

A Case of Mistaken Identity

By Michael H. Lester

My father comes to Los Angeles from Detroit for one of his annual fall visits. Up in years, his hearing and eyesight are not what they used to be.

While in the kitchen preparing dinner, I notice through the bay window an owl perched on top of the utility pole. It is a very unusual sight for our urban backyard, and I excitedly point it out to my father, who, squinting through the thickening fog, insists it is not an owl but a cat.

sphinxlike
twisting its head right to left
a creature
of shadowy origins
surveys its domain

After a moment of futile argument between us, I look my father squarely in the eye and propose a solution.

*If it climbs down the pole, it must be a cat, but if it flies off into the sunset, it must be an owl.
Agreed?*

We can agree on that much, at least, although I get the distinct feeling father is looking for holes in my argument.

We turn back towards the window to begin our vigil, but the owl, or cat, is gone.

all night
the flapping of wings
echoes in my head
father with a flashlight
scours the earth for paw prints

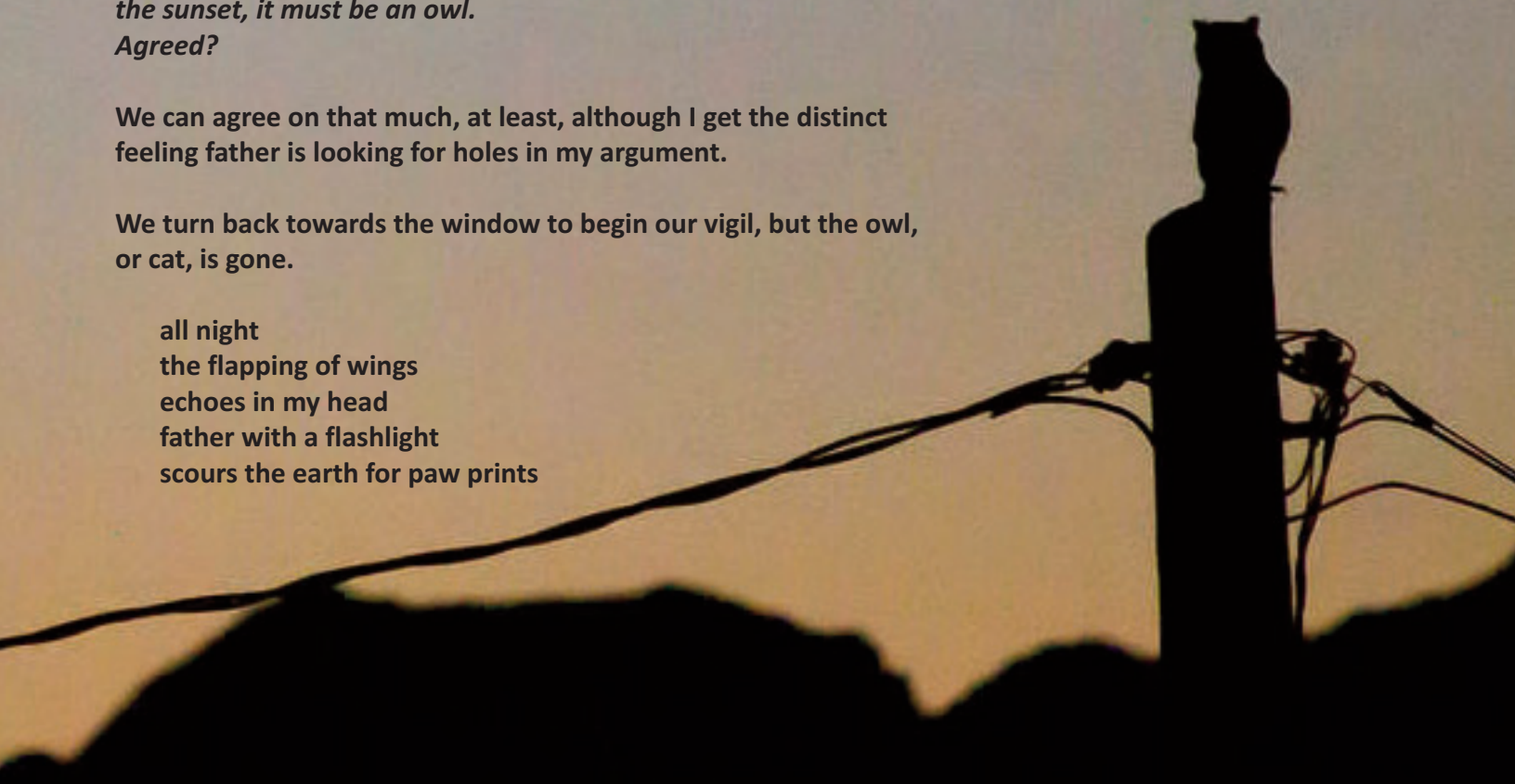


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