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**AFTER
THE
PAUSE**

THE LAST OF ITS KIND





Contributors

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Alexander Etheridge has been developing his poems and translations since 1998; and his poems have been featured in *The Sojourn*, *The Parallax*, *The Cafe Review*, *The Dawntreader*, *Abridged Magazine*, *Susurrus Magazine*, *The Journal*, among others.

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BEE LB is an array of letters, bound to impulse; they are a writer creating delicate connections.

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Editor's Note

Summing up nearly eight years leading *After the Pause* feels impossible if for no other reason than that these editor's notes have been few and far between. It's worth once again primarily letting the work speak for itself. Though I hope you'll oblige a few sentimental words as I end this labor.

Throughout the pandemic, you may have heard the descriptor "unprecedented times" repeated endlessly. Certainly, they have been two years that have no mirror image in my lifetime.

Yet that phrase deserves a widened perspective. Disease and calamity are not the only things we may label such. What is being human, if not itself an unprecedented venture considering our few thousands of years on this planet in light of the billions this universe has seen.

Art pokes at the unprecedented nature of humanity. Creating art is a natural expression of being conscious. *After the Pause* wanted to give space to artistic exhalations, the breath following the pause. For nearly eight years, I believe these pages have done that.

So here we are, showcasing these humanly exhortations one last time. Art is what follows the pause. I hope you enjoy our final issue.

Michael Prihoda
Founder and Editor
After the Pause

Newborn

My little sister can't help but stare at the robin's nest in the backyard. Gazing out the kitchen window as she kicks her feet back and forth atop a wooden stool.

Three eggs inside, turquoise like Easter. Surely a prize within.

She tried to get close once, but the mother bird swooped and sang until my sister retreated.

She tells me she likes the color of the eggs. They're round and small, and she believes she could fit them all in one hand.

After a week of this, my sister approaches in tears. The eggs are broken
Taking her hand and going to the window, I prepare myself to break her heart
even further. But instead of eggs, three newborn birds probe the air with their
beaks.

"They've hatched," I say with a smile, taking my sister into my arms. Yet her
tears don't stop, and I don't understand what the matter is.

"The eggs are broken," she repeats, like I am missing some fundamental truth.

"The little birds were inside the eggs," I explain.

My sister closes her eyes and buries her face in my chest. She doesn't like to
look at them. They are unsightly. Spindly and wet. Small and red.

"That's just what they do," I continue softly. "Eggs hatch. Things change."

I've said the wrong thing, though it is the truth. A lingering ache plants in her young heart, newborn like the birds.

How to Suffer: A Guide for the Lovelorn Traveler

Let's be honest. You've dreamed of putting thousands of miles between yourself and your ex-honey and the memories that pop up everywhere you went together (or, if your memory has developed a cruel streak, had even talked about), but you aren't ready to stop suffering. We get it. The good news? You can do both. (Note: change the gender as needed; misery doesn't discriminate.)

Step 1: Plan Your Trip

Book a flight. An international flight. To be specific, book a flight to synonymous-with-romance Italy. Optional but recommended: buy a center seat. (Misery points: 5)

Step 2: Pre-Flight Trauma

Arrange, by communing with the gods or fate or whatever, for your boomeranging ex-honey and his recycled girlfriend to be on your flight. (Misery points: 50) Discover this on arrival at the gate (plan ahead so you have time to call your friends, sobbing about the goddamn *irony*), then panic when you realize your ex and Recycled Girl could be your seatmates. If you bought a center seat as recommended, add 45 points for the added trauma of imagining yourself sandwiched between them.

Is Recycled Girl wearing a diamond ring that blinds anyone within a twenty-yard radius? Add 75 points.

Step 3: Location, Location, Location

Make your first stop Verona, for two obvious reasons: Romeo and Juliet. Plant yourself outside the house that wasn't Juliet's and gaze at the balcony that wasn't Juliet's and fondle the supposedly fertility-inducing right boob (on second thought, better not) of the statue of not-Juliet while you sob over their tragic love story. (Misery points: 15) But for real anguish, head over to

Via Mazzini for the *passeggiata*, an evening stroll/excuse for flirting and socializing. Envy the grabby teens, parents snuggling toddlers, couples pausing to kiss. The groupings will vary but the minimum number won't. That number is two. You, however, are two minus one equals alone. (Misery points: 25)

Step 4: Share Your Misery

Meals are for conversation, camaraderie, kickstarting romance, and so far you've been smuggling groceries into your hotel room or surviving on mini-bar snacks. It's time to suck it up and find an expensive, romantic restaurant where solo diners are anathema.

Found one? Good. Now ruin a waiter's evening by asking for a table for one. Note the dismay in his eyes when you order not a glass of wine but half a bottle. Now pretend to enjoy yourself: sit back and "relax," sip your wine, and resist, at all costs, your waiter's efforts to rush you through your mushroom risotto. Order dessert, coffee, a *digestivo*. When you leave, if you've done your job well, your waiter's sigh of relief will equal yours and you'll dash back to your hotel room to down the rest of the mini-bar booze. (Misery points: 45)

Step 5: Desperately Seek Attention

Head to Naples for a waterfront stroll, where a grizzled relic smoking on the seawall will leer at you, muttering thoughts that need no translation. Exult that someone has acknowledged your existence. (Misery points: 5, unless you're offended, in which case add 10.)

Next, find a pizzeria and eat a slice in the street. When a graceful man thrusts a napkin into your hand before disappearing into a drove of Vespas, be bewildered yet thrilled. Is there sauce on your chin? No? Then napkin-giving must be a Neapolitan form of flirtation! Don't worry, misery is still yours—after all, Graceful Guy didn't stick around. (Misery points: 20)

Step 6: Salt in the Wound

For seriously intense misery, you must visit the romance capitals of Venice and Capri.

In Venice, walk through Piazza San Marco on a crisp winter night with your lonely hands stuffed in your pockets and trails of fog whispering at your feet. Could this scene possibly be any more romantic? Why yes, yes, it could. (Misery points: 25, + 2 for each fused-together couple you see.) Next, buy a ticket at La Fenice, Venice's tiny opera house. (Any show will do.) Pre-curtain, and for all 185 minutes of the performance, remember in agonizing detail the pillow-talk plans you and your ex had made to tour Europe's jewel-box theaters. (Misery points: 65)

On to Capri, home of iridescent grottos and cobalt waters, perfect for solo traveler self-flagellation. Want proof of your solitariness, your invisibility? Take the boat tour that passes through the arch of the Faraglione di Mezzo, where kissing your lover brings good luck and where, at the critical moment, you should feign indifference and fiddle with your camera. (Misery points: 35) Afterward, squeeze your solo self into a peapod boat, helmed by a chiseled young man whose jeans fit just right, for a spin around the Blue Grotto. Hope for a boat with not one but two clingy couples. (Misery points: 95)

Step 7: Fuck This Shit

Decide to move to Italy, which, sure, sounds counterintuitive at this point. But you can be miserable anywhere, so why not Italy? Prepare to be surprised: in your adopted city, you see solitary women—invisible to you on your travels, just as you believed you were—but now you see them everywhere, in the streets, at the market, having coffee, eating lunch.

Open your eyes. In Italy, the past is very much a part of the present. Take your dog to a park that was once an Etruscan necropolis, stroll along a former medieval aqueduct, gaze at massive stone walls striated with history. See Catholic churches built on the remains of pagan temples, the footprints of stone walls deconstructed to be reborn elsewhere. Discover ancient traditions that still thrive, shared by young and old in fairs and festivals, ceremonies and competitions, art and music and food. Be alone but not lonely. Realize loneliness and solitude aren't the same thing. (Misery points: 0)

You see, life goes on despite the clinging past, and ruins, sometimes hidden but always there, beg to be built upon. They're waiting for what comes next.

Look forward to what comes next.

God How I've Missed Your Face

In this fan fiction, all seven members of the Korean pop band BTS get everything they've ever wanted in life. Via a genie, or something. (Could develop this more.) What's important is that readers understand that each of these successful men wants more than what they have. Jungkook, for example—the youngest member who is forced to be good at everything even when he's tired or sad—is, through a humorous yet touching interaction with the Genie, finally allowed to rest.

In this next fan fiction, all seven of them are in love. A glowing, queer polycule of mutual care and affection. There's some sort of turbulence or miscommunication (or or or) in the first three-fifths of the story but, the point is, by the end, they have figured out how to form a stable and supportive unit. When Jin's family dog dies, they all plan a funeral together, using a shared Google doc to get every detail just right. When Jungkook's mom gets sick, they all pitch in to send a new vase of flowers every Sunday of her stay.

This fan fiction is a mafia one: dedicated yet overworked mobster Jungkook gets distracted from finding his father's killer because his mom gets sick and, through learning to care for her—her vulnerability helping him unearth his own in sometimes painful and sometimes revelatory ways—realizes he has to leave behind his life of vengeance and crime. The other BTS members can, I guess, be part of his cabal.

This fan fiction sees Jungkook is in his final year of medical school and, fresh as the textbooks are in his malleable med student mind, notices his mom's symptoms before they begin. No sick mom arc in this one, just a simple moment between mother and child that leads to several simple moments between woman and doctor, all of it coming together to demonstrate how supportive, studious, insightful, and prepared our protagonist is—he caught

what no else did. Jungkook goes on to form healthy relationships and heal many others, bypassing, as he did, an unnecessary early run in with grief.

In this fan fiction, Jungkook's mom is sick again, but maybe in a more developed way. In this fan fiction, she maybe goes to urgent care with—ouch—a bit of a backache and finds out, after the doctor assures her something must have gone wrong with the bloodwork (*you wouldn't even be standing if your numbers were that high*), that the numbers were, in fact, that high and—surprise!—she has something called Chronic Myeloid Leukemia. And—even though “chronic” is right there in the name—hers is actually in the “blast” phase, which is (according to the statistics Jungkook finds online) basically the same thing as *acute* leukemia in terms of being untreatable, in terms of things being spoken of in months, so why didn't the doctor just say that in the first place? In this fan fiction, Jungkook's dad—who really should have learned how to deal with his emotions better by this point—keeps grabbing at Jungkook's neck with pincer-like claws the way he would when driving Jungkook back from those humiliating soccer games in middle-of-nowhere Maryland, proving, as always, that Jungkook's body was the one thing in his life his dad could control. In this fan fiction, Jungkook's twin sister Megan flies down from Maine and, even though their family has historically used humor as a defense mechanism (when Megan almost drowned at the beach that one summer, Jungkook joked about how hahaha he would've been happy to finally not have an identical twin), they sit in the waiting area quietly—so quietly—and when the security guard says, *Actually visitors aren't allowed to sit down you can stand in that little roped off area by the door, yes, there, by the other wet faces and cold wind*, despite this pristine plating of comedy and tragedy, they are quiet there, too. In this fan fiction, when Jungkook and Megan are allowed into their mom's hospital room over the next six weeks, they notice how quickly her skin has become white has become translucent has become the terrible electric teal of lobster guts, a body eaten up by what's inside. Despite the set-up, the rising action, and the somewhat over-the-top signaling that this story will culminate in Jungkook confronting the reality that his mom (read: himself, all of his loved ones, every breathing beast on this Anthropocenic orb wobbling its way toward a bitter beyond) won't make it, will perish here in her own completely horrific and

human way, in this fan fiction—and here’s the exciting twist—his mom doesn’t die. She doesn’t die! In this fan fiction, her thin arms and legs don’t become spotted with dark bruises like the skin of old plums. In this fan fiction, she doesn’t spend her final days shouting in her sleep, curled up into her hospital gown like a cat with bad dreams. In this fan fiction, I don’t have to help the nurse pull my mom’s fingers away from her confused face so that we can look at her eyes and mouth as we say our goodbyes. In this fan fiction, my mom doesn’t die, and Jungkook doesn’t end up here, staring at me from the foot of my bed. No no no. You can go now, Jungkook. Jungkook, you can go. My mom is here now, I see her, God how I’ve missed your face.

Michelle Meyer

It Takes You By Surprise

Surprise birthday party, surprise bouquet of flowers,
surprise visit from Ed McMahon who hands over

a surprise two-million-dollar check.

My idea of surprise is good. Is welcome.

I never thought about being telephoned by
The Big Bad Wolf, which would also be surprising.

Because it's not like you expect such things.

You expect things like

breakfast, coffee, a commute

but not things like

The Big Bad Wolf. Not things like

an early morning phone call

from an unknown number that slips into voicemail

preserving forever

The Big Bad Wolf disguised in a white coat,

licking his lips, muttering

sorry-for-your-loss condolences and leisurely sucking
the marrow from your bones.

Laura Atkinson

The Parthenon

Doric,
strength in its columns,
gone in places
one can still see.

Is there such a thing as an
ordinary man? And yet,
there is a place where
his proportions

crumble beautifully.
Here, for his struggle is gigantic,
so is his love,
and we see the ages

do something
with these burdens.

Alexander Etheridge

Last Change of Address

The earth knows we'll return--
our few feeble movements
down under the flowers,
and our names repeated like a song's chorus
so the ones left won't forget
through all the winters.

Look,
moon, sun, and moon and sun again,
the mist coming down
to the cold lake and the churchyard--
It'll all be forgotten.

Nancy Byrne Iannucci

Nothing to Say

I step outside
and scratch my white scruffy scarf
as the bitter wind confronts my face-
I take it in like a deep kiss, exhale,
then walk forward like Whitman.

I carefully place dead leaves
over allium, so sacred they are to me,
sleeping deep in the late, soft dirt,
then walk on like Whitman.

Bittersweet berries choke
this gray day red.
Hoof tracks follow me
Like Snow White
but I walk like Whitman.

I lay down by the Poestenkill creek,
seduced by its endless conversation.
I celebrate myself with a selfie
then *loafe* like Whitman,
with nothing like Whitman to say.

Missing Parts

West Elm has better quality loveseats, but you settle for IKEA. It's your first "adult apartment" and hand-upholstered, polyurethane cushions don't fit the budget. When the boxes arrive on Saturday, dump the contents onto your rug careful not to lose any screws. It looks like Ace Hardware vomited up their entire storefront. You've never heard of an Allen wrench, but now you own three.

Feel useless when you realize the directions are fifty-pages of clipart cartoons. You can decipher one: the frowning man with an X across his chest who warns, "Don't build alone." Text your boyfriend to bring over a hammer. Ten minutes later, he replies that you need a mallet. Hammers don't do shit for IKEA furniture — you'll end up with bent nails and a busted finger. Mallet, hammer. Potato, *Potato*. Borrow a hammer from the med student next door and smash together two unmatched pieces of — something. Notice too late one of them is upside down. Woodshop was your only C in high school.

Attempt to FaceTime your boyfriend. *Call Failed*. "Can't talk. Golfing," he texts. Reply that you need his help. You can't build your loveseat alone. While waiting for his response, incorrectly attach six more pieces. Get a splinter.

Thirty minutes later, he says there are how-to videos on YouTube for stuff like this. Be persistent. Can he please stop by after golf? Two people would make it easier. Remind him about the time you rode the T twenty minutes to bring him soup when he had the flu. The time you left your friend's birthday brunch to pick him up when his car got towed. He claims this is different and anyway, he has things to do. He always has things to do. It's interesting how seeing you is rarely one of them.

Use your Allen wrench to bully a screw into a nail-sized hole and recall the time he backed out of a date to watch football with his friends. The night he showed up an hour late for dinner with nothing to offer except, "something came up." And how could you forget the weekend he chose a music festival over your one-year anniversary? Type out a bitchy text. Don't send it. Not yet.

Count out seven long, black screws in your palm — fuck, one's missing. Your phone buzzes again. An apology? A change of heart? No. Hope pops like inflatable plastic packaging. He's canceling dinner tonight. Something about poker night with his buddies. Instead of "sorry," you get, "my b." Wonder how much more of this you can take. Go back to scrabbling around in the mess of loveseat parts — parts that fit together in theory, but not practice.

Yesterday's Tomorrow

Didactic somnambulism, sometimes frenetic, propelled me to now.
Warp 8 at least.
Is my past an illusion?

Never had a GI Joe with Kung Fu grip.
Had a Kenner's Girder and Panel building set though -
"It's Kenner! It's fun!" aaaawwwk!

So now, I'm no longer relevant? It's
"get out of the way, geezer!"
"stop wasting air and space, geezer?"
What were all these years for again?
Living? Don't know.

Not sure I did a good job of it, but I tried. Love you, kids. Sorry for all the
mistakes. Proud of you.

Is your glass half full or half empty -
if your last name was Homer,
would you name your son Grandslam?

I noticed that as you move closer to the sink drain without your glasses, it
looks bigger and bigger.
Vignettes like that are what you kids have to look forward to. Enjoy aging.

Eating cheese before bed makes for strange dreams.
I enjoy dreaming strange.

Elliot Brady

Job Interview

My head in a box
at the corner of the screen,
looking sandblasted.

I have matured into someone strange:
My own inscrutable companion.
Here and everywhere else,

refusing kindness and eating
alone in dark corners,
preparing for this exciting opportunity.

In my previous position,
I independently traded securities
for indignities. I can do that here, too.

I ramble and feel your notes
scratched out below.
I'm failing to hide

the hat in my hand.
I wonder if my eyes
are begging

the way I want them to.
Help me fill my house
with electricity.

Help me

keep the lights on
while nobody's home.

Have You Ever Knelt Beneath a Woman

Have you ever knelt beneath a woman,
your knees dipping into the silt of the lake
pressing, indenting their own craters,
a hushed moonlanding into the sand's soft give
slick with the algae of another life? A maybe.

Did you wash her feet in the leachy water, not because Jesus did
but because you want to.

You want to hold in your hand something as tender and curved as the
newborn baby you reckon you'll never have, never cradle like this.

Was there firelight?

Or did the burn come from her,

the look she gave you when you pressed your lips to the center of her arch,
chilled and wet from the miracles of nightbreeze and splash and want.

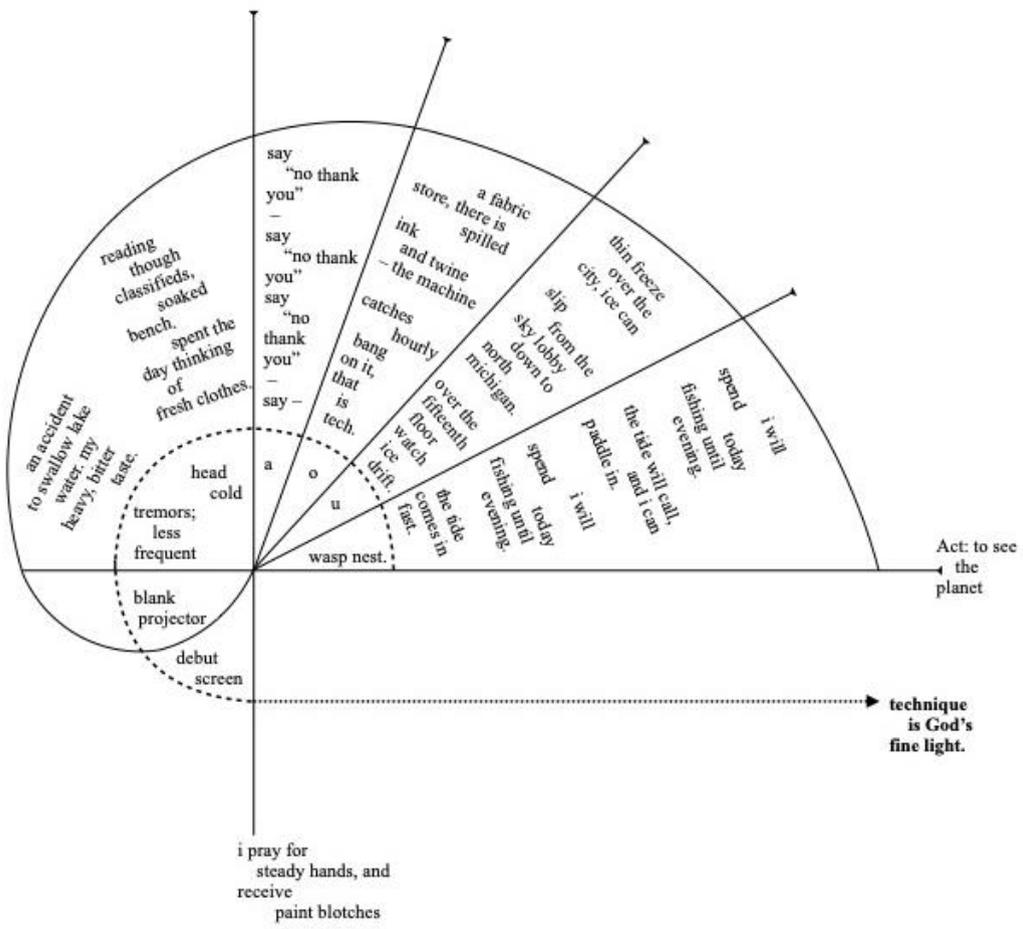
Goddamn perfect

Goddamn holy

Velveteen Rabbit

No one ever touched me that I didn't want to.
Well, that's not true. Is that true of any woman?
But never beyond what I could shake off: a shoulder, a hip, a knee.
The Hokie Pokie.
Turn yourself the fuck around.
But no one ever died on me.
Well, my grandmother but we didn't really know her.
We didn't really love her.
Is that allowed?
I wonder if anything has happened to me
To make me real
Rubbed soft and whole and loved and loving.
Real enough to write good books,
raise good children,
dust all the parts of my house
That I don't think about.
And if I don't want to
Raise good children
Dust all the parts of my house
That I don't think about
Is that
allowed?

Technique is God's Fine Light



Mark Danowsky

A Pristine Island on the Dark Web us on the move

us in motion

experience experience experience

burning the candle that is not a candle at both ends

the paradox of choice vs. doomscrolling

pixels of a fuzzy maple branch

a product placement for your narrative arc

moldy plums in the backseat of a Tesla

that trip to paradise vs. another staycation

fifteen minutes to mindfulness

your fifteen minutes as digital confetti

your fifteen minutes as a downpour of hearts

your fifteen minutes waiting in an open field

Maryann Aita

Eroticism

bourbon drips
along the rim
of your glass.

"when do you think
toilet paper
was invented?"

you ask. I guess
the 16th century
and sip a jar of gin.

*

you complain
about the paper stock
of the new *playboy*.

above us your composition
, the tin ceiling erodes
peels back, like my syllogism:

the correlation of
our ribs.

Machinery

My robot greets me as I enter the kitchen. It's shaped like a dog, and it barks, too. On a platter it carries a granola bar gone two years stale. I take a bite. Cardboard flavor.

"Welcome to Day 343," the robot dog says in its artificial voice. I look down at it as it continues to speak, metal emulating human. It continues, "I am here with your daily reminder to not blame yourself, Dr. Winters. The accident was not your fault. You did everything you could. You are a good person with good intentions. You almost saved the world."

I smile as its robotic arm plucks a remote from the nearby counter. It points the device at the television before facing back to me. "Do you want to watch the sunrise?"

I blink, not sure. Is there a sunrise left that's worth seeing? Will it still shine the same?

And what sunrise do I deserve to see, knowing what I have done and what I can't take back? Because it was always so unhappy, this place, but more unhappy on the days they could not see the sun.

Are they seeing it now? Are they finally home?

I mean, they're together now, surely. Finally together in the stars.

I manage a tear. Just one for the world I ended. There used to be something beautiful here that made us want to keep going. Now love is dead. All is suffering, held in my hands.

A sob cuts through me. One and then another. I feel the pull, the reach of the dizzying darkness trying to drag me to the center of the earth.

My breathing comes and goes so quick. As though I am suffocating myself. Dying while my heart is transfixed by this horrifying dread that slithers, constricting my limbs until my blood ceases to flow and everything just... stops.

How could the world have made me this way? Mold me into this broken form, when surely I am only the cumulative mistakes of it, the things that we forgot to burn?

Only yesterday I was in love and now I'm falling through the clouds. I'm on a collision course with the ground below. No wings. No way to slow my fall.

I plummet to the floor, writhing. Coughing, choking, crying on my saliva, struggling to breathe as my body is consumed by terror.

"I have sensed a spike in your heart rate," the robot's voice cuts through the air, horrible and unnatural. It has no eyes, no thoughts. It simply is, without purpose, real purpose. We are not so different. Its mechanical arm reaches out, touching me on the back. I jump.

"You are having a panic attack."

I don't respond as it offers another granola bar.

"Have some food. It is the same thing you eat every day but hopefully you can enjoy it since I selected it especially for you."

I sigh, taking the granola bar in my hands. I wipe my face free from tears with my sleeve before eating. I continue to sob through the bar, choking on the tasteless oats.

"You should sleep," it instructs when it judges me to have finished.

"Things will be better tomorrow. Day 344 will come and you will arrive with it. Tomorrow will be a new day."

Nodding, I stand, following the robot dog to my room, too tired to argue. I look down at it, moving by my side. Aren't we a fitting pair, nuts and bolts to our cores, programmed for purpose?

The sun has come and gone; why are we still here?

But as my hand catches against the side of the robot, I hesitate, faltering in my step. The robot falters with me.

I blink. The robot is not gone. I am not gone.

And even in the darkness when all else fades away, it is still here. A robotic hand reaches for mine. Cold metal and yet we bring each other warmth.

Everything else is gone but us. Nothingness, and us, holding each other as the darkness presses in, wishing for just another moment longer. Nothing more human than that.

The Sand Garden

There are false glimmers here
– it's true – a pathology of narratives;
you see them when you cross a desert,
in the dunes piled high enough
to obscure these godless stones,
triads rising like towers of granite – or spite.
We ask ourselves if they will ever pierce
the roof of the sky, or quell the madness
of our sick ambitions?
High above us black birds circle,
their low swoops and stabbing dives
anticipate our fall; we ask for water
but there's only sand in our cups.
There's a woman in these dunes, too,
asking us to point her the way home;
we take tea together in the shimmering heat,
with stones for biscuits & bones for spoons,
but nowhere to plant those seeds in your pocket.

The sky is bleached like a sheet
suspended in the wind to dry,
clouds creasing it with streaks
hold us in thrall to the light
– but enfold us further into silence.
As we descend into the riverbed,
dried out like the skin of a snake,
we wish to be those brittle reeds
flattened in mercy, finding rest,
as we tumble down the banks,

in a rare bed of salt-flecked silt.
We think of a place where there falls a rain
like the death that redeems all it washes,
thornless stems softened to stop the pain
and flowers so red they sear your eyes.
But within the edges of these petals
unraveling fast before you, there blooms
an empty core as parched as we are,
where beauty is but an open space
that hopes for nothing – not even water.

Still, we live on broken knowledge,
in wonder of a world always
crumbling in front of us;
we touch its foundations
– forgetting it all –
move into the great easement
remaining after our renewal;
we leach into the red earth,
slide deeper into caverns and broken
cisterns, haunted by our visions,
hearing some animal's last lament,
or the weeping in a bare tree's rustle;
we linger on this strange obsession
riding atop the thunder to the rain

– *whenever* it might come.

Portrait of the Middle Child as Bad Apple

The therapist listens to my fragmented memory and says
these terrible things make us stronger. Let me admit I don't

believe that. The zodiac offers a mirror and for a while I lose myself
within it. I consider posturing myself hidden in a tree, awaiting the body coming,

or licking the juice from an apple seed, but discard the idea by reasoning of
cyanide. What I haven't told her yet can't hurt me, but it keeps me up at night.

Leaves my chest stuttering until I speak of it, fork over my memories
until I watch her cry and realize my whole could envelop her if not doled out

in pieces. Decide to peel the skin, chop up the worst of it. To rid it
of its core. Let me keep myself soft for her; let me make myself palatable,

candied to taste. Let me follow the line of her finger and unearth
each deep-seated belief. Let me return to antiquity: fashion myself guard-

god, tear out the heart and compress that which filters, makes pure,
rids of waste. In the mouth of my truth, let me ferment. As a child I wanted

a sister, now all I want is to be who I should have been. Give me a chance
to go back, let my body unbruise, insisting to the stem: *hold me*.

Let me be the bad apple— cored and cut up, bruised to oblivion, just shy
of tasteless, tongued with complaint. Lord, rid me of this bitterness. Find me

in harvest, pluck me in time. Tell me, if you believe it to be true:

You are the reason you survived. Give me as much of myself as you can.

Alison Hicks

Poem with a Line by Caroline Forché

It is light that wakes
after a night where sleep is hard to find.
Neglected medicines line up in orange canisters.

Already it is diffused across the sky.
July nearly August, heat-bleached
clouds and sky indistinguishable, fused.

A wedge falls through the window
onto the edge of the yellow chair
the red blanket folded over its back.

Languages and cities lost.
Crane on the book cover, neck curved and pointing up
gray feathers parted like fingers.

Apartness gathers the music of solitude as if it were a glass viola.
Like film or video on a loop, it keeps unfolding.

Alison Hicks

Toward Protection of the Colony

Let no one tell you you have no home on this earth.

Exterior and interior, two sides of a coin.

Read books and people equally well.

Walk streets of cities, hike the backcountry, paddle lakes and rivers.

Lighten your step with discovery, gentle touch; pick up after yourself.

May friction make experience memorable.

Find work you enjoy. If it should pay, don't let that sap the joy.

On occasion lose yourself in it.

Gather with friends and strangers without risking your life or theirs:
believe this will happen again in your lifetime.

When you dive through blue the reef will still be there

Richard Weaver

Benjamin Franklin

is in bed, dying. At 84, there was little else left to do. His daughter, Sarah, Sally to him, urges him to shift so as to breath more easily. He's reluctant, having learned during the interminable night, no position on this earth offered even a moment's relief. All proffered possibilities. None delivered what his body and soul sorely needed. I would purpose it, he finally replied, if I believed it worthy. But like the winter, there can be no trusting it. Must I endure? "A dying man can do nothing easy."

Selling Biscuits to the Generation of Cenobites

Excellent work, marketing. The knitters and bakers are well in grasp. But growth, though. Try catering to the prouder boys, 14-28, who grow stuffed on difficulty: men who play *Dark Souls* to extinguish younger initiates (kids who'd hoped to enter their names in the monastic register of the order of repetitive pain) and who then go online to brag of the childish dreams they'd left scarred and battered on the floors of some dreg heap made real in the boundary between the computer's display and the eye, where medieval ruins and emptying plains remind the gank squads and their Redditor friends that a life spent hollowing in the infirmary of yesterday is no life at all. On the forums, kids today really say things like that. They were raised on sirens and emergency forecasts, signs of falling empires and news cycles that relentlessly remind them of their sisters and brothers who fell down some well in the plague or found themselves disintegrated by a fentanyl car crash. They feel seen when they encounter cycles of entropy, fallen civilizations, the aesthetics of apocalypse ruining castles and the pastiche of mansions and mountains topped with dread spires, poignant vistas, or surprise wildebeests. Cater to the men who enjoy such reminders of lost worlds, men who want more of the past grown alive again, boys who think triumph over adversity is meaningful, kids who hope life is an accident, a breakable miracle.

They have money

to buy our biscuits, and we're selling the cure for their fixation on the repetitive crisis of a world that still listens to nobody.

Tell these kids, this

generation of digital cenobites,
that their home is alive. We are
making it. We have warmth fit
for kindling. Go forth and reach them.

Unlearning My Association of the Ceiling Fan Spinning During EMDR

i do not have the modern pine tree's spine
but i brave an ancient cold sore

my therapist said to call her
if at anytime after that session of EMDR
the sounds of the ceiling fan
resume their spin (in my head
or outside in everyday
happenings) and never doubt she says
the sounds that signify resilience just doubt
the lingering voices of associates like monica
and parents hanging baskets
of cold limes

on the laundry line hung between two modern
pines

but this place is safe

and this therapeutic method
has been approved by the gods (with its eye darts
and finger tapping and its astrophysics of consciousness)
and she says
time is just a laugh track (the egrets at the lake never
saw the cold accumulation of capital
that consumed them) and time prefers you

new and tasty resolving the threats lodged in
your heart
with replacement offerings of honey

(your compost habits are
shit
your idiocy makes my heart work overtime)

through sodden memories
of the existence of the body
(nobody wants to remember
the existence of your body)

(nor the skin worn by fables like you) through
memories
of imagistic feelers sprouting from my skin
(hold your feelers to the sky
as an imperative)

the fan keeps spinning

(she cannot get to me if i find my way to heaven)

on the patio
outside monica's apartment

(there is no fan
on the patio
outside monica's
apartment)

just a hive of empty
buzzing beings (a hive of striped half-
brazen things) a living lake of snow untouched

by footprints going long

for the more you hone your art of spiraling-out,
the more slowly your haunting hornets
will search through homes like yours for you

(through the patches left on
every creak
-ing floorboard) and your dead

paradise, your dream of silence, sounds a lot to me

like a trap left by the one who sent you spinning
as though your last dream never ended, your hopeful dream to find
some radiance
in hollow times of oak,
when the notches of your spine
will finally evoke
(between the whirrs of spinning blades)

the outcry of mute things.

Simple Logic for Poets

Well, hell, why should poets get any real consideration when every other person in the world is a poet and thinks that what they have to say is revelatory and will save the world. If one is actually recognized as an important poet—someone who is special in comparison to others—they more than likely have important contacts that the rest of us don't, or by chance were in the right place at the right time, endorsed by Oprah, or maybe even the president of Microsoft or Amazon. Anyway, what I'm saying is that if you're a serious poet who's under the illusion that you'll soon get a lot of exposure, becoming famous to the point that people will be buying your chapbooks like iphones. and coming to you for insight into the true meaning of life, you may as well stop writing poetry and switch to technical writing on how to put something together like a deck chair or a vacuum cleaner. People will remember you way more for that than the best poem you've ever written. . .

Rejection Slip

First off, thank you so much for submitting to our humble magazine. While I loved your poems—and I mean loved!— I must inform you that we're going to pass on them this time. This 'passing' in no way reflects on the quality of your work. There are three of us here at this humble magazine, and one of the editors reacted a bit negatively to your work as she expressed that the content of your poems reminded her of her rotten childhood in which all she wanted to do was grow up fast and leave home forever. She voted against accepting your poems, and her good friend, who is also one of the editors of our humble magazine went along with her. I alone loved your work and voted to publish all of your poems except one—the one about meeting God face to face and giving him a piece of your mind for allowing so much bad stuff to happen to innocent people throughout history. I felt that that poem was a bit over the top and, being a religious person myself, I felt it was not fair to blame God for all the ills that have happened to people throughout history. Other than that, I think you're onto something very special, and I hope that you will send us more poems in the future. We are filled for the next ten years or so, but after that we will open again for submissions. Please keep a lookout for us, and here's wishing you continued success with your writing.

About

Founded in 2014, *After the Pause* is an online literary journal based in Indianapolis, Indiana, featuring poetry, flash fiction, and artwork, published quarterly.

We look to feature the best creative work from new, emerging, and veteran creators.

Find us at afterthepause.com or on Twitter @afterthepause and Facebook /afterthepause.

The founding editor of *After the Pause* is Michael Prihoda.

Our Purpose

We believe art is a product of life experiences, from the joyful to the heartbreaking to the absolutely mundane. Life throws pauses at us. Art follows the pause. We want to share the best art we can find and bring hope through those artworks.

Cover Art

Designed by Michael Prihoda.

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**THANK
YOU**

FOR READING OUR FINAL ISSUE