

How a Romantic Poet Moved On

Katelyn Bone

In the morning, as the alarms blare, a black void of a cat makes her dramatic entrance. With the swiftness of a shadow and the precision of a critic, she leaps onto the bed. Stomping with purpose—determined to silence the awful sound disturbing their shared slumber. Whether this is a natural instinct or a behavior she’s perfected to mock the poet, we’ll never know. As this poet groans into the morning, the walls shift in sympathy. They greet her with the soft reflection of the sun outside—never dull, never obstructed, always eager to remind her that the city of Grand Forks has already begun its day as it bathes her in golden rays.

This is around the time her friend, Zoe, gets off her first bakery shift. Appearing at the poet’s door with a freshly made bagel and, if she’s lucky, her favorite blackberry-white-mocha-latte. The walls turn a blind eye, pretending not to notice that Zoe isn’t on the lease, but with the way they stretch to accommodate her presence, they might as well add her name in the fine print. These mornings begin with Zoe’s usual debrief. Her voice bounces against the apartment’s edges as the poet groggily finds her way to the thrifted, dark green couch. Without hesitation, Zoe throws open the blinds, letting golden light flood in as she sets up her little pink mirror on the windowsill and paints her face for the day ahead. The walls stand as silent witnesses, soaking in their routines like sponges, storing away these moments for when they might need

them again.

Come night, as the poet returns home, the sunset casts warm brushstrokes across her apartment. The walls exhale, settling into the glow of another day's end as she lights a fresh incense stick and her favorite citrus candle, filling the space with calm once again. The music hums through the air, and she wonders—if her four walls could speak, what would they say?

Would they scold the poet for her choices in previous romantic pursuits? Would they let her vent about her choices in a roommate? Would they sigh knowingly, having already seen the cracks before she did?

She ponders if these four walls would catch her up on the philosophy books that have been collecting dust near her bedside. If her apartment reads them as she is off at school or work all day. If these four walls would enjoy a glass of her sweet red wine and watch over her cats. She imagines these walls softening their voices as they watch her come home from a long day. She imagines them painting themselves a burnt, sweet, sunset orange to ease her mind.

The scent of burning frankincense and citrus curl through the dim, smoky air. As it wraps itself around the room like an old friend's embrace, the walls hum with anticipation and music. With a tipsy, triumphant holler of "REDHEAD ENTERING," Zoe crashes through the poet's dusty kitchen door using the Menards-made spare key. The air barely has time to settle before she's sweeping through the kitchen, abandoning her muddy boots, floating past the bowed dining room floor, and entering into the wooden-pillared archway of the living room. The walls almost lean in, eager spectators to the chaos that follows—roaring conversations, cackling laughter, girlish screams, and gossip fill the walls. As the thrifted decorations of arranged spices, art, and the occasional flower painting dangle on the exposed drywall—they rattle. The nightclub below joins in. It sends vibrations up through the building's worn bones and sets the night's rhythm whether they want it to or not.

After what felt like yet another impossible day, the bowed hallway floors groan under the weight of their own history. Whispering stories to the poet with every creak as she tiptoes the summit board to reach home. A once beautiful song, now mocking the ears of the poet. She lifts her heavy eyes to see cracks tracing their way down the walls like veins,

exposing the building's age. Red bricks peek through where the dry-wall has crumbled away, peering out like aching bones beneath thinning skin. The poet sulks at the state of her front stairs. The cold wind sweeps fallen leaves, snow, and stray bits of trash halfway up them, as if it were a comforting blanket these halls had come to love. How could such a historic monument sit in its own despair and filth?

Stomping up the rickety stairs, the poet's mind swirls on the thought of how one can steep in their own despair and filth. She makes her way to the empty space her best friend left behind weeks ago, and crumbles. The walls shift in discomfort. They're not sure whether to comfort her or stand firm on *I told you so* as she curls onto the floor. She speaks to the walls, hoping for a response, knowing they observed every betrayal, every lie, every fight, every attempt by the poet to pretend nothing ever happened. The walls, having no arms to direct or mouth to speak, cannot give the comfort the poet seeks. Rather, she is left to lay upon the cold wooden floor, until she deems it a good time to get back up.

In the later hours of the night, a lamp flicks on. The poet angrily shuffles her bed into the empty space she visited earlier. Hot tears crashing with the cold floor, she hastily fills the space with all of her belongings as if nothing ever left. The room, at a discomfortingly hot temperature, sits in stillness as she flops upon her bed. Still angry, still heartbroken, she stares at the walls. Burning for a response she traces the cracks with her eyes, searching for hidden scripture between them to set her bleeding heart free.

The poet squints at a slight discoloration she can't quite put a finger on. Until she scrambles from the bed to retrieve a tube of spackle and a putty knife—her father swore it would come in handy someday. Perhaps the building and her can hold one another accountable of healing in some odd way.

That night, the poet speaks to her own four walls, allowing every drip of heartbreak to bleed into the cracks as she spackles over them. Every story and every thought, sealed away. Blotches of bright pink polka dot watch as she dramatically flops back onto the bed, sweat now beading at her pale skin. She thanks the walls for listening at such an ungodly hour, cracks a long-forgotten smile, and promises they would dry white by morning. The walls, with their brand-new look, watch over the apartment and their newly rediscovered poet.

By first sunlight, the poet pays respect to the back of her building

as she hauls heaps of memory-soaked belongings to the dumpster. She looks up at the faded, chipped paint that clings to weathered brick, gripping desperately to what remains of a long-forgotten sign. It's message now lost to a time she'll never have the privilege of knowing. She hopes memories work in the same way.

Swinging open her front door, she smirks at the stairs she had recently condemned. "We're in this together now," she reminds the building with a soft pat to the exposed brick. She then slowly sweeps away every stray bit of leaf, snow, and trash that had made residency up there, listening intently to the stories each squeaky floorboard had to offer. Soon returning to the newly spackled room, the pink had faded with the cracks—ready for a new beginning.

The poet ponders if the apartment felt as much relief as she did at this moment. The four walls wondered if the poet knew she just spackled her own cracks, too.

Katelyn Bone is a third-year journalism major. She aspires to write creative nonfiction and poetry, and to spread her love of the human condition caught on a page. If she is not listening to music, she is enjoying an americano with a dash of cream at Urban Stampede.