

Different Kinds of Brass Bells

I knew from the first time I met that thing it would never work: me and you and that damn cat living under the same roof. One of us just had to go; and I think you knew it too, you just wouldn't say. So I'm gone in my blue truck that you never really liked, and I'm never going back to that house. Your house.

The cat's really what started it. It was your baby, your darling, your companion. You loved the way it purred even though it never did, and you loved that little brass bell dinging around its neck. Back then, I still loved the way your hair looked when you woke up, the way you hummed when you cleaned, the way your socks never quite matched. Little things only I got to see. You let me in, me of all people.

I liked making you dinners when you got home late. You never did help with the dishes. I liked seeing your paintings hanging on the walls. When we moved them, I always had to fix that hole in the wall and paint it over with that hideous yellow paint you liked. You said it made you happy, the color of sunshine. All I ever saw was mustard splattered on the wall by some romantic fool with a cheap paintbrush.

I still remember that fight we had, when I told you how ugly it was and you said I should try to learn to love it. That I liked such sad colors, all those blues. That I liked being sad all of the time. Why did I always look for things to be sad about? It's much better to be happy, you said, it's so much easier.

You know, the whole time we were yelling, that cat just sat on the sofa. Watching me. It was like he had been waiting for me to complain about something and now he got his wish. You liked that paint better anyway, he said, it should be me to go. You liked him better. He never got mad at you or yelled at you or asked you to maybe wash a g-ddamn dish for once. No, he had everything he needed with you.

You never made our bed but his litter box was always clean. You never thought to cook for me but, Jesus Christ, if that cat didn't get his three meals a day he might starve! All from a can, best you could buy. Only the best brass bells for him too, the kind with the gilding and the pretty ribbons. Whenever he was asleep you'd go over and coo at him: look at this big belly! See how fat he's getting! Come cuddle with me, baby!

You never said that to me.

And when he scratched at the doors and the window screens and the walls and the floor, and even me, you wouldn't say nothing. When that cat scratched his neck at all hours of the night, just ringing that bell, you told me to hush, it was his way of saying I love you.

You always responded, of course, with I love you and I love you and I love you. That cat was always being pulled into your arms as you told him how sweet he was. I'm still not sure you ever said that you loved me, maybe the cat was just napping behind my back.

But then last night, when we were just about to go to bed, when you took that cat up in your arms and squeezed him so hard I saw the life coming right outta him, I felt that life trailing outta me: you pulling it slowly like a string from another room that you wanted me to chase after.

So we're leaving. Leaving that ugly yellow house I never liked anyways. Leaving in our boxy old blue truck that you never liked, neither of us wearing your damn bells around our necks.