

As I walked farther in, I was enveloped in darkness. The trees above blocked the sun almost completely. Now the air smelled dank, musty, and moldy. I did not like this, and turned around to return to the house, but the edge of the forest was no longer visible. I could not tell which way I had come. A twig snapped behind me and I turned, expecting to see some animal, but there was nothing there. The odor of something akin to skunk, but more stale, filled my nostrils. I smelled manure and the reek of wet dog. I had heard there were bobcats and foxes up here, so I assumed it to be one of those.

Suddenly, there was a loud crash. I spun around, but again, there was nothing. Then, Father, I heard the sound of breathing. It was guttural, like a growl, but unlike any I had heard before. There was another loud crash, and the breathing got louder. It sounded like a large animal, perhaps a mountain lion. Worried for my safety, I turned and walked slowly away from the sound, then ran, smashing through the underbrush, tearing my clothes, slashing my face. I tripped over something large and pitched face forward into the damp earth. When I raised my head, I found myself staring at the carcass of a deer. Its stomach had been ripped open, blood and entrails spilling out. It stared at me with sightless, dead eyes. I lurched to my feet, took a few steps back, and found myself against a moss-covered tree trunk.

All at once the unearthly screams of a woman filled the woods, followed by shrill screeches. And from nowhere, owls flew at me. Flapping their wings, snapping, pecking at my arms. I tried to knock them away while the woman's screams went on and on. I turned again and ran blindly, going left and right, anywhere to get away from the owls. But they followed, wings fluttering, talons gnashing in the dark. I felt their beaks stab my cheeks and nose,

tear the flesh on my arms, my back, and thought my end was near.  
I fell to the ground and lay there with my arms covering my face.  
And suddenly, they stopped. Slowly I removed my arms from my  
face and opened my eyes. The owls were gone. It was silent again.

- Owl Manor – the Dawning