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## **Lukewarm**

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"It's still broken," I grumble as I pass my hand under the running faucet again.

I've spent the past five minutes leaning over the plastic, yellowing bathtub in my dingy apartment bathroom while I wait for the water to warm up. The water heater in my building has been screwed up for a few weeks now, so I guess I shouldn't be surprised that it's still not running hot even with the dial wide open. Maybe it won't hurt to let it keep going a little longer, though.

I shed my clothes with a sigh and sluggishly climb in alongside the flowing tap. My back strains as I do, giving me pains like it always does after days like these: days I spend as a pending corpse, shrouded within my comforter and sunken into my mattress from the hour the sun comes up to the hour it goes down.

The water itself isn't necessarily cold, but rather an unsettling lukewarm temperature. It's the kind of bath that doesn't offer much comfort- but merely functions. I can tell as I submerge myself that my body isn't quite sure how to feel about it, though I suppose that's nothing new by now.

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It's an awkward, only distantly familiar kind of envelopment; it's one that reminds my skin of the air in his house when I haven't visited in a while, where everyone is putting on a painful act of over-casualty in an attempt to pretend that we haven't become strangers.

It's the physical manifestation of one-worded replies; it's like trying to act normal when we both feel it fading. It's the daily routine of cringing at every tepid "*Oh ok*" that my thumbs twiddle out across my cracked screen, but sending it anyway because small talk is better than silence. Silence would mean accepting it-

the growing apart.

It wasn't always like this. He and I used to be wide open with each other. We were taps flooding with talk of art, music, politics, religion, and anything else that pretentious teenagers pretend to know about to impress each other. I remember one instance when I'd cracked an *awful* pun and he smiled at me, his eyes blown wide in shock and eyebrows twisted up in that endearing expression of his which said "*That was the single most stupid thing I've ever heard in my life, but I think I love you even more for it*". It was springtime then, back when we spent our days on the pier watching ripples in the water roll across the green and glassy reflection of the sky. I collected a permanent set of freckles on my knees from hours of exposure to the southern sun as I splay out on the rough wood with my head resting in his lap. I was alive and in love with being so.

But that was before, back when serotonin came from the sky instead of the pharmacy. It was before the winter came and the sun started to set before I could walk out of the school building. There came the season when the bitter wind arrived like a crooked debt collector, numbing my fingers and toes first before snuffing out the rest of what was owed from my heart. It's funny; when he and I first got together, I was elated to think that perhaps I'd never have to feel the throb of heartbreak again. I guess I should've been careful of what I wished for- because the day he noticed the indifference in my eyes was the day I began to pray for pain.

And when I allow myself to think about it, I acknowledge that the muted warmth which visits my chest every now and then when I'm with him can only hold up for a few more milestones: one more anniversary, one more family dinner, one more quiet Saturday cuddled up by the barely-functioning furnace in the living room. Nonetheless, I stay. I wait. I tell myself that one day I'm going to wake up and look at him, and my idle nerves will bloom with adoration again. I guess it's the same logic that keeps me sitting in this tub every night, denying the way the tap runs colder by the second and watching my fingertips shrivel into something akin to the withered roses decaying in the vase on my dresser.

The good days now are few and far between; it seems all of my puns and all of our plans just hit the surface and vanish into steam. The most important things are left unsaid. My cold hands and shedding hair tell him all he needs to know. Hard conversations are substituted with a bitten tongue, or tired kiss pressed to the temple, and silently promised for some other day- which we both know isn't coming. We've been holding our breath, tiptoeing around each other like we both have the same words crawling up our tongues, but neither of us dares to be the one that speaks them.

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I consider filing another report about the heater to management, but then again, what does it honestly matter to them?

The water is climbing; I feel it inching towards my chest. There's still a little tug in me that wants to wait it out a bit longer, but the pipes in the thin walls have begun to groan at my procrastination. I lean forward and finally turn off the faucet, letting out a breath.

If only everything were that easy.