

## Urs

by Sue Hitchcock

I know every detail of this place. The lid over my head, the end which opens sometimes, something I dread. Gentle voices lure me to think some company will entertain me, but when I approach, I am grabbed, harnessed, dragged away, to be prodded, examined or worse. What I dread it that sharp prick which makes me dive into darkness, only to wake nauseous, wobbly, with odd pains, I never had before. If I were not confined, I would kill them, one by one. I still have my claws and teeth.

Mostly I slump in the corner where they can't reach me with their little arms. Under me is the place I tried to excavate when I first arrived. It is made of tree, and I could smell the life it used to have and I felt sorry. It had been part of a giant and was very strong. Still, when I feel sad, sometimes I give it a scratch to smell the wild again.

I can still remember when I wandered in the woods, sniffing the world about me. Time was marked by such variety, best was where another bear had rubbed its back on a tree. Sometimes it would be a stranger, but most were familiar, the father of my daughter, and my daughter too. Of course food didn't come in a bucket every day as it does now. I was always hungry, searching, but that was the whole point of life, wasn't it?

My earliest memory is of the den, the warm, milky smell of my mother and my brother's head next to mine as we suckled. He was always there, pushing me aside, if he could. He grew faster than me, but I knew I was strong, so I'd nip him if he got too rough. We emerged from the den, into cold air, full of scents, mint and nettles, frogs and squirrels. Mother was hungry and led us to some water, rushing over stones, noisy, splashing cold, frightening. Mother paddled in, watching through the surface. Suddenly she pounced. In her mouth a shiny red and silver creature struggled. She tore into it greedily, filling her empty stomach and when she let us suckle, her milk tasted of the creature. I long for some of that creature now and thinking of it, my mouth dribbles and drools.

Food arrives every day, but it has little savour. Maybe I am not hungry for it or for anything at all. Hunger drives. Mice sometimes visit. They know I am not hungry enough to catch them. At first they were cautious scavenging the scraps I had dropped. Now they run over my paws, tickling me. Even that tiny feeling is welcome.

The first days in the box I remembered everything, but same day followed same. Now only the smell of the trees is worth counting. Three times it has wakened me with a smell of fresh leaves. Then I know the flowers will soon scent the air and the hum of bees will excite me. I used to sniff out honey in their nests in tree holes. Oh, they would sting my nose, (excuse me if I sneeze), but the sweetness was worth it.

Three times the warm weather has passed and the smell of fungi in the wet earth is also delicious, but no honey or fungi ever scent my bowl.

So three years must have passed, long with no memories, and short if you are measuring life. The lifetime before surely was not mine, though it is vivid and clear. It makes me shiver when I allow myself to dream it or it comes to me uninvited. Was that me? Could I ever be that bear again? I no longer hope to escape. There's a great devil in the universe and it's called time.