

Barn Owl

by Jake Barnes

My friend asked me to go with her when she released the bird. She had cared for it while its wing healed. We drove up a rutted country road for a bit and parked by an old, weather beaten barn. My friend retrieved the owl from the trunk of her car. I looked at the owl, and the owl looked at me. Its eyes were cold.

The woman put on a glove and coaxed the owl out of the cage. "Tsk tsk," she said. "Tsk tsk." I kept my distance. My friend's face was alight with eagerness and joy. I wasn't frightened, but I was uncomfortable. I was out of my element. I was on property that wasn't mine. In a woods with mansions tucked away among the trees.

My friend walked a few steps up the road then stopped. She made a quick motion with her gloved hand and lofted the bird into the air. It wobbled at first, then settled and made a bee-line for the gnarled trees. "Goodbye, goodbye!" my friend called. Her voice was soft, sad, proud. She looked at me and smiled. "Don't worry," she said. "She'll be fine. She knows these woods. She was born here. This is where she belongs. This is her home."

We got into our cars, she in hers, I in mine, and we drove back down the hill. At the entrance to the highway we went our separate ways.

