Biology

By Audrey Roy

Was stapling together the final parts of our lab report when Mel, being the first of our lab team to catch Mr. Taylor's searching gaze, was called over to choose a crayfish. Our instructions had been straightforward, simple: finish your written labs, then play with the arthropod for a period. Mel returned with a rather large specimen and, after placing it on the table, joined me as she perched herself on the lab stool. We watched it in silence for a few minutes.

"I just love watching it," I said affectionately. "It's so tiny, yet it all works so perfectly."

I knew I was being vague, but I could not express accurately the fascination I felt. I glanced at Mel, expecting her to have a puzzled expression, but she was nodding silently.

We sat watching the crayfish for about twenty minutes. We didn't touch it much, save for the occasional gentle push to return the creeping crayfish to the center of the lab table, or when we grasped its carapace to determine its sex and examine its ventral appendages.

We especially enjoyed watching her walk, and so, when she'd been sitting motionless in the center of the table for a few minutes, I began inching a pen toward her, with the intention of prodding her into movement. She saw the hazy outline of my pen through her thousands of eyes and began backing up. Though her gaze was expressionless, Mel and I both knew she was scared. One of us, I'm not sure who, said as much, but I didn't appreciate the significance of her fear until I accomplished my mission, and she scurried toward Mel.

Something in her movements made me look at what we were doing objectively: we, two 5'5", 125-pound bags of mostly water, were toying with a five-inch, maybe half-pound arthropod. I thought of the movie *Planet of the Apes*, and was horrified at myself. But the thought passed, as most do, and the next distinct, chronological memory I have is of Jamie and Aimee (lab partners across from us) saying how they remember Mr. Powell's class feeding something to their crayfish, and wasn't the food another crayfish, and wouldn't it be cool if a dead one could be found and then fed to a live crayfish, just so they could see how the mandibles worked?

Mel and I met each other's eyes, grimaced, and went back to observing our crayfish. Before we consciously realized time had passed, however, there was a growing knot of curious scientists behind us, and Jamie could be heard asking someone how he should do this and did anyone know where he could find a scalpel.

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In the clutches of a force we could not yet identify, Mel and I rose and joined the crowd. I eagerly watched their petty bickering about how to dissect it and found myself rejoicing when Mary ended the discussion with a definitive twist of her wrist; she broke its head clean off. The mob roared.

Suddenly, it seemed everything happened at once. We all laughed viciously when they tried to feed a live crayfish the liver of the one that had been murdered.

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"My God, it's just like *Lord of the Flies*. I can't believe we just did that," I murmured.

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We urged Jamie to put both in a tank; maybe it will eat in water, the circle muttered. Then, when Jamie was dropping them into the water, just as suddenly, I was on the outside looking in and all I saw was a group of loud, hungry savages torturing another of God's creatures. Mortified, I looked at Mel. She turned, and when our eyes met, I knew we were of the same mind. Dazed, we groped our way to our stools and sat. We silently stared at the crayfish on our table. Helpless, defenseless, and terrified, she stared back at us.

I didn't have to ask Mel what she was thinking. The goading crowd, the severed head—for one second, I knew what was running through Mel's mind, and her soul. But I had to say it, to be sure.

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We had just finished covering *Lord of the Flies* in English class. Our teacher had explained to us how the story could be interpreted as an example of what could happen in a lawless society. The boys, at first, follow the rules of the civilization they have left, but soon allow their animal instincts to take over, as exemplified by the behavior of Jack and his band. On the horrible night Piggy was murdered, the boys had been dancing wildly around a roaring fire, more animal than man. They brutally kill Piggy, yet, after, by their actions, most express bewilderment as to how they could have done such a thing.

Mel and I shared these thoughts, then attempted to express a few more unexplainable feelings, but how can you explain that biology class will never be the same? How I will never be able to dissect an animal with an easy mind. I think Mel and I lost a little bit of innocence that day. We both felt the insatiable urge to write down our feelings, to try to explain to ourselves how a book could be so right, how we couldn't remember exactly what happened, how we were pulled in not even realizing there was anything to be pulled in to, and how we could easily have never come to see the horror from outside. It terrified me and made my soul tremble. Yet it was all there in black and white. Crayfish, pig, man—how different are they? I feel that they are not different enough for me to be able to ignore the parallels.

I know that I will have to dissect a frog before I leave this biology course and, oddly enough, I do still want to take other bio courses. Now I have one more reason for wanting to study animals: I know how easy it is to succumb to our primal instincts and to abandon the reason we are so proud of and become what we call them—animals.