

## Ephemeral Lilies

A vase of dying lilies sits forlornly on a shelf. Threads of gossamer entwine themselves among the wilting leaves. And as the setting sunbeams brush against them, a single petal falls. In the golden glow of the amber light, the flowers seem alive again. Vibrant as they were before. But that scintilla of former glory grows fainter every day. A box to the left sits collecting dust and the occasional despondent gaze. Inside it holds photographs, writing scrawled across the back that speaks of pleasanter days. Once beautiful words and poetry are smeared by sporadic drops. Both ink and tears had long since dried, but the pain they contain is still fresh.

A door slams. Another petal falls. With it, the small piece of a story slowly starts to fade; for these lilies grew and died with the love of two young souls. The evanescence of their passion remains in the permanence of their pain. A shadow crosses over the room, and an intangibly heavy stare falls once again to the shelf. Despondent eyes are taken back to the day they were placed so tenderly in the vase and the flood of memories that accompany it.

She met him in the springtime when she least expected love. Her mind was set on higher things than pointless infatuation. But a simple lunch break stroll down familiar city streets rendered her determined vow irrelevant.

He was new at the office where she worked. Their paths had crossed through the occasional pot of communal coffee. Fate toyed them with oblivious interactions, and she remained impassive to his presence. Until an unsuspecting Tuesday in March, Fate finally grew bored of their indifference and set it upon itself to change that.

She hadn't walked long, her coffee in hand and her phone in the other. Not looking up. Not paying attention. Only Fate could be so clever to have him doing the same, coming the other way. With disguised serendipity, they collided. Drinks spilled. Apologies were profusely issued. And eyes locked. It was instant.

He offered to walk her to the café a few blocks away and make up for his clumsiness with a freshly brewed cup. For some reason, she agreed. And so, it was at this small café she first felt herself fall, between sips of coffee and timid smiles. They talked for what seemed like a lifetime of pure elysian bliss. They could have spent all day there, but work responsibility called. So, with stiff legs, they stood and made their way back to the building that had seemed so dull only half an hour ago. Now, it was with breathless anticipation she awoke each day, eager to be at that very place.

Excuses were found to wander past each other's desks. Lingering conversations in the name of business became more frequent. And each day at noon the café's halcyon scene wasn't complete without two figures tucked in a corner in a world of their own. It was on one such excursion to this idyllic spot she made a passing comment about the

efflorescent lilies in their terracotta pots. She said they were her favorite, and from then on so they were. Not because she had always loved them, but because they now reminded her of him.

As the aurora of their love began to grow, so did her visions of the future and all it held. A white dress. A two-tiered cake. Waving sparklers instead of throwing rice. The details of the perfect wedding became more concrete with every passing month, burgeoning like the bouquets of lilies he frequently bought her.

Summer brought sweetness and the best that was to come. It was late one night; the moon was full, and the sky was adorned with shining stars and twinkling fireflies. A blanket was sprawled out on the grass with a bottle of champagne half gone. The ground was damp with the night-time dew, and their laughter rivaled the cricket's song. They sat shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, and stared up into the dark, fully content with watching the world pass them by. The breeze tousled her hair, and he tucked it behind her ear. Even with the stand secured, his hand lingered, fingers tracing under her jaw. She was thankful for the cloak of darkness to hide the reddening of her cheeks. She felt like a young girl again, dizzy with too much to drink and anticipation. He leaned in first, but before their lips met, three words tickled her ears. These three words dissipated any final reservations that may have been left unchecked deep down in her far-too-practical mind. She was no longer falling but completely immersed, in love and in a daze. The kiss was tender but far too brief. Her head rested on his shoulder, and they simply sat in silence. Blissful, blissful silence. But there's always quiet before a storm, and those golden hues of summer romance betokened a warning of the winter about to come.

Their lives resumed as normal; the stars replaced by fluorescent office lights. Even distracted by fatuous affection, focus on his career came first. This disposition was not unnoticed by those he aimed to please, and a promotion was soon offered. The surprise was of course welcome, but the strings attached less so. A new job. A new city. A new chapter in their lives interrupted. Still, neither of them were strangers to the consequences of corporate ambition. Thus, he found himself in a new city, an hour's drive away from the desk-side chats and daily strolls they had become accustomed to. And she found herself dating a voice on the other side of a phone line. He reassured her it would be fine. They would make it work. And she truly believed that.

But naïve optimism can dissemble even the purest of intentions, leading reality to often diverge from such wishful thinking. So, her overestimation of love shadowed the true fugacious affection that the different chapters of their lives brought. She lived in a world of idealism, forgetting to guard herself against the possibilities of loss. But as distance made her heart grow fonder, the effects for him were reversed. Their schedules grew more complex, and their time together grew scarce. Phone calls became a rarity because he always had something to do. The absence of his presence left her longing for his touch. And later just his voice. It began to seem like that was too much to ask. Still,

they persisted. Their love sustained through the occasional bouquet on her doorstep, reminding her he existed, even if only in her memories of what they used to be.

A year passed. Springtime came again, but it was colder this year than it was when they had first met. A pile of pictures lay sprawled across a desk, as she sat writing, pouring her heart into each note on the back. On the front there were always two faces, smiling and in love. The Lilies on the shelf were all but gone.

The day came, and she found her favorite dress. It was one they had bought together on one of their many trips. She trailed her fingers along the hem, contemplating where she went wrong. Hours slipped by as she fixed her hair. Her makeup. Her smile. Her eyes kept glancing at the clock. A quarter till six. She clutched an envelope of printed memories, tied neatly with a bow, and stood at the door waiting for him to show. One year of her life

A knock. She answered. And that was it. He greeted her with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. No kiss. No hug. No spark. Just silence. Cruel, cruel silence. She gave him the envelope, with a slight tremble in her hand. He opened it slowly and slipped a single photo out from inside. She scanned his face while he gazed at the picture, noting each facial muscle twitch. Her eyes flicked down to see which one he had gotten. It was the only photo they weren't in, taken instead of the radiant lilies. If he had flipped the photo over, he would have read every heartbeat in her chest poured out in careful cursive. But he merely said thanks and slipped it back into the envelope without another word. And they left for a dinner that would be filled with the sounds of everything but them. That whole night. No kiss. No hug. No spark. Just silence. Cruel, cruel silence.

She saw it coming the next day but expected more than just a text. With blurred vision and shaking shoulders, she clutched the pictures she had kept. The vase of brittle lilies was watered as she wept.

The heartbreak of the moment was almost too much to bear, but it wasn't just those few words that caused it to shatter. It was the ineffable pain writing can merely allude to, of watching the person you thought you would spend the rest of your life with losing their feelings for you.

So, with a box of broken dreams as its only companion, the lilies sit neglected but never forgotten. For who could throw them out and all the memories they encompassed? While they are here, so are the fragments of a past love. A past life. Those beautiful memories, tainted with time and heartbreak, persist still in the contents of that simple glass vase. What remains is a wisp of what once was, like wilted petals, shriveled by time. Still, she keeps these flowers, withered on the shelf, to remind her of him and the girl she was back then. She hears his laugh in the slightest rustle of their dry and brittle leaves. She sees his smile when the light catches the fading colors and

awakens them once more. But then the moment is over, and the flowers are simply dead.

The ephemeral lily, like ephemeral love, is only here for a fleeting moment before it's gone.