

Night-walking Henry

By Ryan Mitchell

Henry gazed at the wheat fields. The bus pushed smoothly through rocky roads, alongside farmlands glimmering in the sun. He was a thirteen year-old with smooth blond hair, light brown lips and long, thin fingers. The bus ride had been a symbolic hour-long drain on him. After looking at a sea of seemingly all the same scenery he felt his eyelids drag down on him.

The bus came to a stop in a small town and he sleepily got off. The town's highest point was a steeple that gazed over a small cluster of terracotta tile roofs of houses, cafés, pubs and shops. It was a small town gathered around the foot of the church.

He wandered into the market square, where a group of classic vendor tents had been gathered around a fountain filled with golden fish. The smell of fruits and breads brought him deeper into the market. He came to a baker's stand and used his little remaining cash to buy a roll.

He walked briskly to the outskirts of the town that was at the foot of a hill covered abundantly with wheat. He ran up the hill, pushing through the crops until he reached the top. Then the sun weighed down on him, and at the foot of the hill he lay down. He ate the roll and smiled as waves of heat and seeds rolled over him. His eyes closed.

He woke to see a full moon behind the steeple. The sounds of crickets were everywhere, and with every chirp he felt stress climb deeper inside him. He thought of walking home and quickly ran down the wheat hill to the foot of another. It was dark green and, Henry guessed, the pasture there was used to graze sheep.

He climbed the hill and entered a small gathering of pine trees at the slope. The pines danced in the wind and he felt a sense of fear tingle in him. This fear exploded when he heard the noise.

A fierce growl came from the bushes. Henry ran and a large wolf chased him. He scrambled down the hill. The wolf seemed to move faster and Henry sped away as fast as he could through the valley between the hills.

He found a small cavern in the side of the hill. He slid in, praying that the wolf would not be able to fit in. The darkness seemed to fill every corner of the crevasse and he sat sweating in his hiding spot, shivering as the wolf barked at him.

As the bark subsided he grabbed a rock from the bottom of the cavern. He crawled out looking around. The wolf was gone for now. He ran through the valley. As he left the valley he found himself in a strawberry field. He walked through trying not to think about any of the dangers the field could hold.

He thought of snakes and demons crawling through the fields. But all there was to be seen was a barn owl perched upon a plant in the center. Henry gazed up at it: it was so peaceful. How could any creature be so peaceful in a world where the wolves ran free?

As he walked past it he imagined the owl as a noble knight riding in sword in hand, slaying the wolves and protecting the walkers of the night. He wished he could be that hero.

Henry lay down his rock and sat down. He gazed at the rock, thinking about it as if it were an owl. He bowed in front of it then continued walking. He came upon a small river in his path.

He thought about the snakes, piranhas, sharks and sea dragons that could lurk under the water. But as he was about to turn back he remembered the owl. If he was ever going to be like the owl he must take the risk.

The water felt like a stream of ice and he emerged on the other side, sopping wet and almost unable to move. He gathered twigs and leaves from a nearby patch of woods and placed them in a circle.

He rubbed sticks together until they sparked. The sparks soon grew to flames and he watched his fire with pride. Hunger struck him and he wandered back to the woods. He collected giant mushrooms: one black, one white. He chewed the black one and vomited. He threw it into the fire. He would have not eaten the white mushroom except he thought of the owl sitting calmly in the fields, not afraid of wolves.

Chewing it he smiled. He was about to finish it but he realized he owed the great owl a tribute. After all, the bird had inspired him to forge the stream, make the fire and eat the mushroom.

He threw the rest of the meal into the fire. It soared ten feet high. In a burst of satisfaction, he felt the smoke from the fire cover him, enveloping every part of him and pushing him to the sky.

It seemed to push him into daylight. The smoke had taken Henry to his very own doorstep. Light seemed to glimmer off everything. It shone off the fields surrounding his town and glistened off the tree in his backyard.

Normally he would have entered and greeted his parents, telling them everything. But this time he climbed the tree. As he tugged himself up the tree he felt the worries of the night float away. He felt carefree, like the owl.