

Refuge

by marci stillerman

In the dark of a November night, you're awakened by a thud on your roof—the sound of a small animal dropped. A rabbit fallen from a hawk's claws, its fur bloodied where talons pierced the skin? You feel its heart clutch in fear, see its staring eyes reflect the moon-glow, hear in your heart its voiceless cry. Your brothers, oblivious to the dying on the roof, dream on, in grunts and snorts, of supermen, King Kong, alien worlds. The door slams shut by the wind, recalling your dad's angry departure that evening, the cruel words that sent him away forever. Cotton balls stuffed in your ears do not deafen you to the rocking of your mother's bed on the other side of the wall, as she and the new uncle set forth on the turbulent sea of their maiden voyage. When they come to port, the house sighs, settles to sleep. The new uncle, snoring now in your mother's arms, took Dad's chair at the dinner table. He offered to show you his rabbit traps. You hear movement overhead: the hawk returned for its prey? You gag on your spit. Leaving your warm bed, you cross the icy slick of floor to the frosted window where your breath makes a clearing. Glitter of bare branches in moonshine. A small rabbit slides off the roof in a shower of snow, staggers across the white ground to a safe place it somehow knows. The vision of its blood trail in the snow will be locked in your heart forever. Back in bed, the terrors of the night give way to the temporary refuge of sleep.

