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Empty Belly Home

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Empty Belly Home

He moved in a few boxes each day
He didn't unlock the basement door and creep down the steps and look
for the cellar until his furniture made footprints in the carpet
His fingers slid over the mantel and the house shrieked

"I wouldn't do it if it didn't make you so angry."
I didn't know how to follow this line then and I still don't

Despite my protest he painted
Lavender bruises on my chest, my neck, my lips
Ownership
So that each time my ghoulish lips part, the deed signed in his affection
is renewed

He spent saffron afternoons there
Unpacking
Playing hooky and lining up his home cassette tapes chromatically
Scratchy memories and him swaddled in my warm walls

He won't stop until I say the magic word
Make him my father figure
He never had his own father, so go figure
But I have to spit it out or he won't stop

And the house ached to be lived in! So this was bearable

For a week or two, he was content exploring the upstairs, but he soon
grew restless and demanded the key to the basement

Refusal begat resentment, resentment begat a body like a battering ram
against the door, over and over and over and over and over
Every night
The hinges groaned
The cogs in the lock began to unwind
The screws started to sweat
Explosive urgency, until the pipes beneath his sneakers burst and euphoric
exhaustion flowed free

I wanted to be lived in. Was this being lived in? He dreamed with his back
to the wall, and the wind whipped through the shingles and the broken
pipes dripped beneath the floorboards and the domestic philharmonic
crooned, “was this being lived in?”
“For now,” I settled down and sighed his coffee skin in, and back out

He shut off the gas, the water, and the electricity
Empty belly home
“It’s just my opinion”
Every night
Over and over and over and over

And over until one night, fingernails scrapped brass and the cogs clicked
and the door opened
He found what he was looking for in the cellar

—

November came and so did a carpenter
He stepped gingerly through the frame and surveyed
the structural damage
Fear not, little house!
He had brought a monkey wrench for busted pipes
A flathead screwdriver for loose hinges
Sandpaper and milky paint for scuffs in the door
Gorilla glue for cracked shingles
A shiny brass lock
And an industrial-sized cobalt container for every couch and cassette
tape left in the house

He got to work and I shut my doors to visitors
Windows open and shutters closed
Floating through doorways while he gutted the basement

A flame in the hearth, the first one in five months
The chimney coughed up ink, then a chalky haze
Burning, billowing
Consuming
Consummating the ignition of an adulterated bond

I don't need to be a victim twice
With the Balm of Gilead he oiled every hinge, cog, and screw

—

“A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the strong heart out of your flesh.” (Eze. 36:26)

