



## HIRAETH

**T**he rain teemed down that first morning before returning to work as I sat in my chair, sipping my warm tea. I scrolled through the memories on my social media account; my morning routine of perusing what I was up to according to Facebook years ago. I glanced down at my feet; warm and snug in my grandmother's slippers, dreading heading out into the pouring day.

Three years ago, I was in Kona; revealed by the pictures of Rainbow Falls. I spent my spring break in Hawaii, where I'd leased a car and driven the entire island. There were no actual plans, other than to fill my mind with images that I would draw on to escape the reality of my repetitive existence once I returned to work. It was a welcome change from my routine to hop in the car and just drive from sunup to sundown, stopping in tiny villages or for a quick bite to eat or a dip in the ocean at a hidden beach.

This year had been different. No travel, no family or friends, no adventure, just the comforts and familiarity of my neighbourhood. I lost myself in the beauty of that image and the memory of the time I'd spent on the island. Every day in Kona had been sunny and warm, a stark contrast to the cold soaked air of the West Coast.

The alarm on my watch vibrated on my wrist, breaking the spell of nostalgia and signalling me it was time to dress and get ready for work. Reluctantly dragging myself from my couch, I kicked off the orange leather slippers, pulled on a pair of warm socks and got dressed while I faced the vanity in the stillness of my room. As I brushed my hair and fastened it into a loose braid, it forced me to question the foreign reflection gazing back. Standing quietly, I revisited memories of what felt like lifetimes ago. These moments were so far from the place I found myself in today, yet still connected by the smallest of threads.

Glancing down, I grabbed my lip gloss. I stared in the mirror as I brought the soft, glistening wand up to my lips and let it drag across them. Looking back up at my reflection, my now shiny lips glistened as though a slug had travelled across them. The slight wet look and gentle pout reminded me of those moments after a kiss. Mouth still gently parted and the slight breathlessness of surrender lingered in my mind. Although that memory was long passed, it resurfaced the recollection of the first day I'd spent with an old love. We had sat on a bench in the park by the tennis courts, watching the relay of players lob the ball back and forth for hours. Shaded by the sun, we'd scripted the conversation for the cast of actors we were observing on the courts. He had quite the sense of humour, and his laugh was rich with mischief. Thinking back, the mild blossoming fragrance of that warm summer morning when we first met wafted into my mind's eye. We had talked for months, but this was the first time we had met face to face. I had only seen a single photo of him but had fallen for his dulcet tones. He was adept at disarming me, and it rigged our game of cat and mouse in his favour.

Earlier that morning, he'd left me stranded after my overnight flight, while he dozed; oblivious to his forgotten promise. I remembered how my heart had sunk as I waited, abandoned, at the airport. It was too early to call anyone else. So, I called him. His voice was hoarse, groggy and confused.

"Where are you? Did you want to drag out the anticipation...? Or just save on parking?" I'd asked playfully.

I recalled the awkwardness in his voice for having overslept. "Oh... I'm so sorry, just hop in a cab to my place."

It wasn't like me to be what I construed as demanding, but I took a chance since I'd been looking forward to being



greeted upon my landing. "You said you'd pick me up. I don't mind waiting," I responded in a kind and warm but firm tone.

This introduction to what would be our first in-person meeting had made me uneasy. How could he have forgotten? At least it had given me a little time to freshen up and wash away the stale scent of a sleepless overnight flight. I didn't have to wait too long before he'd arrived and texted me where he'd parked. Walking out of the terminal, the air was rife with the acrid stench of jet fuel. I smiled and timidly hugged him hello. As I got in the car, he took my bags. It was still quite early, and he asked how I was feeling after my flight.

We drove to my friend's place where I was staying so I could drop off my suitcase and then continued to his neighbourhood to return the rented car. There was a strange mood of stilted anticipation and climactic disappointment. As we walked, the warmth of the day melted away the guarded interactions and we soon fell into our familiar affectionate repartee. We searched for a place to get a drink for a few blocks, passing several closed shops, when we came across the honeyed fragrance of a fruit stand that was setting up for the day. I remembered how we were both so grateful for the store's early morning hours. I had been dehydrated, and he was hungover. He suggested a park around the corner where we could sit, talk and savour our sweet-smelling tangy drinks. The harmony of the blended fruit juice brought me back to the summer warmth in

Hawaii. We'd texted the whole time I was away, sending pics back and forth to each other. It was almost like we were adventuring together.

Nowadays, I sometimes take the detour through the familiar alleyways to walk by that park. I retrace our steps through the sordid streets, littered with the foul stench of heartbreak and nostalgia. As I meander through the backstreets, I notice how the late day sun overextends the shadows of the fire escapes. It's like they're reaching toward a distant past, only to meet the pavement and disappear into the murky urine-soaked filth of obscurity. The shadowy parallel mocks my melancholic yearning for my embellished memory of him. Weaving through those pathways years later toward that spot where it all came to life, I can almost smell the adhesive pong of the felt orbs that mimicked our volleyed gaze. We had taunted one another within that intimate tension, sitting on that bench and staring into each other's eyes between conversational pauses; holding back the fulfilment of bitter delight.

Over the years, we'd often lose touch and then come back together again as though no time had passed. This year it had been just a few phone calls before the holidays; nothing like the reuniting embrace at the airport years ago. I looked at myself in the mirror again and wiped off the gloss. What was the point, anyhow? I thought. I put on my mask and headed out the door. **B**

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