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# Blackbird Sundoown

William Everson

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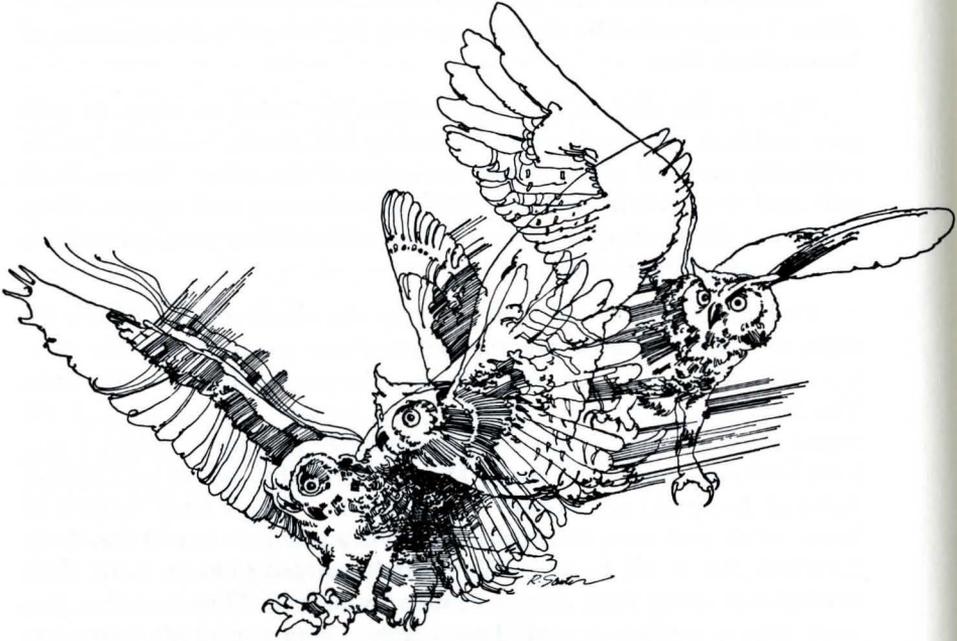
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# *Blackbird Sundown*

WILLIAM EVERSON

High Ridge Ranch: back of the barn  
A live oak thicket, and redwing blackbirds  
In the late afternoon. They cluster on fenceposts,  
Twig stems, barbed wire, telephone lines,  
Any proximate perch. Their brilliant epaulets  
Gleam in the fading light,  
Vivid scarlet on glistening black.  
Intensely alive they frolic and strut,  
Chatter the twanging blackbird tongue,  
Jubilant in the bird-loud evening.

A sudden hush. In the suspension of sound  
Silence drops to stunned terror.  
Then all explodes, every bird for himself,  
Up, down, out and away.

For over the ridge,  
Her shoulders of flight massively outstretched,  
Her hunched body tense with hunger, gravid with need,  
The Great Horned Owl glides implacably in,  
Wide staring eyes fixed on her prey.

Instantly every bird recovers. Springing back to the defense  
They converge on her, a racket of protest, a squall of  
imprecation.

Undeterred, she spans the yard, plunges into the oak  
thicket.  
Behind her swarm the defenders, the stiletto beaks  
Stabbing and yanking, a flurry of snatched feathers  
Ragging her sides.

In a trice she emerges,  
A half-dead fledgling gripped in each fist,  
Her malignant face swinging right and left  
As she scans the yard, glaring down her accusers.

Again the redwings close on her, railing and scolding,  
Their punishing beaks a fury of reprisal.

She shrugs them aside, contemptuously,  
And pauses a moment — umbrageous, ugly, triumphant.  
Then she takes off, her dread profile  
Humped in departure. Insolently unhurried  
She clears the corral, skims the fence, and is gone.

And with her going the dusk drops. Where a moment  
before  
Late light glimmered, now darkness  
Swoops on the world.

The redwings

Circle and descend, seeking their roosts,  
Pulling their shattered world back together,  
Settling into the oak thicket, drifting toward sleep.

Out in the woods the she-owl's mate  
Hoots once, hoots twice, his soft tattoo  
Muffling the hush. She does not reply.  
Her silence is the answer of the hearkening dead,  
Listening for life, when life is no more.  
Over the ridge darkness shuts like a wing.  
The earth-chill tightens; the claw moon  
Talons the west.

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Drawing by Ron Sauter.