

The Owl and the Pussycat: Animal Visitations in Dreams and Waking Life

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“Each [animal] has a unique voice, a voice you cannot find in a guidebook or a compilation of symbols. How the beast appears, what it brings, what emotions it evokes, what healing link it fashions: this is the story” (Russack, 2002, p. 9).

I have just such a story. It involves owls, hawks, cats, and their persistent communications with me. These animals’ attempts to reach out to me opened doors within my being that led me to unexpected places. The story begins with a dream entitled “Wedding Night,” which came to me on June 27, 2008. Although I didn’t realize the importance of the dream when I wrote it down, a few weeks later I felt compelled to work the dream with the help of my classmates. That evening, as a result of the dreamwork, something cracked inside me, and during the 16 months since having the dream many synchronicities have occurred, embedding the dream and its characters deeper into my awareness. This transformative experience solidified within me the belief that dreams are of utmost importance and the cultivation of a relationship with one’s dreams has enormous implications for bringing one into balance and into a deeper connection with the Divine.

#### The Opening Dream: Wedding Night

*It is the night I am getting married. I am in a suburb in a beautiful hilly nature area. I go into a house and I’m supposed to be getting ready. A hawk flies in the room—I am down in the basement. At first it is elusive, but eventually it gets close enough to let me pet it. I see it has a cat head. A head almost like Jack (my orange tabby cat). The orange of the cat’s head matches the bird’s red-orange body. The animal bites me—like one of Jack’s “love bites.” I have to pry its teeth off my arm. I think my right arm. I go*

*outside and see an enormous orange full moon (like a harvest moon). The hawk flies around and swoops down and bites me again and again. I have to pry off its teeth.*

During the dreamwork with my classmates we unpacked several themes from this dream. The first was union with the Divine. In my dream I am about to marry, but this is not a civil union; rather, it is a spiritual union. However, before this union can occur, I must enter the basement and face my shadow.

But it will not be that simple. At the moment I enter shadow's realm, a hawk flies in. Hawks symbolize gaining a broader view and connecting with spirit. Although not clear in the initial dreamwork, it did become apparent over the next year that hawk is an ally in my journey toward connection with Spirit. I regularly see and hear hawks: a nesting pair of red-shouldered hawks lives in redwood trees 50 yards from my condo and most recently I saw a Cooper's hawk perched on a tree outside the building where I attend graduate school. Whenever I see hawks I feel my connection to Spirit more strongly and I am reminded not to become too short-sighted in my quest.

During the dreamwork session in class, we connected the hawk's orange feathers to Spirit and also to creativity, for the second chakra, the center of creativity, is often depicted as orange. Ted Andrews (2001) writes that hawks, especially red-tailed hawks, signify kundalini energy (p. 154), creative energy. Andrews comments that, "this bird becomes a totem in your life only after the kundalini has been activated" (p. 154). Both the dream hawk and the nesting pair near my house signaled a creative awakening.

The dream hawk had an added symbolic dimension: a cat's head. Cats represent mystery, magic, stealth, relaxation, and love. Felines have lived with me nearly my entire life and they are my dearest animal companions. The dream hawk manifested with a cat's

head in order to appear more familiar and less threatening to me; indeed, the cat gave me a “love bite” to get my attention. This pet energy is important to this story, for as James Hillman (1997) writes, “Not only are pets part of the larger family, but they are intimate familiar observers of your unconscious presentation in everyday household life. They were the first psychoanalysts” (p. 16). The dream hawk, with a cat’s head resembling my own cat Jack, knows exactly what I need: a little bite to encourage awakening.

Additionally, the cat-hawk’s eyes see well in the dark, helping me investigate the shadow. Jessica Dawn Palmer (2001) writes that, “cat-magic was invoked by the Druidic priests and priestesses to enable them to walk between the physical and spirit worlds” (p. 69). The cat-hawk chimera shows me what I must do to access my creativity: search through the shadow, communicate with spirit, get a broader view while remaining grounded, and seek both dark and light, earth and air, inner and outer.

That the cat bit me on the right arm is significant. I am right-handed, and this is the hand I use to paint, draw, write, click my camera’s shutter, and work the mouse for my computer. It is my dominant, creative hand controlled by my left brain. The chimera, by biting my right arm, sent me a message to reconnect with the power of my right hand and the creativity inherent in it. In the dream, the cat-hawk drew blood with its bite. Blood, bloodlines: ancestry. The light-bulb went on for me with this connection, for many family members on my father’s side are artists. My grandfather created jewelry and intarsia mosaics out of rock; my grandmother paints nature landscapes and creates country crafts; my aunt paints nature landscapes and tole paintings (painting on wood or household objects, a craft of our Norwegian ancestors); my father is a photographer; and my brother creates art for video games. There is no denying that art is in my genes.

Shifting away from the cat-hawk, my classmates and I looked at the luminous harvest moon decorating the sky in my dream. I learned that to bring about harvest, to manifest my creative dreams and connection with the Divine, I must delve into the shadow and the unconscious and deal with how ego hijacked my creativity. Four years ago, I published a children's book. But just four months after its publication, I got a lawyer and withdrew my contract with my publisher as a reaction to the publisher's unscrupulous actions with my book. I felt my world disintegrating: I wanted to be a famous author, to be known for my witty writing. Who was I if I couldn't be those things? It took having this dream for me to understand that the endeavor failed because of its roots in the ego. The cat-hawk taught me that in order to bring my art to the world I must approach my creativity from a spiritual place instead of from ego.

#### Synchronistic Events in Waking Life

I sat with that overwhelming realization and let it sink in. As the dream permeated my consciousness, synchronicities began. On July 28, I had the undeniable urge to go for a picnic in Mt. Diablo's foothills. I packed a meal for myself and my husband and we set off at the end of the day. When we arrived, a cold wind greeted us, and although we sat amongst majestic oaks as we ate our picnic dinner, I felt grumpy. Why had I brought us here to experience this miserable weather? I aborted our picnic and we started for the car. As we walked past a picnic area, my husband suddenly said, "What's *that*?" and pointed to a wooden bridge. I expected to see a deer. But instead, I saw a bird. I knew instantly it was an owl. I walked closer and saw a screech owl perched under the bridge. I took its picture, getting within a couple feet of the bird. It looked straight into my eyes and we

observed each other for what felt like forever before it flew off, silently. Now I knew why I had braved the picnic in the cold wind: to have this moment with the owl.

I realized later that to get closer to the owl, I had to step onto a bridge over a dry creek. I walked about halfway across the bridge to reach the owl, and when it left it flew over the dry creek bed. The owl told me I must bridge the different parts of myself and find the connection between nature and creativity, body and spirit, dark and light. The dry creek signaled my dried-up creativity and the owl drew my attention to this by flying over the creek as it left. Indeed, Palmer (2001) writes, “When owl appears, it suggests the individual is being kept in the dark about something. Owl brings warning, along with the night sight to pierce the darkness that conceals” (p. 254). Owl illuminated the next step of my path.

When I got home, I read this from Andrews (2001) and nearly fell off the bed: owls are considered “cats with wings” (p. 172). I had just witnessed a waking life representation of the cat-hawk, for owl combines the attributes of both animals: it hunts silently at night with powerful talons (claws). The screech owl’s call sounds similar to a hawk’s cry. Andrews writes that owl’s yellow eyes evoke “the light of the sun, alive in the dark of night” (p. 175), eyes that connect it with the solar hawk. As I looked up from Andrew’s book, I faced my own cat’s intense yellow eyes, eyes strikingly similar to the screech owl’s eyes.

The owl and the cat are often connected with the moon, and here I found another connection with the dream. My screech owl encounter happened at dusk, the same time the events occurred in the dream. Dusk is a powerful time for the owl both in reality and

in myth, and I knew this meant that both the dream and the owl encounter held powerful implications for me.

The synchronicities continued with another dream involving an orange cat that greeted my husband and me in a field. On August 6 I heard an owl outside my classroom while in a clairvoyant training class. The next day I dreamed of a huge wall of intarsia in my grandparents' house. (Intarsia is a type of artwork, practiced by my grandfather, in which one pieces together bits of polished stone to create an image.) In the dream, I saw an albino eagle and two great horned owls in the artwork, among other animals. The next day, during an aura reading, the woman reading me saw owls in my fourth chakra, owls in my heart.

The synchronicities led me, on August 8, to tell my dreamwork classmates "I am an artist!" I felt uplifted by this declaration: my creativity no longer resembled a dried-up creek or something that lurked in the basement, ruled by ego. The next day I created a piece of mixed media art that included my photograph of Mount Diablo to honor my encounter with the owl. The energy of my meetings with the Divine flowed through me now, and I began to allow my heart to connect with my creativity.

Although this declaration felt like a culmination, the synchronicities did not stop. On August 16 I did a dream re-entry with the intarsia dream in order to find my "original medicine," a term used by the instructor to describe our path in the world. I spoke with the eagle and the owl from the dream and learned that my original medicine is to communicate with nature. The next day, I entered the dream again and the animals specifically said my method of communicating with nature will involve art, music, and a strong connection with Spirit. It was important for me to do dream re-entry with the owls

and the eagles, because they pointed me directly toward the action I need to take with my creativity. Barbara Tedlock (2005) writes that from a shamanic point of view, “dream clarification/completion is important—it allows the energy to move through” (p. 128). On August 18, owls returned to my dream life in the form of silver pendants and earrings, (artistic creations) and on August 19, I had what seemed to be a concluding dream, which I called “Cat and Hawk.”

#### The Closing Dream: Cat and Hawk

*I am at a party at a house. The party is being thrown by Intuitive Way (where I go to clairvoyant training). I see David (the owner of Intuitive Way) and I chat with him in the living room. I look out the sliding glass door and see icicles hanging from the railing. I comment on how cold it got, but it doesn't compute because it's warm outside. Then I realize the icicles are fake. They have a light green streak running through them and they are made of plastic. I laugh at my mistake. I see my cat Jack outside sniffing around. He jumps on a table with a plant and starts squawking like a hawk. Then he stands on his back legs and puts his front legs up over his head as if he were a human. He calls out something like, “I want to go to the leader.” It freaks me out. I see a hawk flying and I don't want Jack to get eaten, so I bring him inside.*

In this dream, a celebration is taking place, a celebration that I had accepted my desire to create spiritual art and had created my first new piece. I speak with David, a teacher I respect at Intuitive Way who to me symbolizes intuitive knowledge. Through my intuitive training I strengthen my connection with the Divine and the more I use my intuitive gifts to create through writing and art, the more I honor my commitment to create from the heart.

Outside I see icicles, but they are fake and infused with green. The dream tells me that something I think is frozen is actually pliable and alive. Although I thought my creativity was frozen, it is not; rather, it is infused with nature/life. All of this is aligned with what has been happening in my waking life. But then something interesting happens: I see my cat calling out to the hawk. He has been separated from a part of himself and now he wants to return; he is seeking the leader. This is significant: now that I awoke my creativity and investigated the shadowy reasons why I had not been creating, the hawk, rather than the owl, is back on the scene. The cat, symbol of femininity, wants to reunite with the masculine solar energy in order to balance to my creativity.

Of course, the “me” in the dream fears this powerful union and worries that the hawk will devour the cat, so she brings the cat back inside. I am wary of the power of this union; I fear taking on energy as big the energy created by the union of the moon and the sun. The dream points out that before I achieve this union, I must allow myself moments of respite and safety.

In a shamanic sense these dreams, and the communication with the animals, came to me in order to “restore balance and to heal relationship” (K. Johnson, personal communication, August 17, 2008), my relationship with my creativity and with Spirit, as well as my relationship with the natural world.

### Re-Imagining the Dream

To continue moving the energy of the dreams and synchronicities, I took three images from the “Cat and Hawk” dream and wrote a story. It gave me chills when I read what I had written:

*It's a frigid night. I walk among the silent, snow-covered trees and my heart can barely contain the beauty. I see thick, sharp icicles hanging from the bottom of a lonely bench. My breath is visible from the cold and I feel my heart ache from witnessing the majesty and grace of the scene before me. Walking here alone I feel delicious freedom, a power I haven't often experienced. I no longer have the desperate messages in my head that repeat, "S-O-S," and "Save me," and "Look at me, I want to be noticed." I have a fire that burns hot and fierce within me and I understand that that is the reason the cold no longer affects me. I see the image of a hawk carved into the back of the bench, and I sit down. There is a cat standing in a doorway across the street, waiting to be let in for the evening. I take in the scene. I breathe the cold air. I know I am free.*

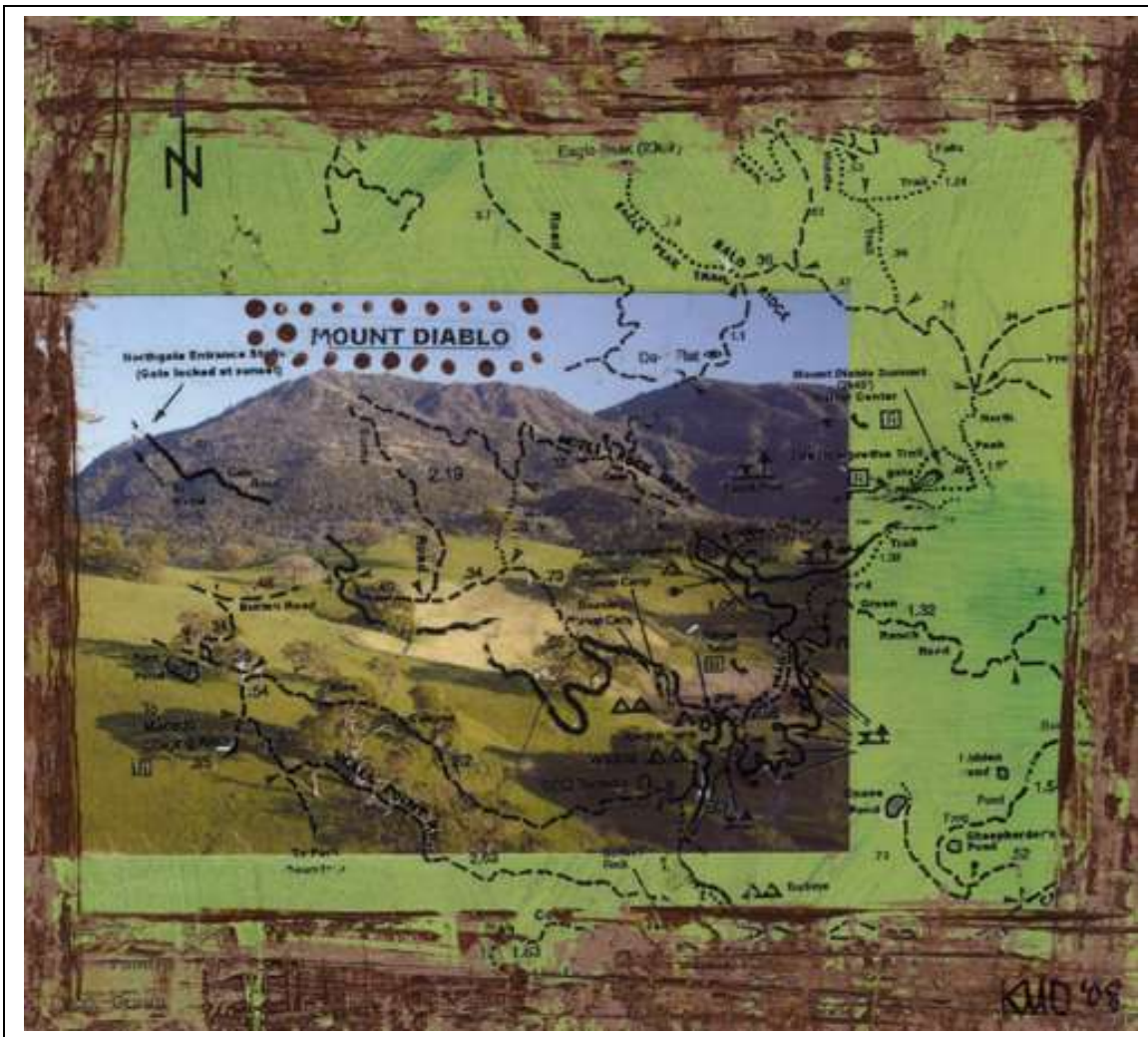
Here the images of cold and heat are juxtaposed: the outer cold and the inner fire. The cold no longer affects me; in fact, I find it overwhelmingly beautiful. I can face the cold with the strength of my inner fire blazing, keeping me in balance and able to appreciate both yin and yang. I walk in nature, taking in its beauty, and I recognize its sacredness: I witness "the majesty and grace of the scene." This recognition gives me a sense of freedom and power. Now I can move forward, allowing that creative fire, that kundalini energy to flow within me. I sit down on the bench of the hawk, resting within the hawk's keen sight and fiery energy. I witness the cat, waiting to be let back in to the house, waiting to reunite with the hawk.

All of these dreams and waking life experiences happened over the course of just three months. Although the rapidity of the dreams and synchronicities surrounding hawk, cat, and owl slowed after the summer of 2008, they did not end. In November, during a shamanic journey, the image of the snowy owl came to me and became a trusted

companion for me in dreams and meditations. A few months later, the great grey owl appeared in a dream and through working the energy of that owl I discovered it is an ancestral bird: it lives both in Minnesota, where my artistic ancestors moved to from Sweden and Norway, the other native lands of the great grey owl. During the summer of 2009, I witnessed the nesting pair of hawks near my home teaching their juvenile to fly.

All of these events mirrored the emergence of my inner artist and the deepening of my relationship with her. Last November I taught myself how to sew and created a snowy owl cape to honor the dream in which she appeared. In December I attended several art shows at which I sold my photography. In February I wrote a proposal for a book about connecting with nature. And in August I began art lessons. I am still navigating my way through this powerful energy, learning its ups and downs. And I am grateful to Hawk, Cat, and Owl for showing me this path, for opening me to my inner wisdom and connecting me more strongly with the Divine.

“Mount Diablo,” mixed media collage created after my encounter with the screech owl



### Resources

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