

Bella

Bella, you sweet little ADD riddled mess, carrying around your PEZ dispenser full of Ritalin. I waited in delight to see how depressed you'd be the next time we met. Your highs and lows, Everest and Mariana's trench, everything in between, your insane world. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't keen to watch you spin right off the planet.

You're unhinged, but I dug it. That's why I thought little of us going home together that first night. Thought little of your squalid studio. The couch so covered in cat hair it appeared to have fur. The goddamn cats. The bachelor fridge filled with beer and condiments. The filthy bed sheets. Soot? You don't respect yourself enough not to live in filth. But why?

You're painfully adorable. So tiny, with giant, haunting green eyes. I liked them most when they were opiate-dead; I felt uncomfortable during the rare times they came alive. Your russet hair always pulled back in a ponytail, begging to be pulled. Your look, almost too innocent to be allowed in public, around drinking and men. Yet, you spend your nights out late, very late, in wild New Orleans, roaming solo, courting thrills.

We met over a billiards table. You strolled in carrying your own cue. I watched you as my hand softly rubbed felt.

As four AM rolled around, we realized we were the only people left in the bar who could be confused for savory. You drove me to my friend's house, though you were far drunker. I'd told him to leave his door open. Through the front window, I saw a pillow and

blanket on the couch. I tried the door, the knob turned, but I acted like it was locked. I knocked again. I held my arms up to you, feigning defeat

“C’mon, you can stay with me, but don’t judge me,” you said.

And there I was, standing by your furry couch. You were attempting to keep up some semblance of the, “you were just letting me sleep over,” facade. I got worried, for a second, you would offer up the furry couch.

“Why are you all the way over there?” You asked.

I climbed into bed. Settled on the filthy sheets. Placed my head on the dirty pillowcase. I promised when I came over I wouldn’t judge you. You were lying on your side, turned away. During the long, thick tension I thought we might just sleep. My hand placed softly on your thigh was what it took to turn you. A deep kiss rushed sensations down your throat, then you were yanking at your shorts as my fingers traced down your stomach.

“I have condoms,” you assured me.

Was that a trunk full of them you slid from under your bed? I remember listening to wrappers crinkling together as you madly searched for my part in a thousand future fucks. Finally, you handed me the one you picked out just for me.

I turned you around and you buried your face in the grimy pillow. It felt like a horror film the way you screamed, the way you wailed into that pillow. Long, endless wailing I worried might never stop. I couldn’t tell if it was actual crying, but I knew you were dealing with very deep things. That’s why I apologized when it was over, even though I didn’t understand why. Or why I want more to this day.

The ten days that followed are a blur.

At night, as you bartended until one, I caught up on baseball news, drinking scotch, waiting for your texts. We would meet in a dive of your choosing under a cloud of smoke, play pool and toss burning drinks down our throats into our belly's horrors.

Every night in the bedroom it was something different. The night you insisted on wearing earplugs to hear the screams come from inside of you. The night you asked me to choke you with my belt. The disturbing violence of it. Standing against the side of the bed, you on your stomach, pulling the belt tight around your neck, watching the fear of death in your doe-eyes glaze over into bliss.

"If you wonder if you're being rough enough, you aren't," you'd said. "Don't stop, even if I beg."

I lowered the lights, lending the room a dull, yellow hue and watched you claw against the wall, trying to climb it, yearning to escape from something. Amidst the savage screams, which played like a symphony in my ears, I caught a glimpse through the window of a little girl jumping over a massive crack in the sidewalk and disappearing into a run-down house.

Wild little Bella, I would love to project what is in your mind and hear the popcorn from the kitchen. What do you see? Honed claws slicing through a backdrop you didn't realize was a backdrop? The world spinning quietly then a giant come-from-out-of-the-frame boot crushing it? You, as a trembling, solemn youth, surrounded by thick black. A hand reaching for you, the disgraced face above it obscured in darkness? Alone in a room,

staring at your reflection in a knife, you growing bold, the cold steel growing hopeful? I would never judge you. There's madness in me as well. If I said what I'd like to see they'd send men dressed in all white for me. The fact you're sick and diseased has the masochist in me ripping limbs off of trees in a helpless forest. In truth, I was excited at the prospect of having something wonderfully unhealthy with you.

But, then came the three AM texts. The night you sat on my couch and explained how you wanted to date another guy and me, at the same time, to see who you liked better. It wasn't the most absurd thing I'd heard, especially considering how briefly we'd known each other.

You waited for my response, a nervous look on your face.

I walked into the kitchen and poured a glass of scotch. Watched the smooth liquid curl around ice cubes. When I returned, I stared into your distant eyes for a long time.

"I think you should go..." I said.

I took a long swallow of scotch, felt it burn as it went down, filling my stomach with warmth. You started to gather your things.

"...we can go to the bedroom one last time, before you go, but you're leaving after. Up to you," I said.

You stopped gathering your things.

"I don't understand what makes you think you can treat people this way," you told me. "I don't think it's fair."

I didn't respond. Just stared. Watched that mischievous smile I'd come to love spread across your face. You walked to the bedroom. When I came in you were facing the corner. I made you march over to me. Slowly undressed you under the harsh overhead light. I turned you around and had you stand there until things became uncomfortable. Then I threw you on the bed.

When it was over, I remember buttoning up my pants and walking out, you lying there shaking like a beached fish. I took a drink of the scotch and waited. After a few minutes, you crept out. I followed you down the stairs in silence. I opened the door and you walked down the porch steps. You stopped at the bottom and turned back. An expectant smile, a glassy droopiness in your eyes. I slammed the door and you disappeared.