

I'm on my third steak feeling hollow. The white dinner plate is a reservoir of watery blood. Scrambled eggs, fried potatoes, and hamburger stroganoff soak in the liquid. Everything is soggy with it. The floor, heat lamps, the other people, all saturated by watered down blood. But with the itch advancing past the subcutaneous layer I barely notice. To avoid scratching my eyelids I concentrate on chewing. Focus on working marshy lumps down an irritated esophagus. During these times I sympathize with snakes about to shed their skin. Soft meat mocks my dull knife, grappling with it and winning.

I scratch the top of my head and come away with a tuft of my hazelnut hair. Long sleeved cotton hides the network of scars I have all over my upper body. Sweat pants do the same for my legs. With all the scars it's hard to shave my legs and they look rather odd if left uncovered. The last bites of my stroganoff go down largely untasted. I scrape the plate and lick the fork.

The frantic speed of my eating matched with the sheer amount of it has already become a whispered conversation amongst the staff. As the transformation begins so does the hunger. Animal protein is necessary. Otherwise I risk a substantial weakness, then capture, then dissection by curious scientists. If I was rich I could buy a support staff. Cops could be paid to stop certain investigations. They could be shown I only eat to survive. If I didn't transform I wouldn't need to eat whole families. But I do. So...I do.

It's a busy night for the small restaurant. The place sits on the edge of town feeding passing truckers and families sick of cooking. In terms of location it couldn't be better for getting constant business. One side spreads out into the industrial districts. This gives them a hearty lunch rush of shippers and receivers. Another side has a hill and half mile of forest which shields a good sized housing development. This gives a decent dinner crowd. And due to the industrial sector and it's placement on one of the roads leading out of town, truckers show up at all hours. There are about twenty tables in the place and all but a few are occupied. Early yet, sun on the decline. Dinner rush. Elderly folks sipping coffee, spooning mashed potatoes. Nuclear families corralling their children into high chairs. The hour of good tips has arrived and energized the two waitresses.


One table over, a young girl pokes at a half-eaten sirloin. The man who sits with her stabs and rakes through his meal periodically squealing blade on ceramic. Sandy blonde hair buzzed short fades into his stubble. A wide smile stretches his face despite the obvious anger his body projects. He is wearing a well-worn, brown leather jacket at the table. It makes me think of hot body temperatures, itching, all that will soon come to pass. For my sanity I must look away. Instinct insists that I mistrust this man.

"Finish yur fucking food," no tentacles, just bent teeth and juices. The young girl wipes her tears. My credit card returns declined, defeated. There's money enough in my checking account to cover the feast, but when the rent check clears there will be issues. Things my landlord will remember. Can't have that. I stand abruptly and turn to leave.

"I gotta get out, it's my time of the month," my feet are sore, filling up the end of my running shoes. None of the waitresses know what to do. Rick, the manager, doesn't answer his phone. They make no moves to stop me. My stomach and intestines attempt to switch places, diaphragm be damned. I make it to the glass double doors before they scream for me to stop. Two long haulers pull into the lot. A sudden jolt of pain makes me lean on the door frame. Everybody in the place is watching me, except the smiling man. They have my credit card they yell.

Closed for the night shipping depots pass by as the bone pain begins. Engine exhaust and road grime seeped into the street, and the buildings, and seems to coat all the landscaped bushes. Everything looks shaped from the same dirty clay. Abruptly the city ends and a wooded slope takes over. I climb it heading toward the shack I found a few days before. Halfway up the hill I look back and memorize the path back to the diner. I think about how I'll probably never get that credit card back. Have to call for a replacement and hear about the balance and lack of payments from somebody I can't track down. If that diner wants to ruin my credit the divorce beat them to it. That and the bankruptcy. And the leases I abandoned. Fortunately for me this is a small town and they will probably be dead by tomorrow. Tossed around in pieces. Eaten.

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