

Ken Rosser – 2nd prize

Why do I Endure

Sometimes I like to stand dressed in darkness near the road, at the edge of the wood. Not too close, so I won't be seen, but not so far that I cannot see and hear the wildlife. The deer, the occasional bear, raccoons, rabbits, and skunks. I also like to watch the cars and trucks hurtle by in the night. Who and what do they carry? Where are their families? Are they lonely and hungry like me?

Look, there's a nice red car with a nuclear human family. They look perfect. I could have them, along with a roasted chicken, or haunch of venison, maybe a little wine, a bit of salad, perhaps some cheesecake to finish it off. It would be a tremendous meal. I would invite them to share it with me, if they don't scream too much.

I don't think I look horrible, just startling, not at all what they would be expecting. Are minds opened by a moment of terror? Or do they fuse themselves even more closed? Only one way to tell.

I only want their company for a night, or if they like to they can stay longer. I am the only one left of my kind. I have hidden, keeping to the shadows for millennia.

I never expected so long a life, and for a while I enjoyed it, till my pack mates faded away, and left me alone. I chose a lower room for a crypt, and carefully arranged their bones out of sight of the sun. I go there sometimes, to talk to them, and sometimes they answer. I thought I was going mad, but their shades remain, trying to

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give me comfort, but that often makes me feel even more alone.

Perhaps I am insane, but I harm none, unless I am in the forest and hungry. Even then, I try to be quick and merciful, and still say the old prayer for the soul I have freed, so I can have meat. I can eat a limited amount of vegetables and fruit, but I have begun to hear them cry too, as I devour them.

Everywhere I go, I am reminded of something I have left undone, or did wrong. It does not matter to me, whether it is a memory from when I was a cub, I still feel pain and outrage at myself. Sometimes it took me years to realize I had done wrong. I know I did right and generous things, but the bad quickly crowds them out. I am old, and still rudderless. What makes me seem eternal? Only the stars should be eternal, not a miserable creature like myself. I know that even the galaxy has a finite life, but what if I do not die with it?

My emotions can get in such a tangle that I sometimes feel it physically. It catches in my throat, crushes my chest, makes me shake and my muscles lock in painful cramps.

I have tried to end my misery, but I heal too quickly. What was it that old book said? That which can eternal lie, and in strange eons, even Death may die? Does that even make sense? Where do all lives fit into that? Does that mean they can all come back from death once it no longer operates? Why does death ignore me? It makes no

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sense since I have nothing great to contribute. All I do is read, collect more books, and look after this fortress that was old, when I was young.

I must sleep, but I cannot escape dreams. I have hung up dream catchers; yes, I was taught about them. They worked at first, but now I awake to find them shredded, or burnt, sometimes with things stuck in them; gifts that assure me the nightmares are real, and in some perverse fashion, they like me. There is a cure for life, but apparently, not for mine.