

*excerpted from faceless angels & tales from hoback junction . . .*

As he remembered it, the spring was deep in the forest, far from the narrow ribbon of highway where the majority of park-goers and tourists strolled, had their picnics, and fed the animals as if the park were some kind of petting zoo.

It was a sulfur hot spring, comfortably nestled within the elbow of an old slow-moving river, where in the late evening large owls congregated in the surrounding pine trees whose branches, warmed by the heat of the spring, never held the snow and were reflected, distortedly, in the eddies of the river.

The sensory experience of naked immersion in this place, and in particular the sulfur pool, is what drew Keith in. It was very much like stepping into a dream – the convergence of the conscious and the subconscious like two highways in the wilderness. The soft natural aroma of minerals permeating the air, the texture of the water strangely smooth against the naked skin. Like touching a snake – there being a surprising disconnect between the wet sight of the thing and the dry touch. The vapors rising up within the cooler air, slow dancing, unchoreographed, like a thurible's smoke wafting prayers up to heaven – up from a deep place within the Earth into the atmosphere of our realm, carrying with it messages only spontaneously decipherable, like a vision in our periphery, which, when we turn to look more closely, disappears. Fleeting, like a thought we cannot express, dissipating as it travels through the tunnels from mind to mouth.

And the owls, commencing their nightly hunt in this ancient place. The owls, as they hearken and embrace an imminent darkness which envelopes whatever insignificant body becomes immersed in their sulfur pool, with their eyes, separate the spirit from its physical confine, as the pool subsumes both into the womb of these primitive elements, reflecting the stars, and, sometimes, the moon.



Illustration by Owen T. Rossman