After: An All American, Post 9-11 Love Poem

by Sarah McKinstry-Brown

After he got on one knee, and she said, *I do*. After

they watched the televised bombs
disappear the city. After everyone fell

asleep. After shock and awe, him and her

making love while tanks rolled through that desert city's
streets, erasing memory. After forgetting their sorrow,

and bringing the babies into the gaping
blue. After nursing and swaddling

while department store massacres unfolded,
perfume counters and bullet casings

on the brink of Christmas. Red, red, blue
red, blue. After sirens. After boys with black hole eyes

emptying their grief into automatic weapons. After
playing house, buying curtains, making lists, pretending to be perennial

and not just another *boom*. After the cold, hard ground,
the evergreens mute and blazing. After

the mothers and fathers on the other end of the

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headlines, the news of children huddled in closets.

After eyes hollow, after no ground could ever be
hallowed. After she heard the news and called him,

both of them with nothing to give the other
except a silence to weep against. After winter

after winter, after winter, after winter,
it's a wonder it didn't happen sooner:

The two of them screaming at each other
in the restaurant parking lot,
the bar, the idling car,

the neon blue and red Open sign coloring their faces with bruises,
blinking, *open open open.*

After he, after he gets on one knee,
and she says, *I do. I do.* After

they watch the televised
bombs, the nothing

blooming. After everyone falls
asleep. After shock and awe, him and her

making love while tanks roll through another city, erasing memory,

Oh, America, who are *you*
to tell them that love is anything

but holding on.