

The Terrier with Attitude

A COLD WET NOSE woke me the day after my procedure. As I groggily opened my eyes, I saw a scurry of a dog shadow, like a slick black sea lion, popping up from an ocean of blankets. One by one, Smudge brought me a parade of toys, her generous offering of alms. Once she surmised I was not interested, she grabbed her favorites, gripping them between her jaws and dropping them delicately on my head: a fuzzy snowman, a Tyrannosaurus head, a green caterpillar and an octopus's left tentacle.

I tried to laugh at the array of misfit toys, but that hurt my abdomen, so instead, I just held Smudge close, rubbing her belly. It was the same belly I'd rubbed for twelve years. I could not imagine that one day I'd be forced to find joy without her. Would that even

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be possible? “Smudge, if anything ever happens to you, I’m locking myself in a closet for a week.” She blinked and wriggled her nose into the crook of my elbow.

Her idea of herself was inflated even before I bolstered it. Weighing only twenty pounds, she confidently pranced up to large dogs, even ones with battle scars and tattered ears. With her tail held high, she growled as she leaped from side to side, attempting to challenge them to a race. Smudge was an adventurer, preferring a mountain hike in the snow over a sniff-trip around the block. She feared nothing and confronted everything.

I picked Smudge from a handful of practice surgery dogs. It was the autumn of 1992, in Pullman, Washington, and I was in my third year of veterinary school. I sat just outside junior surgery studying the numerous types of suture knots. “Don’t open that cage!” exclaimed the surgery technician. But before she could finish her sentence, I had already opened it and a black streak shot out from the chain-link enclosure. “She’s liable to squirt everywhere!” the tech warned. We both chased after the small bolt of lightning throughout the hallways of junior surgery. The technician had been frustrated with the little dog and I could see why. Bolstered by fear and speed, the terrier escaped us at every turn.

As if she were the star in a freak show, the pint-sized black terrier screamed and bolted towards me. She suddenly stopped with a crazy glare, crouched low to the ground and slowly crawled