

OWL DREAMS

by Janet Ruth

In the predawn glimmer
the screech-owl perches on her post,
old woman in a moth-eaten overcoat.
Soft bouncing hoots ruffle the feathers at her throat.

I slip into violet shadows,
a breeze lifts the hair from my forehead.
Spicy scent of wet sand sage
tiptoes softly across the back of my tongue—
morning-after-rain smells like chai tea tastes.
A thrasher croons from the rooftop—
Billie Holiday husking the blues
from the dark smoky depths of a club
somewhere in Harlem.

Early morning chill
traces cold steel down my spine, drags me back
to the owl's wild gaze.
The diminutive huntress reaches for me,
beak stained with mouse blood
rips into my soul—
owl and human exchange skins.

*I fly by instinct at midnight with terrible gaze,
seeking warm-blooded prey—
the plunge, the shriek, the crunch of tiny bones,
the sweet horror of my fierceness,
the not-so-gentle justice of clenched talons
soaked with blood.*

I plummet back into my body,
my human heart pounds.
As the sun stirs, throws off the blanket of night,
the owl's twin golden orbs flame for an instant,
an owlish cry claws at my throat,
as she unfurls the cloak of her wings and
disappears into my dreams.

In daylight and darkness—
I will remember her.
An iron taste rasps my tongue.

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