by her grandmother, and carried a small thermos of chamomile tea. She never said anything. She just sat, stared at the white sky, and let the silence speak to her. The first time she did this was the winter after her older brother, Daniel, died in a car accident. He was her best friend, her partner in adventures, the only one who knew exactly when she was pretending to be okay and when she wasn't. They used to come to that park together as children. He pushed the sled, she screamed. He made snow angels, she decorated them with twigs and pebbles.

That winter, the first without him, the world seemed colder than ever. The snow was no longer magical. The silence was no longer peaceful, it was empty.

Emma sat on the bench for the first time simply because she didn't know where else to go. It was December, Christmas lights hung from the balconies, music played in the shops... but in her house there was no tree, no laughter, no spirit. Only absence.

And in the middle of it all, the bench. Silent. Old. Firm.

At first, she felt nothing about being there. She just stared at the pond, now covered in a layer of ice that creaked in the wind. But little by little, each visit brought back something: an image, a memory, a phrase Daniel used to say. As if the park helped her remember him.

One year she left a letter under the bench. Another year, a photo of the two of them in a sealed envelope. This time, she brought only the thermos of tea and a small notebook.

She sat down. She took a deep breath.

The air smelled of damp pine and old winter. The wood creaked under her weight. A couple walked hand in hand, bundled up to their eyes. A laughing boy threw snowballs.

Emma opened her notebook. It wasn't a diary. It was an attempt. A place where she jotted down memories of Daniel she didn't want to lose. Small things. Like the time he took off her hat just to see how angry she would get. Or when he stood up for her against some classmates who made fun of her soft voice. Or when, in his last text, he wrote, "Shine on, Ems. Even if the world is dark."

A tear fell onto the page, and the ink bled a little. It didn't matter. Emma closed the notebook and put it away. Then she looked up at the sky. It was gray, overcast, and motionless. But at that moment, a snowflake fell directly onto her hand.

Small. Slow. Perfect.

And then, without thinking, she smiled. A real smile. Not because the pain was gone. Not because she'd gotten over it. But because she understood something: Daniel wasn't in the park, or on the bench, or in the notebook. He was with her. In every decision, in every memory, in every winter.

She stood up. The cold bit her cheeks, but she didn't care anymore. She walked slowly toward the park exit. Before leaving, she looked at the bench one last time. She didn't say anything. There was no need to.

Finding Home

Clare Diez

Hans yanked up his coat collar as high as it would go and tightened the wet scarf around his neck. His hat, although pulled practically over his eyes, did not shield his face from the flying bits of snow. The woods were darker than dark, and he realized he would have to admit to himself what he had been trying to deny for the last half hour: he was lost.

This was not how he had planned his Christmas homecoming.

Twenty-four hours earlier, he had been seated in the warm, comfortable passenger car of a train, his mind focused on seeing his family again after months of working a job in another town. His parents, German immigrants, always planned the best Christmases. There would be a tree in the window adorned with shining candles, the aroma of Christmas stollen bread stuffed with nuts and fruit, and beloved carols. But when he arrived at the station where he was to switch trains, his daydreaming was interrupted by the sickening realization that the wallet containing his second train ticket and remaining cash was gone; someone from within that bustling crowd must have stealthily removed it from his pocket. One event led to another, until finally Hans made a daring decision: he would walk the rest of the way home.

In fine weather, the journey could be made easily by a young man in good health. But this was December. Furthermore, Hans had decided to leave the familiar but longer path to town and take a shorter way through the woods. Now here he was, disoriented from the sudden arrival of howling wind and snow. "How could I have lost my wallet? Why didn't I just stay on the main road?" he berated himself.

He knew home was not terribly far away, but he no longer knew if he was walking in the right direction. Even the slightest

deviation could send him walking miles without coming across a single house.

He stopped and stared up at the massive tree branches entangled with the sky. The snowfall and wind were lessening now, but the temperature had not lost its icy grip.

“I need help, God,” he prayed. “I just want to get home. I need a sign that I’m going the right way. Send me a sign!”

Nothing.

He heaved an exhausted sigh and stared down at the ground, his stiff, glove-encased fingers massaging his arms through his worn coat. When he glanced up, his eyes squinted and widened. Surely that star had not been there before. It was hardly a star, more like a speck. On clear Christmas Eve nights, his family used to find the brightest star in the sky and tell the little ones that it was the Star of Bethlehem. For Hans, this had always been make believe. But now... sure, this star wasn’t a glorious, shimmering spectacle, but maybe it was his star of Bethlehem! Either way, he didn’t really have any other options. “All right, little star,” he addressed it in his mind, “Lead on.” A silent prayer of thanks on his lips, he plodded onward.

His steps fell faster as he sensed familiar territory. The woods began to thin, until... yes! He was standing on the edge of his family’s very own field! He paused to catch his breath and survey the land. The open field edged with trees, with the night sky for a ceiling, formed an outdoor cathedral, filled with reverent stillness. Positioned far away in the heavens, beyond the little brown house, was the tiny star, Hans’s guide.

“I’m home,” Hans thought. “Praise God.” The tiredness seemed to leave his body as he broke into a run.

“I’m home!” he shouted at the sky, throwing up his arms like an exuberant schoolboy. His shoes sank into the unbroken mantle of snow, kicking up small sprays of white. The house loomed closer and closer, until he could see his mother through the window, seated next to the glow of a candle. He burst through the door and gasped, out of breath, “Ma, I’m home!”

The distress vanished from her face as she sprang toward

him and threw her arms around him, saying in a tearful voice, “Oh, Hans! Oh, Hans!”

His father rushed over. “You’re home, son!” he exclaimed in his thick German accent, placing his large, callused hand on Hans’ shoulder.

Suddenly they were all there. The siblings came squealing downstairs in their nightgowns: Christa, Ingrid, Friedrich, Fritz, and little Louisa. They surrounded him, clinging to him, hugging him until he felt like he would drown in a sea of love.

He was home.

Snowball Fight

Josy Iracheta



Raynaud's Syndrome*: An Acrostic Poem

Julianna Britt

Rocking on the floor
And sobbing, the pure agony of
Yearly winters taking hold of my hands and squeezing tight. The
Numb, stinging prickles that
Attack my hands when the cold bites the skin
Underneath my gloved hands.
Does anyone understand pain, I wonder? The less expected, but
more
Severe pain that comes along with the blood returning
Slowly, burning my hand from the inside out with each pulse of a
heartbeat, I almost
Yearn for the cold to numb them again. For
No amount of
Dressing in warm layers, coats upon coats, can
Reverse the dysfunction
Of
My capillaries. and so I'll have to live with the
Excruciating pain of the cold.

**Raynaud's syndrome: a condition that causes blood vessels in the hands and feet to narrow in response to cold. This restriction of blood flow can cause discoloration, discomfort, and pain.*

Anonymous

Anonymous

Cold. The air is cold. The world is cold. His bones are cold. They are frozen, frozen without the touch or the love of warmth. The air stands still as if the very winds are too jaded by the icy touch of winter to impede on the frigid territory. Deep within the snow-laden land, an ice-covered lake sprawls across a vast expanse of territory. A deep wound in the ice reveals the chilling water beneath which threatens to consume anything that approaches. Isolated on the long side of that lake's shore, on the edge of the exposed water, a cage filled with darkness lies.

Locked behind twisted reeds of grass and a net of iron, darkness, a deep, heavy darkness, lays as still as the frozen environment around it. Inside of the black cage only two stars can be seen, and only those two stars can see. They see through the darkness, past the net of iron, beyond the twisted reeds, and into the cold air covering the frozen lake.

The two stars are attentive. Not because they had been stolen from the heavens and given the gift of sentience, but because they are not really stars at all. Those stars are eyes, focused and sharp, belonging to a man residing in the deep darkness. The cage the man hides in is not to constrain him but to conceal him from the world, but there is no hiding from the cold. Even through layers of coats, clothes, and skin, the brisk atmosphere spreads throughout his whole body. Like a malevolent rot, it spreads deeper and deeper, becoming more intense with each passing second. As each layer of snow falls over the still world, a new level of cold encompasses the man.

However, no matter how unbearable the cold gets, the eyes in the darkness never stop searching. For the cage of grass and iron is the man's creation to hide him not from danger but from prey. A sweet, succulent prey which claims the sky as its road and the wa-

ter of the icy lake as its bed. A prey that is taking those sky bound roads in order to find greener, warmer pastures. The avian prey longs to take the journey with a flock of like-minded companions. The man, a hunter, knows this. He exploits this.

False imitations of ducks float over the dark waters as an alluring sight to any prey desperate or lonely enough to join them. But to join them would be death. Waiting in the blind on the edge of the water is the man, and in his hands a weapon loaded and ready to sling death at anything unfortunate enough to come close. Even if his gloved hands had long ago become far too numb to feel the guns' cold steel, his mind, unmarred by the oppressive cold, knew the item as intimately as any of his own four limbs. Its shape, balance, and form were ingrained into his mind like a precious memory, and he was soon to use it.

One lone shape flutters through the grey sky above. It circles and directs itself to the dark patch of water where it believes it can join its brethren. Despite the numbing air, the man maintains a lethal glare which is fully and completely directed at its prey. As the unaware duck glides itself over the water, the sky it once called home does it no favors in concealing its form, and the man takes action. Rising against the cold, the man's icebound limbs refuse the effort, but their refusal is in vain. From the man's heart, his very soul, a piece of ember is born. Its fire spreads through his chest, abdomen, and limbs carrying the determination to succeed in this hunt. He rises. He fires. And as the man watches the lone figure of the bird spiral lifelessly to the dark waters below, he no longer feels quite so cold.

Spotlight

Natalie Edmisten



A Pair of Wintery Rhymes

Mary Murphy

There once was a snowman named Jake
He was made from ten thousand flakes
He was jolly all day
He would go out and play
Till in summer, he became a small lake

A snowflake once fell on my head
It looked at me as it pled
“Please put me in the freezer
You’ll be a crowd pleaser!”
I was so shocked it talked that I fled

The First Time

Mary Chittle

I was 19, the first time I saw snow. I awoke that morning in late Autumn and the air was different. The smell was different. Beautifully strange and unfamiliar. Crisp, sharp, and somehow almost frighteningly clean, burning my lungs through the open window. I always sleep with the windows open—it helps me remember to breathe. My nose was cold, my face the only part of me exposed to winter's first kiss.

Slowly, I slid out of bed, gathering Grandmother's quilt around my shoulders, shivering beneath my threadbare nightgown.

The chill reached out with tendrils of frost and wrapped me in the embrace of an old friend, despite this being our first meeting. The cold drove the drowsiness from my eyes, the cobwebs of sleep from my thoughts. I closed my eyes and breathed in deeply, the frozen air hollowing my chest, spreading its frosty greeting through each limb. It felt wonderful, like a true, clean breath. Turning towards the window, I hesitated; something held me back from rushing. It seemed irreverent to break this moment with undue haste.

I padded across the room on stockinged feet, the worn wooden floor creaking with cold. I reached for the curtains, where a sliver of silver sunlight slipped from the split between them, highlighting the dirt beneath my fingernails, the cracked and dry skin of my knuckles, my pale, thin wrists contrasting with the faded colors of the quilt. With one hand still clutching the worn quilt around my shoulders, the other pulled back the curtain, and winter rushed in. Blinded by the brilliant blaze of sunlight on the snow, I spun away, the quilt falling to the floor as I lifted my hand to cover my eyes.

I cracked one lid open, turning back slowly to face the onslaught of crystalline light. The edges of the window around the

muntins were frosted and I reached out with my hand and drew a circle. My finger came away wet, leaving behind a shaky curve carved into the frost on the window.

I finally looked past the glass and my breath froze in my chest. My eyes went wide, the glare of the sun forgotten as I struggled to process the beauty I beheld. The whole world was transformed, blanketed in white. So pure, so clean, so perfect. It was as if God had upended a bucket of white paint on the world, erasing all the ugliness: the pockmarked streets, the weathered walls of tired houses, the weary trees with sagging branches and the rusted, worn-down bicycles. Everything was made new. The street a perfect, untouched sea of glittering snow, unmarred by the passage of slogging feet or burdened carts. The houses seemed to stand a little taller, renewed by the breath of life that had fallen with each snowflake. The tree branches bowed low with reverence, proudly displaying their new attire, each one clothed in layers of soft frozen crystals. The rust of the bicycles had become hidden among snowdrifts, bits of color peeking through, as eager as I to view the icy paradise that had been born overnight.

The sight of the world reborn filled my heart and restored my soul. If this meaningless, downtrodden place could be made so beautiful, so opposite of what it once had been, then maybe I could be too. The world before me was a clean slate, a blank page, empty of previous sorrows and transgressions, full of possibilities and promise. I was 19, the first time I saw snow, 19 the first time I met hope.

Little Purple Princess

Anastasia K.P. Lucia

I felt the magic slipping away,
Childhood.
Whimsy and purple ribbons tied around stuffed animals' ears,
Butterfly wings,
Sunlight streaming through my hair,
Tea parties and riding bikes,
Bubbles,
The world looked so bright, so full of potential,
I could do anything!
I could do anything?

I created fantasies and escaped into them,
Elaborate stories,
Slivers of paper, cut up on the floor,
Playing barbies,
Crushes on cartoon characters,
I could do anything!
I could do anything?

I was a little purple princess,
Sure of everything,
A butterfly dancing in the wind,
Unstoppable,
I was the future, the next Audrey Hepburn,
Youthful and glowing,
I could do anything!
I could do anything?

A Walk to Remember

Anonymous

We walk down our street. All of us bundled up tightly against the chilling wind. My mind is full of questions. My nose is slightly numb. I feel some tension but still have no idea what is causing it. My dad hesitates. The fog from our breath rises, forming a cloud between us. We turn to him. The streetlights shine brightly in the darkness, slightly illuminating us to anyone who happens to look out their window. My dad chokes the words out. I try to look away, but I can't tear my eyes off his face. The break in his voice makes my heart sink. In a moment, we are on him. Tears from all of us. The dog's tail slightly wagging, confused; they must be wondering, "This isn't how a walk usually goes." We ask our questions, then head inside. Back to our school-work and the warmth of the fireplace, as if it's just another night. But it wasn't just another night. It was the night our dad told us that his dad, our Pawpaw, had passed away.

In some ways, it was a normal night. There were no plans made to attend the funeral; no frantic packing needed. We would just go back to school in the morning with hearts a little bit heavier. It was the fall of 2020, so traveling was out of the question. My dad's parents lived in Little Rock, Arkansas, so getting there was an ordeal in the first place. My parents didn't want my sister and me to miss school, and anyway, due to complications caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there wouldn't be a normal funeral in the first place.

I didn't really like that we wouldn't have a funeral. I wanted a chance to see him again. To see my cousins who I rarely get to be with. To be with those who knew my Pawpaw, who loved him, who would tell me stories about him, and who were feeling some of the same pain I was feeling. But we wouldn't get to go. This would be just another thing made messy by the pandemic.

Misty Midwinter Trail

Thomas Barthauer



My First Winter Away from Home

Anonymous

I'll never forget my first winter away from home. I remember the sky was gray, and the wind was colder than usual. I was at school, and as I looked out the window, I saw the first snowflakes falling. They looked as soft as foam or cotton falling from the sky. All my classmates looked so excited and laughed, taking out their phones to record videos. I felt excited too, but inside I felt fear, nervousness, and curiosity; my emotions were mixed.... I had never seen snow.

Where I come from, the weather is almost always the same. There are no four seasons. The sun never completely sets; it's always summer, with warm days, light rain, and that smell of wet earth mingling with hot chocolate in the afternoon. And when it's cold, it's a pleasant chill, one that doesn't paralyze you, but makes you feel cooler and relieves the heat a little. That's why when I got here everything felt so different. It was intensely cold; I could feel the chill seeping into my clothes, my skin, and even my bones. The sky was always gray. That day I realized how far away I was from home and how much I missed the weather of my city.

When the bell rang, I looked out the window again and noticed snow already covering the sidewalks. I always walked home, so I went out, like every day, but this time everything was strange.

The wind hit my face, making my cheeks red and raw, as if the wind were burning me. My hands were frozen. I walked slowly, watching as I left footprints with every step I took.

The streets were so silent that all I could hear was the wind. Everything looked so white. The cars passed slowly, as if time were standing still.

Each breath came out in the form of white smoke. I continued walking, my body numb, thinking about how different this winter was. I began to miss the warmth, the colors, the flowers, the

trees. Everything seemed as if the entire world were covered in a white blanket. I felt scared, but at the same time, a strange sense of tranquility, as that experience had been etched in my memory. It was a new, different feeling, one that made me feel very far from home yet very close to myself.

When I finally got home, I made myself a hot chocolate and stared at the snow from my window. Everything outside looked so quiet and beautiful that, for a moment, I forgot about the cold and felt so much peace and tranquility.

That day, I understood that winter isn't just cold, but it also brings beautiful things. It taught me to appreciate the warmth, not only of the weather but of my home.

And now, without realizing, I've learned to love winter.

Pockets Full of Cold (Empty) Hands

Mary Chittle

When I said my hands were cold,
I wasn't asking for your gloves.
I was hoping you would hold them,
wrap them in your love,
but you didn't understand.
Did you even try?

Did I want you to?

You never knew my coffee order
 (I get hot chocolate, I don't like coffee).
You didn't learn my birthday
 (October 14, it's in your phone).
You can't remember my sizes
 (medium shirt, 10 pants).
You buy me gift cards instead
 (I don't shop at Kohl's).

So when we walked through the snow,
your eyes glued to your phone as I led the way,
I said my hands were cold, and
you figured that covering them up,
wrapping them in wool would fix
the problem, fix us,
make me warm again.

If anything, it made me colder than before.

So much of us was this way,
you brushing aside our problems, or

covering them with a temporary solution.

Yet I didn't protest, didn't say a thing.
I let you break us apart, even beginning
to cover things before you got the chance.

I learned to turn a blinded eye,
bought myself a coat with pockets.
 (I had a gift card lying around).
But somehow, my hands are still cold.

Can I borrow your gloves?

Winter Inside of Me

Anonymous

I've always liked winter. Not just because of the decorations or Christmas, but because I've always felt that in winter everything is calmer. People walk slower, everyone has their own routine, the streets fill with a beautiful silence... as if the world breathed more slowly.

But this last winter was different. I don't know if it's because I turned 18 and life started to feel more serious or real, but I feel like everything changed overnight. Suddenly, I was no longer a child, but I didn't feel like an adult either. I still had many goals and dreams, but I saw everything with little clarity.

During the first days of December, I felt very dull, I no longer felt the excitement I used to feel when I was younger. The Christmas lights looked beautiful, but distant, as if they weren't meant for me. My routine felt heavy: classes, work, studying, sports, and that constant feeling of running behind time.

One random Sunday, before Christmas break, I decided to go out alone downtown. It was very cold, but I still tried to enjoy the moment with myself. I went to a small square where my grandparents used to take my brother and me to play when we were kids, and I sat on a bench watching the children play. I felt a strong sense of nostalgia, and I realized it had been a long time since I'd laughed and disconnected from the world, just like those kids were doing. Everything in me had turned into organization, planning, control, expectations.... I had purposely brought my notebook with me, so I took it out and started writing without thinking. I almost never used it, but this was a really good moment to start writing again. I wrote about how I felt, not about my future or the things I had to do that week, which was mostly what I used the notebook for. Then I started realizing how I truly felt: tired, lonely even when surrounded by people, dimmed... but at the same time, I

realized that I wanted to change that.

From that day, I started a new routine. Every morning, I wrote in my notebook: three things I was grateful for in life, simple things that I had been overlooking for years. At first, it was hard, but with time, I started to value the little things in life again, just like when I was younger. I also decided to disconnect a little from the world, so I could reconnect with myself. I spent less time on social media, learned to cook, stopped taking my sport so seriously, started reading more before bed.... It wasn't a huge change, but it was a step toward feeling more present.

That same Christmas, on Christmas Eve, while I was helping my mom prepare dinner, she told me she noticed me different, calmer. And honestly, she was right. Obviously, not everything was perfect, but for the first time in a long while, I felt peace. I realized that growing up isn't just about having all the answers, but also about learning to live with uncertainty.

That night, when everyone was asleep, I went out to the balcony with a blanket and a small cup of tea. I looked at the lights differently, not the way I did when they were first put up. I thought about everything that had happened that year: all the mistakes, the good moments, the lessons, the times I doubted myself, and the small victories I never celebrated. And that night, I made myself a promise: not to let hurry steal my calm and peace. Because I understood that winter also arrives inside of you — it's when you feel lost or tired. But just like snow melts, that cold also goes away. You just have to give it time and have patience.

That was my winter lesson, that not everything has to shine to be beautiful, and that even on the coldest days, you can always start again.

Standstill

Sylvia Vanderburgh



Icicles

Anna Kvasnik

did it hurt
me like
you

I'm

frigid, sharp
a splinter,
ice over
hearts—
cold

so

a chill, aching and deep
from floors or walls, up
emerging from sleep
sore, hibernation
like depression
shivering
heavy
hurt

from the iciest of airs, from winter
separating, shapeshifted by cold
bitterness brought with the ice,
peeling like my chapped nose
empty, pale as the snow,
cooling with my tears
now freezing on me
fragments, felled
by words, by
chances
unused

you

tossed aside

a shell

empty

The Light Changes Color

Thomas Barthauer

It was the week after the wedding and Mara was alone in her car, which had never smelled new, waiting for a red light to change. Heavy snow was tapping on the roof, the windows, begging for shelter, swirling and spinning--but she didn't let it in. That would be silly. Her father had lost a car by leaving the sunroof open for the snow. It wasn't good to let the snow in. Besides, the sun had set anyway.

Mara rotated her ring idly. It felt strange--taboo, even—like she was a little girl playing with her mother's jewelry. Her mother would find her, and tease her about getting married and moving out, but Mara would insist on staying forever and ever.

Mara drummed her fingers on the wheel and checked the clock. James would be home by now, in their little apartment. Right beside the clock was a taped up, faded picture of her on her fifth birthday, grinning wildly. She was clutching Snow White, the gray stuffed rabbit, her best friend until she grew up and got real friends. Mara wondered if Snow White was still at her parents' house. Probably in a box somewhere, resenting her. She didn't know how to feel about that.

Snow White got her name when Mara left her in the car by accident and she got buried with snow. Mara imagined it was heavy and choking, a weight that built and built, one snowflake at a time; a weight that made every breath a struggle. And sometimes, for moments—at night, alone—breathing didn't feel worth the struggle.

Sometimes opening the sunroof lets in darker things than snow.

A horn slapped Mara's focus back toward the road. The light was green, despite all the snow, and her husband was waiting. It wasn't good to sit around remembering all day. Sometimes opening the sunroof just lets in the sun.

O Tannenbaum

Sylvia Vanderburgh

Red, green, gold, and blue
Twinkle in frosted-window dew
Corn older than Mom — that's pretty old —
Graces a bough with Iowa gold.
Green paper chain from four-year-old hands --
Neither now nor then could I understand
That tiny red trucks bearing freshly-chopped trees
Just aren't enough to set this house free.

Untitled

Gabriel Trerise

To a kid, the greatest words ever said are “schools canceled.” There was one year, December 2016, when my hometown, Sherwood, Oregon, received over a foot of snow. It was the most snow I’d ever seen. Everything was completely covered in pure, blinding white. I remember waking up confused—light was flooding through the blinds, totally illuminating the room. Oregon winters are consistently dark, rainy, and quite depressing, and it’s difficult to wake up in the dark, especially in a soft, warm bed. I remember pulling the covers off and getting out of bed to see what was outside. We have a large sliding glass door, always covered in curtains, just outside of our bedroom that looks out into the front yard. I crept towards it. Please! I remember thinking. Sherwood is notorious for getting as close as possible to snowing but not. Somehow, it will be just above freezing, but raining profusely, and then once it does drop below freezing, it’s dry as Death Valley. I pulled the curtains back...Ahh! The glare totally blinded me, and once I recovered, I was stunned again. Snow was piled up to my knees!

I sprinted across the room and up the stairs to the living room, where my mom was sitting, reading on the couch. She looked up when I made it to the top and said, smirking, “No school today!” I couldn’t get the ear-to-ear smile off my face. Everyone said snow was coming, but I didn’t believe them. We hadn’t seen snow in over 3 years, and I thought there was no way this time was different. I was so wrong.

After putting on the proper attire, I rushed outside to meet my brothers, who were already rolling up a snowman. Walking was extremely difficult. A single step felt like going up stairs three at a time. My legs sank to the knees with every step, but who cares? School was canceled.

My brothers and I built two snowmen, one big one in the front yard and one smaller one on the front deck. On the hill in our yard, we dug trenches to form a track for marbles to be rolled down. We spent hours digging that track, and we'd only stop when we couldn't feel our fingers anymore and needed a mug of hot cocoa to wrap them around. But when our mom asked us to shovel the driveway, our day suddenly became spoiled. There was no getting around it either. We needed to be able to leave our house, and with six inches of snow piled up in front of the garage, our cars couldn't get out. My brothers and I shoveled for hours. We have a large concrete section that was asked to be cleared, and even with three brothers working with me, it took a lot. Shoveling snow is easy for about ten minutes, and then everything starts to set in. The cold, your back hurts, you slip on ice, nobody's having fun, and it starts to become miserable. Unfortunately, when your mood is darkened, your judgment becomes clouded. Scrape and throw, scrape and throw, scrape and throw. We were scraping and throwing so much, we didn't realize where the snow was ending up.

Later in the evening, we were all ready to leave for church. Dinner was eaten, the car was ready, the people were ready, but something happened. As we were pulling off the concrete, we ran into a giant mound of snow, lifting the front wheels off the ground! My dad was furious. First, he yelled at us for leaving the snow there, then he got a shovel and began digging the snow out from under the car, then he put chains on, put it in reverse, and floored it. All while we all stood and watched because he was too mad to let us help. The car is Front Wheel Drive, so not having the front tires on the ground made it hard to get off the snow pile. When it didn't work the first time, he got out, dug some more, and floored it again. He did this about three times until the tires got some traction. The only problem, they were grinding the concrete. Needless to say, we eventually made it to church, but to this day, there is still a large scratch on our driveway, caused by our giant snow pile.

Horse in the Snow

Mary Chittle



The Shortcut

Jerson Medina

It was becoming harder to see the road ahead of him. With every step he took, he felt his feet starting to drag with the building snow. The last car he saw was more than two hours ago, and he couldn't turn back. Although he'd dressed appropriately, the frigid cold and the blowing snow had already caused him to lose feeling in his face. Elias had convinced himself that the old maintenance road, the "shortcut" everyone warned against, would save him an hour of travel time. The wind was alive, moving across the hillside and ringing a high metallic pitch in his ears that drowned out every other thought. He clenched his jaw, every muscle aching. The constant fight against the storm's force was exhausting. Every time he lifted his foot, the heavy, wet snow dragged him back. He realized the danger wasn't just the cold, it was the suffocating silence beneath the wind's roar. The world was just a mix of the grey sky meeting with the white snow. The lack of color was disorienting, and a cold, paralyzing feeling started to settle in his chest. "Keep moving," he told himself. He thought of his little sister, Mia, waiting for the medication he carried in his inner coat pocket. The local doctor was snowed in, and this prescription couldn't wait until morning. That promise to his mother was the only thing anchoring him to the path. He focused on a memory, the warm, sticky scent of the maple syrup Mia always poured over her pancakes, and the warm and sweet feeling of the cup of hot chocolate that she made especially for him every morning. The memory was so vivid that he almost didn't notice the patch of ice beneath his boots until it was too late. The impact knocked the air from his lungs, and for a single, terrifying second, he didn't want to get up. The snow felt soft and welcoming, muffling the wind into a gentle hiss. "Just rest for a minute," a voice whispered, but he couldn't give up. He forced his numb fingers to dig into the snow, getting himself up.

It was then, through the swirling curtain of white, that he saw it. Not a car, not a sign, but a flicker. It was a soft yellow light, about a hundred yards off the road and barely visible. Hope cut through his exhaustion like a hot knife, giving him an adrenaline surge that pushed past the dull pain in his feet. He stumbled toward the light, wading through the untouched snow up to his knees. As he got closer, the light solidified into the window of a small, wooden shack: an old ranger station. He could smell it now: the unmistakable, comforting scent of pine smoke and burning wood. He could hear a faint, low crackle of a fire inside. He hammered on the heavy wooden door with his fist, the sound weak and dull. The door opened instantly. An older woman stood there, wrapped in a thick, red wool jacket, her face creased with concern. The sudden rush of hot, dry air against Elias's frozen, wet clothes was agonizing, as if a thousand tiny needles were piercing his skin. He stumbled past her, shedding his coat onto the floor; the heavy, wet wool immediately filled the air with the sharp, clean scent of melting snow. She simply pointed to a chair near the fireplace where the fire now roared. He collapsed into the chair, holding out his hands. The heat was overwhelming and painful, yet he couldn't pull away. He watched as the numbness receded, replaced by a deep, throbbing ache that was the sweetest pain he had ever felt. "Drink this," the woman said softly, handing him a mug. He brought it to his lips. It was thick, dark, hot chocolate, spiced with cinnamon and chili; the same as how Mia always made it. He took a long breath, the smell of the fire and the cocoa filling his senses. He was safe. The silence in the cabin was broken only by the gentle, rhythmic popping of the burning oak and the whisper of the wind trying and failing to breach the walls. Elias felt the tightness in his chest finally dissolve into a wave of profound, exhausted relief. He was now ready.



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