

By the Fire

A Short Story by Lisa Hering

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Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

With Music by Peder B Helland of Soothing Relaxation

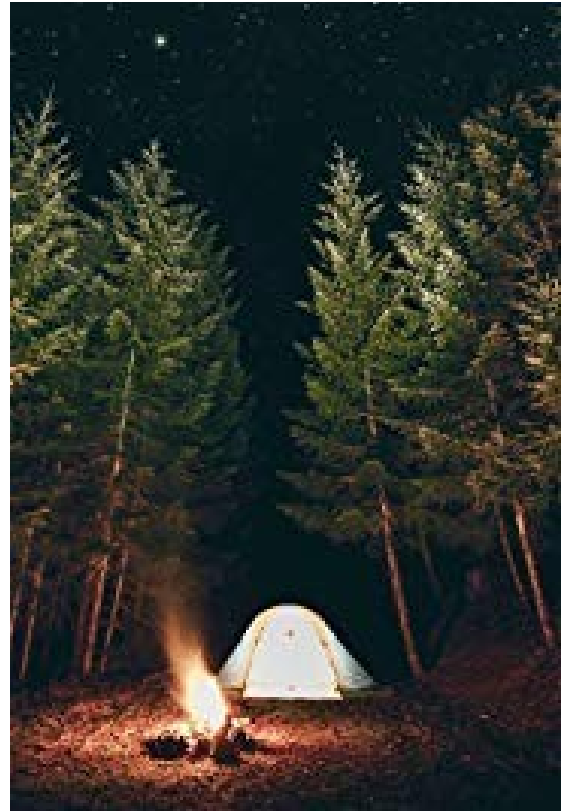
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMrtSHAAPhM>

"Morning Whisper", ★167

I'm far out in the woods, sitting restfully on the ground watching the energy of my campfire which burns brightly. It gives me the feeling of warmth and comfort. The stars span gorgeously across the night sky, and I contemplate them. The night owls hoot while the crickets chirp. There is water running in a nearby stream and the wind moves the branches ever so slightly. It's a pleasant night. The astronomical intrigues me, while earthly creatures keep me grounded. Their sounds remind me what world I belong to.

I'm just staring into the fire pensively as I sit in front of it with my dog, a Labrador Retriever, my hand rubbing her head. The fire crackles and the embers fly away. My eyes follow the trail they leave behind. They are surely not grounded on Earth. I wonder, how far do embers fly? Do they enjoy the journey blazing across the night sky like a rocket? Do they have an ember-life? Do they think their life is long? Does time spin slower for them than for us?

I hiked a long time today, as I have been for many days now. I am walking the Appalachian trail. And I'm doing it by myself, that is, me and my dog. She protects me. I'm her closest friend. She loves me. She'd do anything for me. That's true love. So eager to please. Why are we not all like that? It's a simple lesson. All we have to do is watch. But for this moment, I tell her, "Sleep, my child, for tomorrow is a long day."



And then come the last moments of the evening, civil twilight, then slowly nautical twilight, and finally, astronomical twilight, degree by degree as the dusk is swept under the horizon. Evening arrives and I sit still and simply watch it roll in, and it allows me to sit and admire it. We do not bother one another. We co-exist peacefully. We are separate within the same universe.

Out here by myself, I have plenty of time to think. That's what calms me. Alone time out here. Although I have 24 hours each day, I seem to use them up quickly in the city. Out here, in nature, I seem to use them much more slowly. At night, once my chores have been taken care of and dinner has been eaten, there is little else to do but be entertained by one's thoughts. And for me, thoughts happen in large quantities. They are a thing I can consider to belong solely to me. No one else can hear them. They are my stories, stories that wander the worlds, the stars, and the universe.

And I am transfixed on the fire. It has captivated my whole attention. The embers rise and I wish I could go with them, up high into the night breeze. And as I consider thoughtfully this wish, I melt into the flames. I become an ember. I travel with the heat. I burn, but it doesn't hurt. This is the life of an ember. My dog jerks awake and looks for me, but I am gone. She senses that I have gone into the fire. She watches the embers rise, and she stands and barks. I go higher and higher. She continues to bark as I see her from the treetops, quite small now, by the fire, all alone.

Her voice gets further and further away. She is but a spec now. She sees me no longer. I am still burning. I am a bright yellow red. My heat beats like a heart as it pounds forcefully, then rests, then pounds again. Life. We know so little of life, yet we claim to know so much. Who knows of the life of an ember? I'm sure there is no one else. And I'm still sailing, far above the trees.

The wind takes me, for it is my transportation. But I remain alive and warm throughout our journey. It takes me high above the clouds. It is delightful. How funny that an ember should have such a wonderful time. The clouds are as a mattress to me. I can jump on them and I spring back up as on a trampoline. I can dive through them and see them from either side. I can pluck them and stretch them, and when I let go, they snap back into place. I give them warmth and electrify them as I pass through, and they smile. They love the feel of electricity.

I feel myself changing as my source material burns up. Tiny pieces of ash fly away from me, many small, small pieces. Soon, I am nothing but energy. I am in the clouds and I am electrifying them. The energy builds and builds. My heat fills the clouds. There is energy and excitement everywhere. The cloud is almost to the point of bursting over with joy. It's crazy fast, the movement, as all parts are seeking a tunnel to reach back down to earth. And in an instant, the perfect path is found. The cloud opens up, and the ground's positive attraction sucks me down through a funnel in the sky. I light it up to a blazing temperature and I flash brightly and make a thunderous ear bursting noise. What an amazing circle of life for something that started out as such a small piece of energy.

But there are two eyes that are looking at this particular lightening bolt, the two eyes of my loyal friend who waits for me by the fire. And it takes me less than a fraction of a second to reach her. She is sitting up, watching. She knows somehow that it is me. She whines for me to come to her. Her tail wags. I slam down into the camp fire and rekindle its blaze. And as quickly as I became an ember, I am back by her side, as she barks and licks my face. She buries her head in my belly and lies back down. She is content.

And I am content to watch the fire and know that I know a little something about the life of an ember.

Thank you for listening.