

An Early Anniversary Gift

By J. Awad

Snowflakes dance in the air. A hush has coated every inanimate and animate thing, turning it all into a soft mirage. The moon shines brightly in the sky, a light glow reflecting off the frozen icicles hanging from the tree's branches.

"Can we please talk about this?"

"What is there to talk about?"

There is a wool hat pulled low over your eyes, hiding the window from me. I remember the day I finished knitting it for you, as I held the material in my hands and the pride I felt at having accomplished something. It is in your favourite colour: a dark, navy blue.

"We can work on this. Whatever it takes."

"There's no point. It's just not working anymore."

The bus shelter's light is low, a dull hum ringing in the air. I want to ask if you can hear it too, but there are more important matters at hand. We are quickly reaching that point where we won't be talking about the little things anymore.

"I thought you were in this forever. You said it. *You said it.* You said forever."

"I know what I said. But things change."

The day you made that promise, I had come to a gut-wrenching realization. I had fallen in love with you, and what if you felt far from the same? I knew I had to get the words out, or else they would poison the blood running through my veins. So, with a deep breath, I drove to your parents' house. You were two hours away. When I arrived, you were already running out the door, keys in hand. Your words came out breathless. And I felt like I had been born again.

“Was it me? Was it something I did?” “It’s not you, it’s—
I mean, it is me. Really.”

I am shivering in this cold. The bus is five minutes late. Your gloved hands look so inviting. Do you know, that when you take my hands in yours and rub until I feel warm, when you bring my fingers to your lips and breathe warm, hot air onto them, that I know I have never felt safer? That when you wrap my scarf tighter around my neck and plant a kiss on my forehead, as we stand under the streetlights hidden in the dark's shadows and you tell me that you had a great first date and can you call me again—was when I knew my life would never be the same?

“I don’t understand how you can fucking do this to me.”

“I’m sorry. I am.”

We are waiting for the bus because we are going home for the weekend. To my home. We’re supposed to meet my parents and spend the holiday with them. The urge to throw the duffel bag slung over my shoulder to the other side of the bus shelter is overpowering—zipper open, clothes flying. No, not mine. *Yours*. So, you can clean up the mess. And I can watch—so I can know how it feels.

“I love you.”

I wait for you to respond. For the words to come out breathless, so that I can feel born again. If you said them right now, *right fucking now*, I would forget this conversation ever happened. I have a horrible memory, anyway.

Your silence blends with the quiet outside. The snow continues to fall, blanketing it all in a cloud of white. The grass becomes cleansed and when the snow melts, gets to start anew. You want to do the same.

Without me.