

Freedom

by Jake Barnes

I was seeing the owl lady from time to time when I met Caroline. C. was moving into an apartment in the complex where I lived. She was a blue eyed blonde; I was smitten.

The owl lady fit into the category of any port in a storm. She was a Woodside matron. She was in one of my classes at the college. She said her husband traveled a lot.

My new flame wanted to go to her former lover's funeral. I said I didn't think that was a good idea. We settled for being observers at the grave site. The deceased's lawyer spotted my friend, and she introduced us. He invited us to a party. He was celebrating winning a lawsuit. He had sued his former wife to have his alimony reduced.

One day the owl lady called me and said she was going to release a bird that day. She asked me to go along. Okay, I said. In my head she was already a thing of the past, a trifle.

My friend tended injured birds. When their bones had healed she released them. The bird she released that day was a barn owl. We drove up a back road in Woodside. I got the cage out of the truck while the woman put on a thick glove. Then she got the owl out of the cage. It perched on her gloved hand and looked at me. I looked back. It seemed to look right through me. Then my friend tossed the bird into the air and it flew off, into the trees by an old, abandoned barn. Its flight was a little wobbly at first, then it strengthened. "Goodbye," my friend said. "Goodbye."

That night I took my new friend out for pizza. When we got back to her apartment, she asked me in. I followed her. She didn't switch on a light. She cradled my face in her hands. She whispered, "Fuck me."

