

When Does the Waiting End?

By Ally Blovits

These Trying Times

cut from emails received over the course of the pandemic

during a time like this it's normal to feel a huge range of emotions

sad, At any given moment, *unmotivated*, relatively empty

lethargic, an unsettling *lonely*,

we've been lost

Over the past two months,

over the past eight months,

over the last year

it can be hard to feel so much all at once

angry, bored, guilty, frustrated,

discomfort that comes with so much ambiguity and uncertainty.

We are all in this battle

stressed, exhausted, anxious,

Try to stay in the present.

we may feel *overwhelmed*

Take the time you need to feel those feelings.

according to the recommended schedule

It will all end soon

In just a few short weeks, earlier this year,

last summer, next year

we must remember we are on the virus's timeline.

no longer even a single day away from these difficult demanding times.

these trying times.

one of the gloomiest moments of this pandemic

Like Every moment of this pandemic

while we are all in the same storm,

we are in different boats

isolated, fearful, confused,

Remember: this moment is temporary.

Although none of us know exactly when this will end, it will not last forever.

right ?

the current circumstances will **have to** end eventually

it can **not** last much longer

right ?

right ?

Any Day Now

Takeout boxes on the floor, sunlight
through the blinds, email from my grandma,
unread texts from my mom, forgetting

what voices sound like other than my own, changing
out of pajamas to put new ones on, old mascara, lost
hairbrush, shutting the door, rewatching a movie

that I've seen a hundred times, heart breaking
when my favorite character still dies, fighting
in a zoom call, angry glitching, unstable connection,

crying in the shower, memorizing shadows on the ceiling,
using hand sanitizer until my skin is raw, fight or flight
reaction when somebody coughs, hyperventilating

in grocery store aisles, reading my own name
in loved one's obituary, canceled funeral, grieving
alone, and my friends are too far

away, all of us lonely
thinking of each other, my outdated
calendar won't tell me when this will end, I'm waiting,

I keep waiting, I don't know when to stop.

Letter to Covid-19

After Franny Choi

Once, I breathed without your blue hand
over my face. Once, I left my house without
my heartbeat running away from me. When we met,
pandemic was a word I had to look up. *How long*

is quarantine? What to do when stuck at home? You
were temporary, a month or two they said, which then
sounded like forever. Back then, every day was busy.
I was surrounded by people when you emerged,

invisible as spit particles. You rewrote my life
plan, you held my hand and didn't let go. *Isn't this*
like a vacation? What should we do today? Truth is,
I wanted to slow down, wanted to rest without fear

of falling behind. You held me with a gentle pillow
to the face, sent me new reasons never to leave,
record-breaking deaths, new coronavirus strain, *Are you*
staying home? Who have you seen and from how far away?

You tightened your grip when I got restless, made me
hyperventilate at the thought of you exposed to my
loved ones, made me passive as a rag-doll tethered
to your creeping ivy grasp, I have no escape from you

though I've never gone far. *Why vaccines might not work*
as well as you think, tell me do your thorns have a rose?
When will you stop growing new spikes? Do you get stronger
when I fear you? Is normal still possible?

when will you leave me alone?

Still Soul-Crushing

text from "Soul-crushing': US COVID-19 deaths are topping 1,900 a day" from Yahoo! news

COVID-19 deaths [REDACTED] have climbed [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the virus is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] increasingly lethal [REDACTED] complicated [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] devastating [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] heart-wrenching | soul-crushing. |

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] more deaths [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] per day [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I've got to [REDACTED] wonder if we are ever going to see the end of it [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The nation was stunned back in December [REDACTED] But [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Now, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] there is
[REDACTED] no [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] surprise [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] but [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] No one really thought that we would still be [REDACTED] this [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] worn out.

Family Togetherness

This morning my twin's door is wedged
so tightly in the doorframe it's easier to pretend
I'm an only child. Pretending doesn't quiet the clank
of cans I didn't drink in a sink full
of dishes I didn't use, but it's still my
task to clean them, I'm still the only
child who will. I'm aging backwards, reverting
to high-school habits, staring
at ten-year-old posters in my twin bed,
boxed-up Barbie dolls staring back at me.
My mother's TV turns on, hosts talking the gibberish
half-words of a show in another room, and
with a bang my brother's door bursts
open, youtube blaring out of tinny computer
speakers, I put on headphones just to hear
my own thoughts, Mom's yelling
to Dad upstairs about the news, the numbers
are up again, Dad's yelling back about the morons
at work ignoring the mask mandate, and there's nowhere
I can escape.

At night, the pacing begins. Heavy
footfalls up and down the stairs, the click of the fridge open
and closed. My brother howling into his voice chat with
friends across the country and I'm convinced this house
is haunted and I am the ghost. We all spend sunlight hours
bonding, putting together puzzles, pulling each other apart.
We spend days finishing each other's sentences, analyzing
the grammar in each facial expression, understanding
easily each syncopated sigh, we are synchronized
swimmers, drowning in this dance together, this house is
its own planet, orbiting the weight of what used to be,
and I'm starting to think we are all that exists,
that the vacuum of space outside these walls is a silence
too still to bear.

Reflection

There's someone's reflection in my yogurt spoon. Someone half-cleaned my room, leaving sweaters splayed like a crime scene on the floor. Someone started to read my favorite book but couldn't finish it. Someone let my phone ring out and go to voicemail when my best friend called. Someone left my paintbrush in the water so the handle cracked and splintered. Someone left for work with a sack lunch and came back with it only half-eaten. Someone ran my car out of gas sitting alone in empty parking lots. Someone watched my favorite movie and forgot to cry at the sad parts. Someone cut my hair with kiddie scissors in the upstairs bathroom. Someone shrugged on my pajamas and brushed my teeth before bed and someone laid awake in the dark thinking *this isn't how my life should be, this isn't how my life should be, this isn't how my life should be,*

Who Did This to Me

I don't know how to live in this strange world.
None of us know how to connect anymore,
our voices are muffled and wary.
there's no safety in numbers, two is a crowd,
we've all become feral cats
hissing at each other from six feet away.

I never thought I'd have to rank my friends
by who will keep me safe,
I don't know how to say *I love you, but*
I don't trust you.

Why did the world do this to us?
Why did it lock us inside Shrodinger's box?
Why did it only let us see the seasons change
through gaps in the window blinds?

But can I blame all of *this*,
all of *this pain* on the world?
We're all trapped,
both growing and decaying, both dead and alive.
Who's to blame for this guilt I'm shackled with?
I have been making an enemy of the only person
it's safe to be around. I have been hating the world
for waking me up in the morning, for keeping me here,
where we are all alone, where I am alone.
How do you call a truce with your own head?
How do you forgive your own hands?

How do you cope with this ache
when there is no one left to blame?

My Hands

I know where these hands have been and that's why
they're sticky with aloe vera, smelling like a doctor's office
these hands are familiar, with sweat and fingerprint swirls
these hands are coated in light citrus scented sanitizer

sticky with alcohol, smelling like a distillery
stinging with the burn of a hundred papercuts
these hands are coated in light citrus scented sanitizer
before the first application has time to dry

stinging with the burn of a hundred papercuts
someone across the store coughs, I reapply
before the first application has time to dry
this hand sanitizer is my only lifeline

someone across the store breathes, I reapply
my hands are so flammable I'm a walking fuse
this hand sanitizer is my only lifeline
I wish I could drink it, inject it into my veins

my hands are so flammable I'm a walking grenade
These hands are foreign with germs and disease
I wish I could drink hand sanitizer, inject it into my veins
I know these hands will never be safe again

An Unwelcome Dinner Guest

Fear places an icy hand on my back,
pushes my chair in, and sits across from me at the dinner table.
The tablecloth is damp and slimy, it drips and sticks
to my legs as I cross them under the table,
my foot wobbling like the bobber on a fishing line.
Fear appears not to notice, it knows just which plates to serve,
which fork to use to tear into the meat on its plate. Fear stares
at me for the entire meal, asks me why I'm not eating.
The air is dense, smells of ozone, the lights are growing dim,
sparkling and flickering out for seconds at a time,
and fear just grins at me across the table with teeth too-white.
Why aren't you eating? My food has aged before my eyes,
bread hard with green mold fuzz creeping across the surface,
I try to back my chair away but I can no longer touch
the ground. The table cloth wraps tendrils around my wrists
like seaweed, pulls me back, the lights
flicker out again, fear's steely eyes glow
just enough to see its angler fish grin
as it asks *Why aren't you enjoying your meal?*

Back to Panicking

text from “‘We’re back to panicking’: Moms are hit hardest with camps and daycares closing again” by the Washington Post

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] prepare to quarantine.

[REDACTED] swiftly rearrange [REDACTED] schedules to [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] worry [REDACTED] the entire rest of the year could be a series of emergencies like this [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] We were starting to breathe a sigh of relief. Now [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Panic is setting in [REDACTED] as plans [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] are [REDACTED] disrupted yet again [REDACTED] rise of the [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] delta variant [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] worry [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Everyone is anxious [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] still [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] *strange and lonely* [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

uncertain [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] hopeful [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] plunged into a world where [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] All of this is
happening [REDACTED]

[redacted] over [redacted] and [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] over [redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted] just [redacted]
[redacted] when [redacted]
[redacted]

[redacted] we [redacted] got [redacted] comfortable
feeling like the pandemic was over [redacted]

Glitch

*I can't think for the buzzing of cicadas and static,
my bedroom window glows orange with warning lights,
nothing outside this room is real anymore,*

*the robins follow their script chirping
in the pixelated sunlight, rendered clouds shift past,
you tell me about the months since I've seen you last*

*in robot voices over the phone,
we're both lying to each other,
both pretending not to notice,*

*you act like this is normal and I hate you
for ignoring it, until you say something
and I hate you for mentioning it,*

*when you hang up, I talk to the dead
phone line and it feels the same, I keep thinking
about that Scooby-Doo episode, the house is so high-tech*

*it comes alive and starts tormenting people for attention,
I, too, want to scream pay attention to me,
PAY ATTENTION TO ME, and now*

*my therapist is buffering through the computer screen,
we're all just pixelated faces trying to speak
through disconnected calls and unstable connection,*

*and my heart is a dead spider, legs curled in the air,
and my heart is a picture of a dead spider,
just tiny squares of muted color,*

*and there's nothing I can touch, just buzzing
electricity, virtual reality, and I must be glitching
I can't remember what it was like to live before.*

Hydrangea

The hydrangea bush out back
has been shrinking with each neglected year,
it has struggled since Nana passed,
as have I, so I take the task upon
my sunburnt shoulders,
my green gardening gloves obscuring
black thumbs.

For the first time since the pandemic started,
I'm helping something grow. Not building,
not creating, pruning life back into a thing with roots
deep in the earth and an aching pull towards the sun.

Leaves tremble as I snap and yank
dead branches, leaching weeds, clearing a path
to July's burning sun.
I keep thinking how much better Nana was at this,
her practiced, knowing hands, or even
Papa, but they are gone now,

and I am left to brush aside the spiders, to crack
the garden shears into the woody bough
like the snap of dry bone.
I'm trying to do good.
I can't help but think I'm the disease,
I radiate illness.

I pray to the dirt and worms,
please don't let this plant die,
please don't let this die by my hand.

Dead Bees

I've been thinking about death a lot lately.
It's 90 degrees outside. I'm skimming the pool.
It doesn't matter how many bugs I've rescued
from a watery grave, the next scoop will be filled
with dead ones. A net full of lightning bugs,
ladybugs, dragonflies, pondskaters, cicadas,
beetles, bugs I can't name. The honeybee
I saved crawled right back into the water. The ants
get angry when I brush them aside. They'd rather take a swim.
I'm starting to wonder if I even care. Does it even matter.
I bet you don't care that I spent the afternoon scooping
bees and spiders out of my pool. I bet you're sat
in your sunroom, writing in that journal
I made for you, decidedly not caring about me.
I'm not grieving for these drowned bugs & I'm not grieving
for all the deaths on TV, numbers changing every day,
& I'm not grieving for the time & opportunities
we've all lost this year. I'm grieving you.
I'm grieving you, living, as I scoop bumblebees, dead,
out of the water. In days flooded with death,
I grieve for someone only a ghost to me. I'm trying to swim,
but I keep bumping into tiny bodies in this graveyard I keep.

August Nights

Outside my window, the neighbor's cat drawls a screechy mew, the katydids chatter the chh-chh-chh ch-ch, the mechanical heart of the night, the shh of dampened cymbals, and the cricket chirps blend together to a continuous hum, legato violin in the deep pit of the orchestra. One lone cricket must be perched on my porch, closer than the rest, its chirp a plucked piano key: me, me, me, me and their friend further off responds a duller note like a marimba: you, you, you, you. The katydids quicken and slow, quicken and slow, they know to savor the night, but they have so much to say. Insects rattle, buzz like electricity, nature's static, erasing silent night from memory. Across the street, a dog impatiently yips, but is quickly hushed. In the distance, cars rumble down the road, clanking parts bumbling over potholes, grumbling engines eager to get home.

I am not so lonely anymore.

Looking Forward

cut from emails received over the course of the pandemic

Hi, everyone. I hope you are all remaining safe and secure.

Times like this remind us that there is so much of the world that is out of our control,
Please take care of yourselves

Treat yourself as you would treat a friend

you might feel *happiness, calm, peace, gratitude, excitement, or even joy.*

lonely, But, Maybe a little bit better

I stand with you, hoping to inspire and be inspired

I have been thinking a lot about the future,

I was pleased to see the brightening prospects

sad to see them fall

The good news We're still here

take care of yourself

we actually have very little control of the future, and

my continued hope is that you will be there with me

I am encouraged by the uncommon will and strength we have shown

I am so proud of the resolve and determination

shared wishes for a joyful and safe ever-brighter future for all of us

soon, we will be together again

It's True, our world has changed.

things are still hard.

but still we find firm justification for hope

It's a beautiful summer here

I'm looking forward to seeing

You again