

direction from which the signal was coming. I wore headphones, also connected to the receiver, that fully covered my ears so I could detect even a faint signal from a far away radio collar. In addition to the radio tracking equipment, I wore a headlamp so that I could see where I was going and read the dials on the equipment while keeping my hands free.

One particular balmy night, I had already been unnerved to see someone lying by the edge of the road. I checked to see that there hadn't been an accident and discovered that he was an intern I knew who worked on a different project. And he wasn't wearing much. (Okay, field researchers can be a little odd.) He was occupying a wide spot beside the road where normally I would've parked my car and gotten out to try to get a good reading from a skunk's radio collar. His presence reminded me that there might be others out in the park, too, but as always, I told myself it was silly to be worried about other people. This person, and others like him, would simply be enjoying the night sky (and night air, apparently), and I should just go on about my business.

I parked instead in the next wide spot, and set off with my equipment. I was tuned to the frequency of one particular skunk's radio collar and walking toward a stream. Even with the headphones, I could tell how much noise I made tramping through the weeds. Anyone nearby could've heard me more easily than I could've heard them. I left the grassland and entered the trees near the stream, where it was darker. My headlamp cast weird, flickering shadows all around. Suddenly I heard what sounded like a deep male voice say, "Hey!" Panicked, I swung around, shouting, "Who's there?!" and grabbed off the headphones. I accidentally knocked the lamp off my head. The light went out leaving me in the dark, trying to disentangle the cables, the straps, the antenna, and my hair, find the lamp, get it back on.

And then to my profound relief, I heard it again from the direction of the stream: "Ai!" The bass voice of a bullfrog repeating his call, "Ai!"

ANDREA BECKER

untitled

I have a recurring, dark dream in which I sit at a long, ornate table, but the table and the room in which it is kept are unfinished and dilapidated. I have a guest, seated adjacent to me at this table rather than at the opposite end. He feels disconcertingly familiar. He is a beautiful man, albeit gaunt and dirty. He is tall, thin but solid, with a chin-length mop of dark hair and stormy gray eyes. His posture and his heart emanate despondence. We each sit at a neatly set place at the table, but all of our fine, beautiful dishes are cracked and filthy. The only illumination of the room comes through the windows—thick beams of moonlight bounce opaque off of the windowsills, onto my own sharp cheekbones, finally lost in the deep, sad pools of those eyes I can't yet bear to meet.

My dream's dinner presents me with the proverbial crow upon my plate, and he talks to me. He declares it would be an altruistic gesture to offer my guest a piece, if just a leg or a chunk, of his full breast. In response, I plunge my fork into his stomach. His talons dance and dig short, deep gashes into the raw wood of the table. After he eventually stops writhing in protest, his cries still ring in my ears: shrill, brazen, harsh. It's always at this point that I almost feel my eyelids flutter in the waking world. Instead, I am unfailingly drawn wholly back into my subconscious.

I imagine digging my soiled fork into my own leg, prodding hard at the reflexes, involuntarily pushing my sharp heel through the foot of the man beside me. I know his silence, however, and it will not be ruptured. Instead of hurting him, I glance upward and unwillingly become swept into the whirling hurricanes of his irides. The hurricane's own translucent eyes pierce me straight through. Precipitously lost in some quiet storm of doubt and starvation, I inhale deeply the scent of the room's damp earth and my own cold sweat. I wake.