

ONLINE
EXCLUSIVE!

WELTER

Bird
Marathe

“A BABOON IN
THE CATTERY”

Fiction

a baboon
in the
cattery



Bird Marathe

It's my job that the cats don't die. There are ways for the cats to die that include: a cat in a cage on the left sneezes, and the spray hits three cats in the cages on the right, and those three cats are sick now. The three cats in cages on the right sneeze and the spray hits nine cats in cages on the left. The situation becomes less tenable in this way. But it is only a URI, and they survive. Every cat gets a dropper of Clavamox in the morning. When I give a cat Clavamox it tries to spit it out but if I am careful then it cannot. The cattery is hot. It is better to clean droplets of mucus before they dry.

The cattery is a good place for a person like me. Some of the cats on the left are named Sing-Sing and Papaya and Enkidu. If I scratch Enkidu at the base of her tail she nibbles at my other hand uncontrollably. She nibbles at the air if I do not offer my other hand, but usually I offer it. I name these cats.

I know every cat. There is one cat I do not know. The cat is very fluffy and white. I cannot see its face. I feed it and water it the same as every other cat. It may be that this is not good enough. Every cat needs different attention. I don't like this situation. One thing I know is that this cat does not wish to be petted. I have to build trust. It is better to move slowly sometimes. I do not give this cat a name.

There are ways for a cat to die that include: the cage. This is the way things are inside of a cage: the cage is all metal. I put newspaper on the bottom. This way the cat does not get too hot or cold. There is a litterbox and bed and water bowl and dry food dish. There is a shelf that the cat can climb on when I am cleaning. The cage is made such that there is a little gap between the shelf and the back.

I am in front of Phoenix's cage. Phoenix is not on the bottom, or on the shelf. Phoenix's neck is stuck in the gap between the shelf and the back. Her head is above the shelf and her body is dangling below. Phoenix likes the spaces between things.

She is breathing. Phoenix is looking at me. I put my hand beneath her body. She is not dangling now.

Can I push her head down through the gap? She looks at me like I'm hurting her. I can't do it.

Can I push her body up through the gap? She makes a noise.

Can I pull at the shelf? Can I pull the shelf out of the cage? Can I bend the shelf so Phoenix can drop down? If I bend the shelf might that pinch her neck? I need tools I can't reach. I need a wrench for the bolts. Phoenix looks at me. She is a calico. Only females are calicos because of the X chromosomes. I am still holding her but if I want to find a solution I will need to let her go. I need to feed the other cats. I need to give afternoon Amoxicillin to the other cats. Not feeding the cats or giving them Amoxicillin is a way for cats to die. I am still holding Phoenix. This isn't fair.

I let her go and come away from her.

I get the wrench. My back is turned to her and she isn't making noises. I come back. She is still alive. I can undo bolts with one hand and hold her with the other. This takes time. Other cats are making noise from hunger. I remove the shelf and set Phoenix on the bottom of the cage. She stretches wide and curls up small again. I shut the cage door.

There are ways for a cat to die that include: a cat is dead and bloody in his cage. In the time I spent with Phoenix this is what has happened to Sing-Sing. I do not know the reason for this. Cleaning this up is one way of being careful. I pick up Sing-Sing's body.

At night I close the window and open the cages of all the cats who are not sick. The night is a good time for this. The night is cool. If Tiny starts a fight, I put Tiny back into his cage. Tiny should be a gentle giant.

Be a gentle giant.

I sit on the floor. I lean against the cages on the left because the cats aren't inside them. I do not obstruct any cat's view. Everyone can see.

I could remove the shelf from each cage while the cats are out. This could be a way of being careful, so that what happened to Phoenix cannot happen again. On the other hand, the cats like the shelves. They need shelves to get away from the bottom. I cannot remove them.

Enkidu is over my foot. The fluffy white cat is still in a cage. It's on the right. It's in a different cage than before. Because of the night it is a blue cattery now.

There are ways for a cat to die that include: during the day I let Little Grey play outside the cages. The other cats are not jealous because they have their own concerns. Little Grey lurks under the cages instead of between them. The floor is a hard material. I look under the cages to make sure Little Grey is still there. It is hot so the window is open a crack. It is bad for the cats to be too hot. Imagine if a pigeon could come through the window. In this case the cats would all move. Nothing will come in. Cats pant instead of sweating.

It is lunchtime so I put the wet cat food in little paper trays, one tray for each cat. It is hot so some of the cats wait to eat. Little Grey is on top of the cages now. Little Grey has the worst name of any cat. A name is not a cat's own fault.

It is so hot. I get sweaty and this makes me rash. There is the heat from all the cats. It is a good idea for the window to be open because the cats are panting. The water bowls are always full because the cats should be as comfortable as I can make them. There is a sink inside the room with things beneath. Clavamox, Amoxicillin, Nutrical, Betadine, gloves, litter, buckets, lavender Fabuloso, Scoop, newspaper, toys, food, nail cutters. Everything I need for the cats is inside. This way I do not ever have to come away from them.

Little Grey is looking out the window now. The window is over the cages on the right.

Little Grey, too close.

I climb on top of the cages. They are in units of four, each unit a square. Two on top of two.

Little Grey, time for your cage.

My foot kicks a cage door. I don't mean to cause Valentine to hiss. Valentine hisses easily. I block her view out of her cage. I don't mean to do this.

Little Grey looks out the window. Little Grey goes out the window.

This is a way that a cat dies.

Little Grey.

The fluffy white cat is red in places. It is in its cage. It's bad to have a cat with no name. It's not bad. It's much better to be patient than to rush things. The cat is so fluffy that I cannot tell if it is on its belly or back or side. When I change this cat's food none of it is eaten. I think that sometimes I fall asleep. I try not to fall asleep often. I am tending to the cats.

There are ways for a cat to die that include: the cat gets something worse than a URI. The cat gets distemper. Ozymandias does not like to be petted but I pet her now. She lies on her side. She has a rasp and looks at me. It is my intention for her to be encouraged when I pet her. It is not my intention that petting makes an annoyance for her while she is sick. The cattery is a good place for a person like me who sometimes has trouble telling the difference between feelings. I have plastic gloves on while I pet Ozymandias. While I pet Sif I am wearing a different pair of gloves. While I pet Quark I am wearing a different pair of gloves. Sif and Quark are vaccinated but I cannot be too cautious.

Cats are not noisy but now there are fewer cat sounds than usual.

Imagine if I were to leave the cattery. It would be a good idea to bleach my clothes so that they could not infect the outside. Even so, it is impossible to see distemper. If I left, there is no way to tell where the virus would go.

At night the fluffy white cat is in Yangtze's cage. Yangtze and the white cat are both red in places.

Why are you in there? How are you in there?

The white cat has arms and reaches outside of the cage with hands. The hands undo the latch on the cage so it is open now. The white cat climbs to a different cage that is empty and opens the latch and climbs inside.

A white baboon.

I come to Yangtze's cage. A gash on the neck. Some of the neck is eaten. The way that Yangtze is dead is: the baboon. I should clean this but I don't want to clean this now.

I come to the cage that the baboon is taking up. The baboon scratches its snout with claws.

Baboon, this isn't good. Baboon, I think I am too patient now.

I open the cage. I think the baboon is stronger than me. Where can a baboon go?

The baboon has a piece of Yangtze in its teeth.

I grab the baboon by the snout with one hand and put it under my arm. If it fought me there would be nothing I could do. It doesn't fight. It has a baboon smell. I walk back and forth by the cages with the baboon. Maybe the baboon doesn't fight because we are both primates. Maybe the baboon doesn't fight because if it did, what would be left for it? Both we primates go back and forth together. Is a cattery a good

place for primates?

I climb up the cages. I jump so that I do not kick Valentine's cage. I kick Bonsai's cage. This is not my intention. I am by the window with the baboon. If the baboon starts to fight I cannot hold on. The baboon does not fight. Andromeda is crying and hungry in her cage.

Baboon, out the window is a place for you. What do you think? Your name can be Eating. Your name can be Falling.

I am looking out the window. It is so far that nothing could come back. A place for dead cats. A place for a baboon.

Falling sneezes. It has a URI. It needs Clavamox.

I climb back down from the cages with Falling. I take the little white bottle of Clavamox with the dropper.

Open up.

Falling spits all the Clavamox out. This baboon is very good at spitting. Drops of white get on me. The only way is to put the Clavamox in the baboon's food. The baboon eats cats.

Falling, you can't eat them.

There are three kinds of wet cat food. Turkey Gravy. Chicken Delicious. Delicious Feast. With one hand I open a can of each with the can opener. It is hard.

Will you eat this one, Falling? Will you eat this?

The baboon does not eat. The baboon might not be hungry. I will clean a cat's cage, and then I will try to feed Falling again, and then clean and then try to feed again. I will keep the baboon under my arm. There is no place else for it to go.

Bird Marathe's bio forthcoming