

Yoke

Emily Page

“Dead cat,” Dr. Moores announced as she waltzed through the swinging doors with a lump of fur in her arms. Her inch long gray hair had started to grow back after four years of chemo. She was stubborn but that was probably why I liked her. She was always trying to lift things or work extra hours when clearly she struggled holding a Chihuahua for more than two minutes.

Dr. Moores said something about the cat not having a locator chip in it and, running my fingers through the Captain Crunch colored fur, I found there was no collar. I slowly studied the dead cat’s mink-like body. The right side of his face had been dragged up three inches and his right eye was popped and oozing. It reminded me of an egg yolk sliding over the lip of a white shell and down into a frying pan. The poor sucker. I was amazed that the teeth had not shattered. “Baseball bat or car?” I asked.

“Car. The lady up front saw it on the side of the road and brought it in.” Dr. Moores said crooking her thumb over her shoulder. I listened as described how the lady’s three elementary school daughters had been crying up front looking at the uncovered face. I began snickering. Maybe at the thought of a mom pulling her car over to pick up a dead nameless cat, or that her daughters had to see the shattered hollow face. Maybe it was wondering how she decided to pick it up that got to me. Did she cuddle it up like a newborn in her arms? Or did she grab it by the tail and let its stiff paws wave to the ground?

When I looked over at Katie I could see that the scrambled face was having the opposite effect on her. Her eyes had started to water. Dr. Moores looked from Katie’s face to mine, “Emily, can you take care of this.” I nodded. Katie said “thanks” as I grabbed the bag from her shaking hands and she swiftly left the room. Dr. Moores grabbed a yellow card denoting public burial, and a blue twisty tie. She placed them on the table as Georgia, the receptionist, asked if Dr. Moores could come up front.

I’d like to pretend that bagging dead animals doesn’t screw you up in the mind a little, but it does. It makes you numb to the feeling of others and it messes with your sense of smell. You lose your appetite because you can still smell them in your nail bed after scrubbing your hands for the fifty-sixth time and the memory never goes away. The memory of each one dying. I still remember a rat I killed. How it tried to fight. I will never know whether its pitchy scream was for the stinging of the metal needle or for the fatal liquid itself.

I unfolded the garbage bag and laid it on the table like a new bed sheet. I moved the soft toes into the mouth of the bag and watched as more pink bodily fluid spilled out, wetting his butterscotch tail and hind legs with a sappy coffee color. I tried not to think as I felt wet urine and blood on the cat’s tail end dribbling onto the table. When picking up the corpses their spines always feel like a live fish fighting for its freedom. After getting the front two legs into the bag it was only a matter of dealing with the head. Instead of pushing the furry crown in, I tugged at the garbage bag, shimmied it under the flapping tongue and face. After the head the body just sort of slides in. Sealing off the bag and tying the yellow card to the top, I picked up the plastic coffin and headed to the laundry room where the freezer stood.

As I walked by the noisy dogs, their howls died down. They knew. Sometimes I ask myself how I would feel if I was an animal and I smelled a dead creature go by me. But then, no one really knows how they’d feel. Opening up the freezer I placed the cat next to three identical bags. His paperwork would read “John Doe.”

Back in the treatment room I sprayed down the table with Nolvasan and bleach. My fingers grew dry. The multiple chemicals saturated my skin as I cleaned up the liquid with paper towels. I rubbed my index finger against my thumb trying to sand off the small beady parts that would not come off. It reminded me of getting super glue on my hands. The cool table felt good against my flaky fingertips, like a reassuring touch from a loved one.

