



We were only Bright for a Moment

John Brixter Tino¹

I burned the way a match burns, all the way down
to the fingers. There was a summer I carried light
in my chest like a swallowed coin, and you were
there, radiant with the particular fever of being young.
We stood in the parking lot at dusk, our shadows long
as declarations. I remember the heat off the asphalt,
how it made the air visible, trembling. We thought
we were infinite. The night disagreed. I have kept
the photographs where our faces are overexposed,
white flares where eyes should be, proof that we looked
directly at joy. The sprinklers came on. We ran through
them anyway. Water on bare skin, the shock a kind of
baptism we invented for ourselves. I think brightness is
a unit of measure no instrument records. It lives in the body,
then leaves. A filament thins. Goes dark. You drove away
in October. Leaves the color of a wound healing. I stood
on the lawn and watched the taillights shrink to red periods.
Two dots. Then the road swallowed everything. Now I carry
the afterimage, that green ghost the retina makes when
the source is gone. I press my palms against my eyelids
and see us still, faintly, the way a bulb remembers
burning for one full second after the current stops.

¹ Department of English, Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, Manila, Philippines.