

A Lifetime (a burning haibun)

by D. Keali'i MacKenzie

Springfield, Massachusetts

July 2019

Heartsore, I land in New England. Home for the first time in four years. Jet lagged, exhausted from one of the hotter summers on record when grindr pops up and I find myself driving to a man's apartment. Well after 11 pm, his place only blocks from my high school. My heart beats loud, past my throat and into my ears. My stomach butterflies a sickly-sweet cliché. As I pass the dunkin doughnuts (one of 3 on the route to his house) I understand the nervousness, the tension in my body, is the same feeling I get before I perform on stage. This is a kind of performance, isn't it?

If I could have, I'd have spent the night. The sweet cast in his eyes a gentle plea to stay longer. Perhaps. I hold on to how good it felt to kiss a man with stubble - not beard - but the scratch that lingers across my lips the next morning. Perhaps I hold to the lamp light across our naked bodies - hands entwined - a mutual instinct. Perhaps I felt safe - even with a stranger - for the first time in months, and wondered this as I rose from his bed, his rumble whispered voice.

It was after. Our very sweet, yet awkward shower together - where he asked me to scrub his back, I obliged, of course - After. More kisses, mouths cooled from chilled water. After I mentioned my age. He turned and said: "Shit. I'm 27, but I feel like I've been living forever."

"That's real," I said. honest.

"It's true," He said, also honest.

What could I do but let him rest his head on my lap?

I held him. An eternity, or seconds. We exhaled.

Hands entwined.

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