

**Athar C. Pavis**

**Dear Millennial**

“The purpose of living,” you ask, and “what’s the point?”  
It all seems useless to you looking forward  
in instant algorithms, but it’s after,  
once you’ve weighed anchor, only from afar,  
you see, the way the beveled cliffs of Dover  
tower to their full height when you set sail.

I’m not a model, I have to admit.  
I’ve turned down so many chances of living,  
my house is cluttered with measuring cups a husband  
gave me for Christmas, half of its windows  
walled over in stone — what the French do  
to lower their taxes. It’s uncomfortable,

the questions you’re asking, when the furniture  
fills up the spaces that were once my own.  
I’m not a role model, and I can tell you  
things it wouldn’t be good for you to hear,  
the multiple selves I left disappointed  
for you to bloom, how the sore heart pauses

because the mind it seeks is multitasking  
each time I phone. It’s true, I can’t offer much,  
the homilies successful people bring,  
tweaking “commencements” to a grand rebirth —  
their easy optimism is not my thing;  
I know the beast that gnaws from underneath

remembering life before it has been lived,  
time counted now against a drip-drop clock  
no one can see.

Nevertheless, I think  
how the light filters through the balsam fir,  
gliding to morning as the fog lifts off,  
gilding horizons, blanching the grass —  
nothing of what you loved once has been lost.

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Only the gladness of an open heart,  
wonder, the surprises that keep me alive,  
blossom, that sweeter impulse to impart  
something within to these ungentle shores —

a life, my dear millennial, that's yours.

**Portrait of Peter**

You were a loner, socially inept,  
always saying the wrong thing to a woman —  
something about a man's duty to protect  
nobody wanted to hear. You told them

about your first million, desperate to attract  
even a passing interest, and the time  
you backed a makeshift upstart, your wild bet  
to make PCs better than IBM.

You were a high-risk taker, so you said  
to anyone who listened, but no one  
at the Commonwealth Club, the place I'd found  
for you to meet bright women — or someone —

gave you the time of day. I had you try  
dancing lessons, hard workouts in the gym,  
products to whiten teeth, and taught you how  
*Pride and Prejudice* shows that what things seem

are not what they are. Years of non-fiction  
had made you literate but too literal —  
history you read — for truth — but missed the one  
staring you in the face no one would tell —

how all these high opinions put them off.  
But I liked the way, when I took your arm  
it stiffened with authority, as if  
entrusted with some sacred task you came

just in the nick of time to show the way.  
You were a sucker for this kind of thing,  
and women used it, you became the prey  
of needy damsels needing everything —

a new apartment, TVs from Best Buy,  
SelectQuote shares, even the family farm,  
before I took your camera, so that I,  
deleting pics, might keep it safe from them.  
You must have given S. a half a million

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and yet I could not bear to intervene —  
you were in love, you thought, and this illusion  
was quite enough — for you had never been.

Later they used to wait around the block  
not to be seen by the Assisted Living —  
women, though not an educated lot,  
smelled opportunity. And so your giving

had to be stopped, but still you couldn't do it.  
You took a Xanax first, then told me straight  
these women came for money and you knew it —  
but, after all, what else could one expect?

Who were you not to remedy an ill —  
their motives were irrelevant, in fact,  
and swallowing yet another Xanax pill  
you added, disappointment of the heart

is what you'd lived with your entire life.  
Depression's just the modern word for heartbreak,  
in its rebuff, you said, the world was right —  
something in you was flawed, misfit, a lack.

But I remember how on Alcatraz  
you'd planned before its time a wandering moor,  
the house you built all windowed to the skies  
leaning to seaward its suburban shore.

Your dreams like mine once blowing to full sail  
across vast oceans, beating on the wave,  
the heave of time, the unforgiving swell —  
and then I think the dreams we cannot save

define us best. So I remember you,  
not in the anecdotal of a life  
but in ambitions only the heart knew,  
remembering yours to find them in myself.