

Meat by Elizabeth Silverman

The inside of the lab coat was covered in a thin layer of sweat, cold against her skin. The night had been long, but the shift was almost over. The temptation of a fast food dinner; hamburgers and French fries dripping oily grease and guilt all over her scrubs was an oasis in her desert filled with needles, charts and blood.

Her name was called, and it echoed in the halls filled with frantic bodies and the overwhelming smell of ammonia. Her name sounded hollow and cold, weighted with static and urgency. Souls crowded the hallways; people on stretchers sobbing and grasping at parts of them that were in pain. Some tried to wave at anyone in a lab coat, asking about what was wrong, trying to understand why they were broken, but the doctor was tired and sore and she was needed. She passed by the waiting room, crowded and alive. A man was sitting in a chair licking Vicks Vapor Rub off of his fingers like frosting; the container neatly set on his lap. A young woman a few seats down was looking at the floor, trying to cover the welt on her face, protruding and purple, with her hand.

When she walked in, the woman on the metal table was wailing, her hands protecting her pregnant belly. Tiny sores like bleeding freckles tattooed every inch of her body. People gathered around her,

trying to hide their curiosity, masking it with professionalism and curtness.

“Where are your good veins?” the nurse next to her asked, “Where are your good veins?” Her embarrassment was apparent despite her writhing body and contorted face.

“Here,” she murmured, pointing to her left hand. “Between my thumb and pointer finger. That’s normally a good one.”

The needle penetrated through, sucking in the blood slowly, the red steadily filling before sputtering and stopping, only filling it halfway.

“Where else?” the nurse asked, frustrated, squeezing parts of her flesh between fingers frantically, her skin flushed red.

The lab coat was sticking to the doctor now, and she was growing more uncomfortable. The patient’s charts were in front of her. She tried to ignore her name, but her date of birth was haunting. They were the same age; they were born in the same month. They were both Pisces born in the year of the Ram. They both had full, red lips that had taunted men.

“How long have you been pregnant?”

“I’m in my seventh month,” the woman replied. She grasped her belly and a string of curses, constant and ritualistic, flew out of her mouth.

The Doctor gazed at the woman in front of her, body ready to burst, eyes glazed, veins used up and dying. She touched the woman's abdomen, tried to feel the body of the child growing inside of it, tried to ignore the way the woman felt against her. She asked what drugs she used. Ashamed, she listed them off, one by one; between each she would murmur an excuse, an explanation.

“I tried to stop, but it's ... it's hard. You wouldn't understand.”

She stopped talking on the metal table, the nurse still trying to find a good vein, poking and prodding, drops of blood like red crystals dripped on the floor.

For a moment, the doctor paused, taking no action. She glanced at her reflection in the metal table and sighed, her name was sewn in black thread on her lab coat's pocket in cursive, a proud emblem of who she was. The reflection was strange, a stretched silver likeness that suggested she was a machine, a robot.

The doctor explained what would have to happen tonight. The woman's face broke into a sudden cry. An inhuman sound exploded from her mouth, loud and mournful. The nurses around her comforted as the doctor spoke about the procedure, ignoring the wailing, screaming mother in front of her.

During an explanation about how they would be extracting the lifeless body, thoughts of a fast food paradise overwhelmed her, a magnificent feast. She spoke about how the fetus' head would be reduced in order to be taken out, and between sentences she shoved in an image of a hamburger, oily and smothered in cheese and bacon, and she began to salivate.

“We'll have someone come in and talk to you afterward to see if you'll need any counseling,” she finished with a solemn smile. She only had an hour left at the hospital, and soon she would be driving to her heaven. A meal awaited her, wrapped in thin, precious paper. It was sustenance for the next few hours, days, months, years.

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