

The After-Chapter

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There you are.

Lost in time, uncountable. Yet, I return here without any presence again.

Today, my days of wandering are nearing an end as I carry the weight of nothingness. Across tiles of concrete creations, it's become clear now that no shadow can quite mimic the shape of mine. I love to see them try, with their attempts nonchalantly fleeting within the clouds of people I pass by.

Making my way through the spaceless corridor, I notice a room where my quivering feet once stood. Without a shadow, or a presence, I perch on that armchair in that room God made everyone forget about.

With my memories remaining an unvisited dream, I woke up amidst the calm green meadow that gently held onto me. There was warmth in the flora that encased me, but so was a sense of longing deep within me.

And so, I gave in to greed, one more time. Maybe one last time, I'd search for meaning. I pushed away this Eden and ran for myself, faster than I would for my fears. The daylight welcomed me, but with a warning. It could shelter me but

it couldn't save me from the night's abysmal grasp. And so, a deal was sealed even before it was spoken of. I was made aware of the fact that I was on borrowed time.

Something tells me this wasn't my first attempt. Everything in me ached, suffocated. *But I am here.* Somehow. Here I stand, looking over to the bed that I despised so much in my last days.

On my tongue remains a comfortably bittersweet taste of memories. The sheets look cleaner. The pillow feels softer; it hasn't held a head down since, no longer gaping a void that would let me silence my screams. There's nothing around my bed now, not that my body needs them anymore.

It looks better this way. It feels better.

Like the whirring of a grounded bird's wing, long-forgotten bitter memories in me awaken. Some visits to the doctor when it would be overdue. My eyes catch a glimpse of the framed picture by my bedside table. It shelters shades of life I couldn't love enough. It has never failed to blur my sight with tears. I open the drawers and they're empty too. Only this armchair, that bed, and its table at the side live days of despondency.

I was home again. But like always, time did not wait for me. The daylight warned me after all. The light grew orange, vividly passing through me onto my bed. Sometimes I wonder if the afternoon is aware of how eerily tranquil and beautiful it is despite being

short-lived. If it doesn't, could I still wish that I was like the afternoon and that my numbered days were just as serene?

Nevertheless, I look back again, the light on the bed thinning as the sun nears its slumber. It's a familiar scenery from when I stood on the cliff of life, with the arrival of the wind left to take my fragile body down the depths of the next.

Nearing the edge, I was always afraid, regretting every decision that led me closer and closer to my demise. However, that day I was as calm as the sea below me. Perhaps it was the inevitability of fate, the fact that I got to witness a story so grand that it had to conclude before it reached out of bounds.

I wish I could trace my steps from here to the ground beneath where my body rested. But I suppose even greed cannot escape death.

There's peace hidden inside of this room. I do not know where exactly, and perhaps I never will. But it still welcomed me.

As the light mixes with the surrounding colours, preparing its clue for departure, I realise that it's not just the afternoon but its glow too which has embraced all of me.

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ILLUSTRATION: **ABIR HOSSAIN**