

REEXIST

by notjoelschneier



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The seasons had changed, and autumn crept up on me. I stepped outside and into the street, the air dry and cold. The wind surging through the trees, whisking crackling leaves to the ground. I was shaken. I kept my hands in my pockets as I walked down the street toward the corner. Beyond the orange glow of the street lights I could see the sky, black and infinite. I could have fallen into it if I only let go of the ground. Instead I stopped at the corner, in wait for the bus.

□The bus never came. I stood by the corner for hours. The sky spun and tilted overhead. The wind brushed leaf after leaf through the streets, passing me by. They spun and tumbled over the asphalt. I don't know how late it was when it found me...

□It had eyes-I'm sure of it-that didn't glow or stare or move but those eyes were alive with...something...I could see a life in it as it perched from high up in one of the oaks that lurked over the street, high above the street lights. It spread its wings, with the feathers that unfurled like flames and hung in the wind. It looked down on me, wings spread, eyes dead, and then it was gone.

□I chased after it-shaking with uncontrollable and helpless fear. My feet steered me through the streets, following the wind with its tumbling leaves all around me. I chased it through the city, through the night. The wings that fluttered like burning flames always high off in the distance, the eyes always upon me as if it were moving backwards. Its eyes were always upon me.

□And so I came to the river. I hopped freeway barriers and ducked under on-ramps. The night was empty and vacant, lit by darkness. At the edge of the river I could see it high above the water, out far above the depths. The stars were above, tilting in the dark sky. The moon was new and absent. High above it stared down at me, my feet at the edge of the water on the mud and grass. It stretched its wings wider, spreading the feathers that were like flames out to reach what must have been the breadth of the river. And then water from the depths of the river burst into the air, a pillar toward the sky. The water reached up toward the wings, the flames uncurling in the night sky, and the flames were gone-they were quenched.

□The water fell back to the river in a blanketed mist. It was gone. The wings with flames were gone, but I could feel the eyes. Where it had been the crest of the moon had crept out from its black curtain. It was a new moon, and it was waxing.