



## Comfort Animal

BY JOY LADIN

*From the sequence "Shekhinah Speaks"*

*Comfort, comfort my people ...*

*—Isaiah 40:1*

A voice says, "Your punishment has ended."  
You never listen to that voice. You really suck  
at being comforted.

Another voice says, "Cry."  
That voice *always* gets your attention,  
keeps you thinking

about withered flowers and withering grass  
and all the ways you're like them.  
Hard to argue with that.

Death tramples you, an un-housebroken pet  
trailing prints and broken stems,  
pooping anxiety, PTSD, depression.

It's better to be animal than vegetable  
but best of all is to be spirit  
flying first or maybe business class

with your emotional support animal, your body,  
curled in your lap, soaring with you  
above the sense of loss you've mistaken

for the closest to God you can get.  
You want to cry? Cry about that.  
Who do you think created

the animals to whom you turn for comfort,  
dogs, miniature horses, monkeys, ferrets,  
hungers you know how to feed,

fears you know how to quiet?  
I form them, fur them,  
it's my warmth radiating from their bodies,

my love that answers  
the love you lavish upon them.  
Your deserts and desolations

are highways I travel,  
smoothing your broken places,  
arranging stars and constellations

to light your wilderness.  
Sometimes I play the shepherd;  
sometimes I play the lamb;

sometimes I appear as death,  
which makes it hard to remember  
that I am the one who assembled your atoms,

who crowned your dust with consciousness.  
I take you everywhere,  
which is why, wherever you go, I'm there,

keeping you hydrated, stroking your hair,  
laughing when you chase your tail,  
gathering you to my invisible breasts

more tenderly than any mother.  
You're right—you never asked for this. I'm the reason  
your valleys are being lifted up,

the source of your life laid bare.  
Mine is the voice that decrees—  
that begs—your anguish to end.

When you suffer, I suffer.

Comfort me  
by being comforted.

Source: *Poetry* (January 2019)

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Plain Old Forever

Death, shmeth –  
Been there, done that, conceived and aborted  
innumerable futures  
in a single breath.

Eternity curves and recedes  
like a cheek I brush,  
highlighting the contour of the bone  
where being meets nothingness.

Even forever has a flavor, invisible and sweet, like a small ripe fruit.  
Even nothingness creates a sensation,  
like a pushup bra maximizing cleavage  
between spirit and matter.

I was fine while I lasted, I'm fine  
fading from lilac to black,  
I'll be fine when I stop shopping and sweating  
and slip into something more comfortable,

Earth soft as a moccasin,  
plain old forever  
sliding over my head  
like a cotton dress.

From *Fireworks in the Graveyard* (Headmistress Press)