Monty Reid/THE DREAM OF THE SNOWY OWLS

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Slow wings. The arrival, late in October, of snow. It begins and you have never learned to expect it because nothing changes fast enough. Love, wisdom, weather. Owl on a pole.

From the overpass north to the beaverdam is eight miles of meander, deadfall. They got up, spread a hard white wax on their skis and broke trail up the creek. Moonlight quilted to the snow, shadow stitched from bare willow branches. Once they heard an owl and stopped. Twice they found the end of tracks. Shit, green bark in the scrub, rosehips with a faint red still in them like wineglasses in the morning, gnawed. The rabbit flushed, then wings.

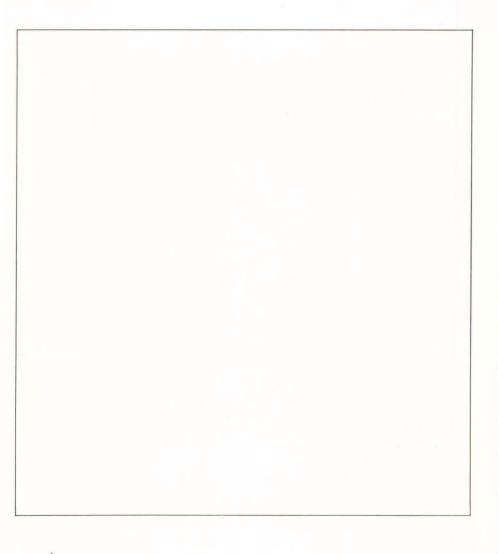
They remembered angels. How they fell into fresh snow backwards and tried to get up, to walk away in their own footprints; no unnecessary marks. But now in the creekbed sweat cools against their skin and they need motion to release them. Returning, snow filters through gaps in black poplar along the bank, the flakes weightless, as petals off the cherry tree in the garden in May, collapsing not in the late frost but in sunlight afterwards. Two miles out she broke a tip and had to walk the rest of the way.

He rarely dreams but dreams owls. Fixed eyes. Snow on the highway. They refuse to move, perched on shattered roadkill with intestines in their beaks, brown bands deep across breast and wing. Not the immaculate birds of midwinter but spring, the hollow bones brooding with instinct, ready to fly north.

Indifferent. The first one he hit barely moved. Later, they walked towards the wheels, owl after owl, exploding like pillows, tho in his hands there is no feeling. The air is soft as feathers. In the mirror he would discover them intact, unruffled, pivoting absolutely, unable to turn only their heads, towards his disappearance.

In the end it was deliberate. Steering at them, foot rammed with belief against the floor.

He rarely dreams and when he does the dreams wake him. Moonlight quivers on the glass.



In the summer they are gone. He sleeps with the window open and sweats into the pillow. In the public library, an owl mounted on a cut maple, a patch of rabbit fur in its talons. The librarian cannot remember who donated it.

early March, driving home from the city in a wet snow, an owl

caught in solid light, lifted so slowly from the shoulder

no feather, wing, just a thud on the glass, an imagined flailing out of the light and behind him

tho he stopped, the snow melting audibly on the pavement

undreamt, the owl
flies from the pole
or does not fly
that
there are wings, silent,
held, among curtains, glass,
a body of light persistent
in snow, a particular
symmetry

that the owl, at least, assumes air and the air embraces it