

Doggy Bag

Samantha joined her sorority sisters in the Memorial Union. Delta Delta somethin' somethin' hoodies and sweat pants created a frantic sea of grey and black—pink and blue letters floated atop like planks from a wrecked Greek ship swirling around in the wave like gesticulations of their masters. These little group therapy sessions met two to three times a week in the Union. Fat Burger burgers with no cheese, small fries, and a *diet* cola was dished out all around.

Despite the dissonant chatter surrounding her, Sam was checked out and looked mentally adrift in the wake of her morning classes. The conversation shifted suddenly and the squawking grew with such tension the chords from which it came could have been plucked like guitar strings. A cute little bombshell full of tenacity equipped with rhinoplasty and adorned with perfect bangs and chipped nail polish brought up a mysterious text one of the sisters had sent earlier that day. A blast of, “Oh my gods,” “Shut ups,” “Me too, holy shits,” and “Your Kiddings” filled the hall.

Sam, accustomed to her sisters' zeal for anything edgy and new, tuned them out. Scanning the airwaves she caught the news going over the day's top local stories. “A bizarre and gruesome discovery was made early this morning just outside of a local pawn shop when...” the anchor's voice snuck into Sam's uncommitted ears and the instant her brain processed the information she spit her diet cola all over the table and spewed forth a mighty, “Holy fuck.”

“What the shit Sam,” was the general consensus around the table.

No more than three hours earlier in her Rhetorical Studies class, Sam heard a version of that same story. The story I'm about to tell you now. She was in such

disbelief of the contents of the story being at all true that she actually bet on it. *I* can't say that I blame her, but I'll let you make that call for yourself.

This *bizarre* little story is about Elise, a young girl whose problems didn't start the morning she stuffed her dead childhood pet into an old duffle bag. Elise's ingredients to life were always less than bountiful. When her mother rode off with a guy half her age on the back of his old panhead she was wearing his leather jacket that stunk of menthols. Elise watched from her bedroom window, her eyes dry and focused on the sleeves of cheap tattoos that ran all the way down to the guy's hands. At that moment Elise started to realize just how shitty those life ingredients were.

Elise's pet and confidant, Roxy, was an above average mutt who carefully licked away Elise's tears the next morning. For months after she let Elise's father kick her in the ribs and put cigarette burns across her back. The old man died of an aneurism while fucking Elise's high school best friend. Elise found them both later that afternoon. Roxy's dog leash was still around her friend's neck, swaying gently side-to-side in a crimson bath—the curtain rod split in two on the floor, a terrible gash deep in the friend's skull.

It was then that Elise made up her mind that sticking around would not be without consequence. So, she decided to take her frustration and run with it. Her foster fam supported the investment, which kept her sane and scored her a partial scholarship to college. A night job at an off campus bookstore and letting Roxy be passed around the local retirement home for touch therapy sessions every Sunday carried the rest of the financial load.

After blowing out her knee sophomore year the sisters of Delta Delta whatever whatever, got under her and raise enough money for her to finish out the year, but not in the house—so a crappy off campus apartment was it.

On a Sunday night in mid-spring a breeze filled with the voices of rowdy townies and blowing horns crept through the open windows of that apartment. By then, Roxy was an old dog, but a good dog. She gave a disagreeable growl at the sounds. There was a sudden tug in her chest, and then some palpitations of her heart followed by labored breathing. Like many a doge before her it's likely Roxy knew what was happening. As accepting as a dog can be she pulled her favorite blanket from beside Elise's bed and took it into the Kitchen. There she gently gathered it up just the way she liked, laid down and died.

In the morning Elise found Roxy next to the stove. Calling the vet was her first instinct, but that costs money. At seven thirty in the morning it was unlikely any of her sisters were up.

Elise lived on the fifth floor of an old apartment building four miles and six light rail stops south of the river near campus. Roxy loved it down there. It used to be an easy jog and Elise had a romantic vision of Roxy resting beneath the bank under the freeway where they used to play fetch. There Elise would stack a few sticks and rocks as a marker, and on crap days go down and lay on a cool wet patch of clay beside her old friend. Here was the thing; Roxy was a good dog but a big dog making transportation a real issue. So, can you guess what Elise did? That's right, what she had to—dump out her spring softball duffle bag.

With Roxy packed up in the black bag getting her to the shore was feasible. It wasn't easy though. Forty pounds of dead weight if you can excuse the expression is not very cooperative when trying to get it into a duffle bag.

First, Elise tried to slide Roxy on top of the bag and lift the sides up around her. The problem was that Roxy's head and rear paws kept getting hung up on the narrow ends of the bag near the sling. Her head slumped out and bobbed like a limp arm hanging off the side of a bed. No amount of shimmies or twists worked.

Next, she draped the bag over Roxy, but quickly said, "fuck that" idea realizing that she would have to somehow flip the dog into it.

After a quick cry and a deep breath Elise laid the bag flat again and started by putting Roxy's hindquarters in—paws first. She worked her way to the head and gently tucked it down under the zipper and into the wider space within the bag. She ran her fingers under the back of Roxy until she had a grip on the zipper line and tugged up. Both sides of the bag slid around Roxy's body and the dog was in the bag. Elise considered putting the blanket in with Roxy, but draped it around her own neck instead. Gruesome, but what the hell was she going to do.

I kid you not. The damned elevator was out of service that day for repairs. The steep stairway leading down to the lobby was tricky to maneuver especially with her bum knee that began to throb by the time she got to the street and had her limping up to the kiosk to purchase a one-way pass on the 4B train north.

It was a bit of a wait before the train came hissing and grinding into the station. In that time Elise did what she could to occupy her mind. She overheard a couple of guys talking about some speakers for sale out of one of the guy's trunks. A mother tried

to calm her pissed off toddler by being pissed off in return and Elise was pretty sure she saw a kid from her Rhetorical Studies class taking a piss behind the kiosk.

The train doors opened and Elise lumbered onboard and bumped a youngish guy who was also getting on with her bag. She apologized.

“Sure,” he said. “You play softball sweetie?” He lifted his head when he spoke, looking down his nose at her, with his head cocked.

She knew the look. She also knew the type of guys who say “sweetie” to college girls and sport faded tattoos on their hands even better. She even recognized the tangy flavor of menthol on his breath.

“Not anymore.”

“Laundry day baby?” The guy nodded at the blanket around her neck and then feasted his eyes, unabashed, on Elise’s chest as she sat down.

“No.” She said. I dare not speculate why she said what she did next but it made all the difference. “Just some electronics.”

“That’s what’s up. You know...” The kid from Elise’s class interrupted the guy by backing into him while trying to sit down. “What the fuck yo. Get a grip on yo shit kid.”

Elise looked up at the two of them. The kid gave her a faint look of recognition. A slippery grin dashed across the guy’s face looking at Elise. He moved a couple seats down, close to the doors across from Elise.

On top of a jacked knee the sling on the bag had really worn into Elise’s shoulder. I can imagine she wasn’t entirely sure how she was going to, one, carry Roxy’s body bag

the quarter mile or so it was to their spot from the stop and, two, how the hell she was going to dig a hole—it's not like she brought a shovel.

Meanwhile the guy did a decent job of checking his phone and checking out Elise and her bag. Elise pretended not to notice. Three stops went by. This guy, he was a patient SOB. He watched Elise loosen her grip on the bag and let the sling slip through her fingers and slide to the floor. The sling coiled around the top like a snake. Two more stops passed then a third.

Between that stop and the next Elise put her head back and shut her eyes. The train stopped the doors opened and the guy made his move, waiting long enough to snag the bag and run off the train just as the doors began to close. Elise sat up and tried to pursue, but was stopped by the doors.

“Oh shit, did that dude just jack you or what?” The kid said.

The few other people on the train gave their attention to the two.

“What,” Elise said.

“I said...”

“Ya, I hear you.”

“That sucks man. Was there a lot in there?” The kid slowly sat up.

“No, it wasn't even electronics.” Elise sat back down and wrapped Roxy's blanket around her. “See this.”

“Ya, it's a blanket.”

The other people, seeing no dramatic climax in the near future, returned to whatever it was they were doing.

“It belonged to my dog. She died last night. That's what was in the bag.”

The kid looked at Elise like she'd just eaten a raw baby.

“Fucked up huh. You’re in my Rhet class right.” Elise looked directly at the kid and drew a long breath.

“Ya, that’s where I’m... You mean you had a dead dog in that bag.”

Elise nodded.

“Goddamn. That is fucked up. I’m not like judging you or nothin’ but.”

“It’s alright kid. My life’s ingredients have always been less than bountiful. This was to be expected. Sometimes when things come to a head you have to use it or it’ll kill you.”

The kid looked down at the floor with an expression as blank as white paper.

“Sorry about your dog. Like, how did it even happen.”

Elise’s eyes widened. “Well it didn’t start with me stuffing her in that bag I can tell you that.”

“Ya?” The kid smiled, more engaged than Elise had ever seen him in their class. He sat up straight and leaned in towards her.

The train made its next stop. By the time the kid’s stop arrived he had a whopper to tell. “You gettin’ off?” He asked.

“No, you go ahead.” Elise slouched in her seat and pulled out her phone. “Good luck kid.”

“Ya, you to.” In a flurry of grey and red cars the train was gone.

With little time to spare the kid took his seat in the nine twenty Rhetorical Studies class next to Sam, who looked at the disheveled boy with mild disgust and concern. It was current event Monday.

“What time is it?” The kid asked.

“I don’t know I forgot my phone. I’m afraid to ask Cody. Did you find a current event?” Sam asked.

“Fuckin’ aye right. You’re in that sorority Delta what’s its nuts right?”

“What?”

“You know the other one of you that is in this class that sits in front of us.”

“Elise, ya why?”

“You’re not going to believe the shit I just witnessed.”