

King of Everything

by
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(A small, sparsely furnished apartment. There is a door upstage right and a window, leading to a fire escape up left. An empty birdcage hangs in the corner, its door is open. Gil sits in front of a nearly dead, potted chili pepper plant. Under the tree is small, oblong cardboard box. Gil wears a woman's kimono over his clothes. He reaches out to touch the tree. It is crunchy with dryness. He begins to sob pitifully. A key turns in the door.)

MELANIE

Gil? I came as fast as I could. Are you all right? I couldn't understand you on the-

(Gil begins sobbing again)

Oh, God- Are you hurt?

(Gil shakes his head)

Are you in trouble?

(Shakes)

Is it your dad? Your parents?

(Shakes)

Gil, You have to tell me. Can you write it?

(He nods, still sobbing. Mel digs in her purse for paper and pen.)

Yeah, okay. I know I have a pen. God, I'm shaking. Here. Here. Write it.

(Gil writes a few words and then breaks down again, dropping the pen. Mel grabs the paper and reads.)

I killed. (Beat) You killed? You- Oh. I have to- to sit- to- Wow.

(He points at the chili pepper bush and then hides his face in his hands. Fresh sobs.)

What? The- This? The chili pepper bush?

GIL

(Finding enough breath to talk.) And Aimless. I killed Aimless.

(Mel notices the box. Peers in.)

MEL

Oh. I thought you- You shouldn't scare me like that. Gosh, poor little Aimo.

GIL

It was- I was brushing my teeth and when I came out of the bathroom he was- He was on the- On the-

MEL

Floor of his cage? Wow, just real sudden then. Well, isn't that the way we all want to go?

GIL

But, no. Not in his cage. I let him out to play on the tree. The Chili- The Christmas tree.

MELANIE

You let him out? But we agreed-

GIL

He liked to climb around on it and it seemed stingy to deprive him. Every morning he'd fly over to it and he was so cute, he'd sit on the pepper tree and the little red peppers with the bright green leaves and the twinkly lights and pure white Aimless and it was just like when it was our Christmas tree, but now Aimless was the little angel every day.

MELANIE

Oh, Gil.

GIL

But today when I- It was like he looked straight in my eyes before he just bit right into the cord.

And I ran over and kind of batted him off with my towel, but- I didn't know there was even enough voltage in a string of Christmas lights-

MELANIE

Oh, Honey.

GIL

It took him a few minutes to go and I stroked his feathers and I just hope- I just hope he knows I was so sorry.

(Gil begins to sob again. Melanie strokes his hair.)

MELANIE

Well parakeets don't have a lot of- They don't have great judgment about stuff. About what's dangerous.

GIL

And while Aimless was going the tree must have just continued to fry. When I finally unplugged it- Well. Oh Mel. It's all so unbearably sad.

MELANIE

Well, it's just a plant.

GIL

No, I mean- And it wasn't just a plant. It was our Christmas tree.

MELANIE

Yeah, but still-

GIL

No, Mel, because your face lit up when I brought it home and you said it was the perfect Christmas tree. You said because it was the perfect size for a small apartment and the peppers were like ornaments and it could be our Christmas tree every year, you said, because it was a hardy perennial.

MELANIE

But, Honey, then we broke up.

GIL

We separated.

MELANIE

We- You shouldn't be sitting here with dead things strewn about and you in that disastrous kimono. It would depress anyone. When I go, I'll take them out to the dumpster.

GIL

No! That's- No!

MELANIE

Fine. Okay. Not Aimless, but the tree at least, and definitely the kimono.

GIL

No.

MELANIE

Well it's my kimono.

GIL

You gave this to me.

MELANIE

I didn't. I left it on the bathroom hook.

GIL

It still smells like you on the collar.

MELANIE

Oh, no. That's it. Take it off.

(She starts pulling on it.)

GIL

You'll rip it, Melanie, please. It's fragile.

MELANIE

Take it off! It doesn't fit you.

GIL

I don't mind.

(He grabs her hands and pulls her into an embrace. She allows herself to be held for a moment.)

MELANIE

I can't stand you wearing it. You're too big for it.

(She pulls away.)

GIL

You can have it if you don't throw it away.

(He removes the kimono and hands it to her.)

Here. Why don't you put it on?

MELANIE

Why?

GIL

Just to see. No reason.

(She hesitates and then begins putting it on.)

MELANIE

The seams are all loose.

GIL

You look pretty in it.

(A moment while they take each other in.)

Mel, do you think you can revive the bush?

MELANIE

No Gil, it's dead.

GIL

Vitamins, or- You're good with plants.

MELANIE

It's dead. And life will go on without it.

GIL

No.

MELANIE

Yes, Gil. Yes.

GIL

But-

MELANIE

(Losing patience)

You killed it with your kindness.

You probably watered it so much it became a super-electrical conductor. And you can't let a parakeet just fly around thinking he's the king of everything. Anything could happen. He could fly into the toilet and drown while you're in the kitchen microwaving popcorn. You have to exercise restraint, you know, when things are so dependent. Fragile. So much kindness and it's like you're giving them rope to-

(A beat. Mel stares at Gil, a horrible realization dawning.)

Oh my God. Oh my God. Just like I did to you. Just exactly like I did to you. And- And still, I just desperately want to make you soup and give you a bath and-

GIL

Yes. That's- Would you do that?

MELANIE

No. That's how I killed you. The more soup I fed you, the smaller you got and then you didn't work and then you didn't have any friends and now you fit in my clothes.

GIL

But, Mel. You're not kind.

MELANIE

Excuse me?

GIL

Well, you're a lot of wonderful things, and you take care of things, me, but you're not really kind.

MELANIE

But what about all that soup? I was good to you in a thousand different ways.

GIL

Well, why are you getting upset? I'm trying to say it's not your fault I'm.. this way. I mean because you were saying how you don't want to be kind.

MELANIE

Well, but I thought I was. In spite of myself.

GIL

No. You don't have to worry.

MELANIE

Oh. What a relief.

(A beat)

What are you going to do about Aimless?

GIL

He should have a proper burial, but I mean, there isn't any actual earth for miles around - even the vacant lots are paved.

(Melanie takes the chili plant to the fire escape window.)

MELANIE

Do you still have the Hibachi? We'll make a funeral pyre out of the dried bush and cremate him.

(She tears the bush out by the roots and stuffs it into the b-b-q and then comes back for the box.)

GIL

Yeah. Okay. He would have liked that.

(She places Aimless' coffin atop the twigs.)

MELANIE

Matches?

GIL

There should be a prayer or something.

MELANIE

Right. Sorry. Go ahead.

GIL

Dear God, we commend Aimless into your care. He was a good and loving pet who-

(He is sobbing again. Melanie takes the matches and lights the fire as she continues the prayer.)

MELANIE

Who always had lots of tickly bird kisses for everyone and made us laugh a lot with his silly tricks.

(She blinks. Smoke is getting into her eyes.)

He was our buddy-keet. Amen.

GIL

Amen.

MELANIE

Oh. Ow. My eyes, Gil. The smoke, it's-

(She starts pawing blindly, trying to close the window.)

Oooow! It burns. The peppers. The smoke is in my eyes!!

(Together they manage to get the window closed. Gil is blinking now too.)

GIL

Cry! Blink and cry. Don't rub! Rubbing makes it worse. Oh my God, it hurts like hell.

MELANIE

Oh, it kills! I have to rub!

GIL

No! I'm telling you- Hands off.

(He holds her hands.)

Just cry. Come on. Let me see you blink. You've got to-

(Melanie begins to really cry in earnest.)

MELANIE

I'm sorry if I wasn't kind. I tried to be. I didn't mean to- I thought I was kind.

GIL

Why are you-

MELANIE

But you never said a thing. And you were always very kind. How could I think I was the one-

GIL

Look, it's just who we are, you know? And it's fine. It's like, you know, you're the needle and then I'm the thread and that works out fine. You don't have to be both.

MELANIE

Huh?

GIL

Just cry, will you just do that? Okay?

(She does. He holds her.)

There, that's perfect. Good girl.

MELANIE

My eyes are better.

Gil

I know. Mine too.