

Ragdoll

A story by Andrew T.S. Bedgood

That damn cat. Lying there on her side of the bed. Still as though in a deep sleep. A pretty cat, I've been told, but a cat nonetheless. That little Ragdoll was the anniversary gift I never wanted to give, but Sherry insisted that she needed it. She loved cats—I hated the damn things.

Sixteen years to the day I've been putting up with the irritation of its constantly getting underfoot and shedding. The fur... well, that's something I could go on about, so I'll just leave it at that. I got it a little box for doing its business and yet the damned thing still insisted that sometimes the carpet was more appropriate for its leave behinds. I've never cared for cats and that little asshole never convinced me otherwise.

Still, I felt obligated to keep it around. After Sherry said her voiceless goodbye, I couldn't give up the thing. I know it sounds a little pathetic, especially given that it's been the better part of a decade now that I've been putting up with this little shit, but she loved the cat and I felt like I could hold on to her a little while longer with her precious Ragdoll.

Every morning, Felix would be perched on the nightstand beside her and greet her with a hungry meow before leading her to the kitchen for some morning munchies. It's a ritual he's forced me to continue—though not without protest. She'd wait for him to finish his breakfast then carry him back to bed to wake me up. And from waking up in the morning to going to bed at night, that cat never let her out of his sight. It was a curious level of devotion for a creature—especially a cat—but she loved him... and that cat loved her.

When I came home after the funeral, he greeted me briefly before wandering back to a sunlit spot by the door mat. He stayed there for a week. Every now and then, he'd come seeking attention from me, but he'd go right on back to his spot by the door when he had his fill of me. She never came back for him, though. After a while, I think he finally learned that she wouldn't be, either. Still, I'd find him lying in her piles of clothes from time to time—the ones I kept trying to bring myself to pack away or sell, but just couldn't find the time or will to do so. He probably did it because it was comfortable, but I like to think it's because he missed her. Her scent was still on the clothes and every time he kneaded a soft spot to lie down on in that pile, I could hear him purr.

When I finally cleared out the clothes, I couldn't find it in me to lose the cat, too. I hated picking up after it—the litter box, the fur in my eyes, the various things it could find in the bathroom trash. As much as I hated the damn thing, I felt connected with it. Strange to think that I could share a sense of loss with a cat, but I did.

The Ragdoll and I never really became friends in the time that passed. We've got a sense of understanding of each other, I suppose, and share in obligatory moments of comfort—I'll pet him, if only to get him to stop meowing incessantly, and he'll with a purr and a claw in my leg let me know that everything will be alright. Every now and then, I'll lose better judgment and bury my face in his fur—it irritates the hell out of my eyes, but sometimes I think I can still smell Sherry's perfume. I know I can't. It's been nearly ten years and between then and now the cat's had more than a few baths. Still, when I take a deep breath, I can imagine what she smelled like and I'm hit with a thousand memories.

I know it's probably not healthy how little I've done to move on, but it's not for a lack of trying. After the first year of grief, I decided to try to get out and maybe meet someone new—at the very least make a friend. It never really went well. I'd meet someone nice, but there'd be that one thing—a crooked smile, the way she laughed, the clothes she wore... any number of small things—that reminded me of Sherry and it just couldn't work out. I felt it'd be unfair to the both of us if I was thinking about my dead wife whenever she smiled or laughed.

There was one woman about five years ago—Chelsea, I think her name was—who was the most promising candidate. Pretty girl with short brown hair and a great sense of humor. I couldn't see an ounce of Sherry in her and I thought that was perfect. We made it through about a half dozen dates before I finally invited her over. It was then that I found out that she didn't like cats. She was perfect. I had a cat. It didn't work out.

Time moved on and I could never find that perfect woman. Still had Felix, though. Through thick and thin that bastard has been with me—willingly or otherwise—and, despite never becoming a cat person, that's something I appreciated. I don't know if I'd call him a loyal creature—at least not with me—but definitely consistent. In the years that have passed, consistency is something that I've definitely grown to appreciate. And I've grown used to the bachelor's life. Widowers can appreciate the freedom of independence, too, I suppose. Besides, meals for one are cheaper.

For nearly ten years in my solitude, I could count on that cat to be there for me when I needed it. And I needed it. I walked to the edge of the bed and placed my hand under Felix—unworried about disturbing him—and picked him up. I cradled him in my arms and buried my head in his fur. My eyes itched and burned like hell, but that wasn't the reason for my tears. I can't believe it had to happen on my anniversary.

I hated that damn cat.