

Take Me Home

"Show me."

As I whisper into the crisp, night air, my breath swirls in dancing white vapor. She screeches as if to confirm my request before taking a silent flight from her perch. I run through the snow blanketed forest of skeleton trees. My bare feet sting from the cold, white floor below me. My eyes are wide as they try to take in as much moonlight as they can.

She lands on another branch. Her white and brown feathers ruffle as she folds her wings against her sides. Her pitch black eyes pierce mine and she stands as still as a statue.

I stop. My feet ache and my lungs burn. I look behind me as if to see him following me. Tonight is the night I get my freedom back.

I've been watching this Barn Owl sit outside of my window every day for exactly one year. She would come around midnight and perch on the same pine branch until I fell asleep. I could see her as I laid in bed next to him. Her inky orbs had this magnetic pull that would get stronger the longer I looked at them. I could feel her luring me outside. She wanted me to follow her. She wanted me to run. She wanted me to escape.

Back in the forest, I collapse on a fallen log. I have to get something on my feet before I get frostbite. I need to be able to keep going. I take off my jacket and then my long sleeve shirt. You must always wear layers to hide the bruises. I put my jacket back on and begin ripping my shirt in two. One piece wrapped around one foot. The second piece wrapped around the other foot. The warmth my body injected into my shirt quickly faded as the cloth soaked with icy water.

My attention was diverted as the Barn Owl hooted. The echo of her call evaporated into the night, it was replaced with deafening silence. Then I heard it. Soft but heavy crunching of work boots in fresh snow.

"Time to go." I barely whispered. "Show me."

Her muted flight baffled me as I couldn't hear her unless she wanted me to. I took off running after her again. It was easier now with makeshift shoes. I could feel the Earth below me shift and melt as my feet hit the ground. His dogs barked and howled, breaking the silence I desperately longed for.

"Just let me go." I whined between hushed breaths.

Tears swole in my eyes, distorting my vision. The white blur flying overhead screeched which sent shivers down my spine. He has to give up. He has to let me go. Just let me go. Let me go.

The pounding of eight paws hitting the ground grew thunderous like the crescendo of a Summer storm. They were close. Dread filled my heart as my window was closing. My mind raced with the possibilities of what he would do if he caught me.

Suddenly, there was a new sound. The snow below me turned into a slick sheet of ice and the vibrations cracked in warped frequencies that reverberated against the surrounding hills. I stopped and for a split second I felt like I was surrounded by lost souls. They moaned and wailed through every bone in my body as their cries transformed into melodic rhythm.

The ice gave under my weight and I plummeted below the surface. The abrupt temperature drop caused me to gasp and flood my lungs with water. Choking and panicking, I swam to the surface only to feel the underside of the ice. I was slowly becoming hysterical as I could not find the hole I slipped through. My efforts became less and less as the lack of oxygen and exertion of energy slowed my movements.

I stopped fighting.

This is it. I thought.

The murky waters enveloped me in a void where I could only see his face in the moonlight above. That haunting face morphed into the beautiful Barn Owl. I felt a warm wave of serenity and peace wash through my blood as I closed my eyes. My slowing heartbeat was the only sound I could hear. The nightmare is over. I am finally home.

I'm finally free.