

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Hathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss.*

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I asked my daughter Emma what I should write about this month. Without pause she said, “pets.” I started thinking about my story and what animals are in it. At first I thought there was only one - a weasel, but then I remembered a second - giant wolves. As I started to write this introduction I remembered dogs and cats, then birds and butterflies. So join me on an investigation of how animals add flavor to a human story.

Douglas G. Clarke

## Pets

In the preindustrial world of Hathrae - where life is still a struggle for most people to put food on the table - pets are mostly of the working variety.

While none of the characters in *Unremembered Loss* own a cat or a dog, in one scene Samuel does comment on the lack of them in town after two months of war. He notices that the cats are not prowling the alleys looking for rats, and that the dogs are not howling to each other.

While writing the story, the absences of dogs and cats seemed to add a bit of color to the story and just flowed out as I wrote about the Samuel looking down on the town of Maple Grove. It does pose the question though, “Where did all the dogs and cats go?” Did the cats run off because their owners stopped feeding them, or did they become someone’s dinner?

The thought of the family cat becoming a meal is a very strange thought in our western society, but for a town being starved it might be one of the signs of desperation. What would be the impact on the people of the town as the number of cats dwindled.

If one family ate their cat, and then noticed that their neighbors had eaten theirs as well, would it make the first ones feel worse because it

would remind them that they had done it first? Would it make the desperation even more real? What of the family that had not eaten their cat? Would they look down on their neighbors? Would they worry about their cat being taken by desperate neighbors? How would they feel when their cat finally disappeared?

The fate of the dogs might have been the same, or perhaps they were used to aid the soldiers during the first weeks of the war.

I don’t explicitly go into detail about how the loss of pets affect the townspeople, but I think the readers will fill in the sadness and loneliness that their absences causes as they read.

Beside the dogs and cats there is mention of horses. These would also be seen as workers - proving transportation and the means to plow the fields. One of the differences in Hathrae as compare to Earth, is that the enemy - the turpes - that are attacking Maple Grove don’t see the horses as something to try to capture.

Instead the turpes see horses as a potential food source and an advantage of the humans. So, when conflicts arise, the turpes kill the horses first, allowing some of the humans in the caravan to fight their way to Maple Grove, while none of the horses make it to town.

There is one other pet in my story that stands out - this is Jim, Samuel’s familiar. A familiar is an animal that has some special bond with a wizard. Samuel’s familiar is a weasel, who has lived with Samuel for twelve years. Samuel and Jim talk a lot, or at least Samuel does a lot of talking and Jim does a lot of listening. Besides being a companion, Jim does the occasional errand.



In the story, Jim also gives Samuel a way to look at his own old age. At twelve, Jim is very old for a weasel, just as Samuel is very old for a human. This gives Samuel someone to relate to when he thinks about moving someplace warmer where they can sit on the beach.

Jim also acts as a connection between Samuel and Annay. When Jim shows up, Annay knows that her Master has something important to share with her.

## Wild Animals

In the story *Unremembered Loss*, wild animals do not make very many appearances. They are talked about and in a story that Annay is remembering, she recounts traveling in the woods and makes the observation, "The good news was that most of the creatures that they would normally have to worry about on such a trek were either hibernating or held up someplace waiting out the winter."

For the people of Hathrae, and the town of Maple Grove, which is on the wild frontier, wild is often equated to dangerous.

Birds make several appearances in *Unremembered Loss*. In one scene they are a surrogate for an attacker. The birds are paired with butterflies. The butterflies are under the care of one character and the birds are used by another character to attack the thing under the first one's care, the butterflies, and by inference the first character. In this case the butterflies don't have any chance of surviving the attack and the scene shows how sometimes we are in situations where there is no way to win.

In a different take on that scene, later there is a butterfly and there is a bird, but this time there is a second bird - a hawk. This time, however, the butterfly represents the first character rather than something in his charge, and the bird represents the second character who is trying to kill the first. But in this scene the hawk is God, who protects the defenseless.

The other ways birds are used in the story is as a simile for the way a magic spell is cast, "The power erupted from her like a flock of birds taken to flight by a pack of dogs"

In one scene Annay recounts how Julie experienced God. She

says, "Julie experienced God in the woods, far away from the constructions of man and dwarf. Julie saw God's handiwork in the mountain peaks and in the rushing water. She saw the glory of God in the elk and the wolf."

Julie saw God's handiwork in the mountains and streams, but she saw his glory in the elk and wolf. It is in the nobility and power of these wild animals that she could glimpse the nobility and power of God. Unlike men and dwarves, the animals do not puff themselves up trying to be like God, they just reflect the nobility and power of the one who created them.

In several scenes deer are mentioned. In all of them they are or will be food. In one scene deer are used to show how fast foetur are, "Even now the foetur are running wild in the woods attacking farmhouses that are already destroyed and chasing after deer."

These wild animals are not companions or mirrors for the human characters, but rather symbols for different aspects of the human struggle.

The butterflies show the tenuous existence of man. Flying from flower to flower, unaware of the dangers around them, unable to control life and at the mercy of God's design.

The birds represent the unwillingness to get one's hands dirty - sent to kill in one's name without reveling one's identify.

The elk and deer represent strength and agility, while the wolf represents barely controlled power.

While animals may be good to show aspects of the human makeup, the characters in the story cannot interact with them as people, not, that is, until magic is added to the formula.

## Magical Animals

In *Unremembered Loss*, Annay relates a story of an encounter where they are attacked by a wild animal, or at least what they first think is a wild animal.

The creature was a Dierbeon, which is a humanoid with the head of a deer. The encounter quickly turns into a fight as Hector tries to kill the creature who is keeping them from the cave where they want to spend the night, and the dierbeon is trying to keep the invaders out.

The Dierbeon turn out to be just as scared as Annay and her friends. The use of this story device shows how quickly people are willing to assume something different is an enemy

In another scene Samuel is telling a story from his youth where he and his friend Red Beard went to the ocean side to look for treasure. The story is about Red Beard - his fears and hopes - but during the course of the story they meet a mermaid.

Like the story of the Dierbeon, the encounter with the mermaid points out how quickly people can jump to judgements about someone's character after just looking at them. It also shows how once you get to know someone your whole view of them can be turned around.

One of the things that is special about magical animals is that they can be smart, they can communicate. I can take a deer-man and make him totally different from a human, but at the same time give him human traits. It can show compassion or wit. By using magical animals and creatures, one aspect of the human condition can be exaggerated to make a point.

Animals are not just color, they can be an integral part of the exploration into the human condition.