

They're real! Real, I tell you. More real than you've ever guessed. Magic, it's real.

I know you've heard the stories, about those folk with the yellow eyes that can stare straight into your soul. Those big, white wings on their backs, flyin' them just out of human sight. You've heard the stories. If you catch one and hold it 'till the sun goes down, that hankering deep down in your soul will spring into bein'.

I caught one once.

I was just a lad of eighteen. I'd been hearing those stories my whole life, and I believed them. Go ahead, laugh! If I were standing a puddle of you I wouldn't wet my feet. You can only believe the things floating in front of your nose.

Anyways, Pa had gotten in the way of a drunk man's rifle and it was up to me to be the man of the house. I thought if I just found one of those folk I'd be on my way.

I was just walking home from workin' the wheat in the fields when I saw the biggest white wing I'd ever heard tell of poking onto the path. Even one of those swans wouldn't be able to carry the weight of that thing. Right off the bat I knew it was one of the folk. "Hey," I said, all gentle. Didn't want to scare her.

There was a scuffing sound, and she poked her head out of the bushes like a mouse peeks out of a hole, sorta scared. Those yellow eyes in her skim milky face. Even with a gash alongside her cheek, wowie, was she a showstopper. I walked to her, holding my hand out. "It's alright," I said, comforting like. "I ain't gonna hurt you." She made a whine like a frightened puppy. See, she couldn't speak no English.

It took some cajolin', but she let me grab her hand. I took her right up to the barn and locked her in my big stallion's old stall. I'm not saying that was the right thing to do. All I'm saying is that I needed that money bad. Well, she went crazy. She started beating those wings and shrieking, slamming against the walls of the barn. You could hear her caterwauling way up at the house. I told mother it was a bobcat.

Now, I'm not a mean man. I gave her some food and went into that stall with her, thinkin' maybe if she had some company she wouldn't be so damn upset. But she had the tears pouring down her face and she was still shrieking up a storm. I wanted to let her go, I really did. But I just couldn't do it. The day before we'd gotten an eviction notice because we couldn't pay the bills. You have to believe me, I'm not a mean man.

I stayed in that stall with her all day. Never let her go outside. When the sun started goin' down, she stopped screaming and just sat in the corner, whimpering. It right tore at my heart. But I couldn't let her go.

The sky was almost black, you could see it out of the barn window. I was starin' at it when she came up to me. I right started when she put her hand on my arm. You could almost see though her hand, it was so pale, so skinny.

"Please," she said, real soft like. I couldn't do it to her anymore. Poor little thing, using her only English work to get out. I was fumblin' with the lock on the door, but it was sticky. The sun dropped out of sight like a piece of lead in a bucket of water, and the day was up. There was a terrible scream, a million times worse than the other screamin' she'd been doing that day.

Even though it was dark out, the old stall was bright white, like someone had just set off a ton of firecrackers. I was lookin' at her one second, and the next she'd just dissolved into a pile of gold coins.

I'd killed her.

I used the money, it saved our lives. But I never felt good about it. It was blood money, that. And I've never again caught one of the folk.

Do you believe me now?