

Mice Droppings

When I was in elementary school, no more than eight years old, I already had a strange sense of mortality, and as a result, I had a relentless fear of getting sick. All I could think about while my dad scooped the dead mouse up into a plastic Walmart bag for disposal was how he could contract some sort of disease carried by mice, especially dead mice, and then the disease would spread rampant through our entire house, and we would all end up in the hospital attached to strange machines that beeped and displayed graphs the average child like myself could not read. The doctor would list off diagnoses that sound like a foreign language, and I would wish I was back home in the sun with my sister.

My sister and I found the mouse while we were playing outside in the backyard, and at first, I didn't know what it was. Upon first glance, I didn't even notice it as a mouse at all. It was reduced to a small, matted lump of browns and grays flattened against the gravel. My dad theorized that a neighborhood cat or some other powerful animal had probably found it and killed it. We had a cat of our own, a big orange tabby that weighed 15 pounds named Pumpkin, but he was an indoor cat. Sometimes, when the back screen door was open, he would stick his head out and dare to creep along the house with his body against the chipping stucco wall. However, the slightest noise would scare him, and he would go running back inside. This mouse was obviously killed but wasn't killed by Pumpkin.

And this was only the first spotting. Within the next couple of months, we found a few more dead mice. They each looked more like a hairball thrown up by a cat than a separate entity that had once had a life of its own. Some were missing limbs, and I could never make out a face. I could impose faces on plants and inanimate objects like cars, but I was incapable of imagining a face on the lump in front of me. No anthropomorphism of any kind ever came. I liked to think I

could not force my imagination to carry out my wishes because I never saw any live mice with happy faces running around. I never saw any mice droppings in the yard either, just dead mice that looked like they had been taken from their faraway homes and dropped in our yard as a cruel joke. Maybe I couldn't imagine the mouse with a face because it would be like imagining something dead as living.

Yet, despite the murders, I kept playing in the backyard on the rusted swing set that threatened to tip over if I was not careful and the pristine playhouse my Papa built when I was three. However, I would always watch my steps and scan the gravel for any camouflaged corpses. When I wasn't thinking about accidentally stepping on a matted mouse body with my bare feet and contracting a disease, I thought about why the killer just left the body behind. Wouldn't the cat or whatever creature who committed the act want to eat its kill? Wasn't it killing for food to sustain itself? Was it killing merely to revel in its power?

Then images of people at Tingley Beach Park, a half-hour away from our Albuquerque home, catching fish and throwing them back into the water floated through my mind. I thought of the stag antlers in my grandparents' garage, hanging next to the door with a hat draped over the beautiful white bones. I recalled how I once spent an entire afternoon stomping on ants coming out of an anthill, and how I did this for fun. It did not seem fun anymore. It just seemed cruel.

The thought of being the dead mouse almost seemed better than the thought of being whatever had killed the mouse and left it behind to rot in the late summer heat. Once I could picture myself as the dead mouse, I saw myself in the dead everything—the fish, the stag, the ants. However, I could also see myself in whatever or whoever had killed the mouse, the fish, the stag, the ants. All this time, I was worried about getting physically sick, but I failed to realize that

alongside the compassion rooted in my bones, there was also a sort of power sickness within my blood that made me capable of reveling in the destruction of others.