

I donned a warm jacket and pulled on my boots. I left Jessie, my black lab in the house, as I wanted to approach the owl, or at least where I hoped it would be, as quietly as possible, and she tended to make a lot of noise running through the woods. I walked along the path through the woods until I was near a large stand of spruce where I suspected the owl to be. I was about 200 yards from the house. I stopped and listened; only the soft, steady sound of my own breathing returned to my ears. I left the path and meandered my way through the trees till I stood in the middle of a large spruce stand; sure that if the great horned called now, I would be able to locate it easily. Suddenly, about 30 yards in front of me, I heard the sound of something moving through the crisp snow. I stopped, expecting to see a snowshoe hare go bounding away into the moonlight dappled shadows. I held my breath, listening; nothing. After a moment, I took several steps, when, just at the farthest extent of my vision through the trees, I saw two ghostly shapes. I stopped. Slowly, the shapes moved from the shadows into a moonlit opening; it was two coyotes. Then they, too, stopped, their attention focused in my direction. I stood frozen in my tracks, barely daring to breathe; not from fear, but, rather, in fascination at seeing the coyotes so close. I had often seen coyotes, usually late at night, crossing various roads in the area as I returned home, but it was always a fleeting glimpse of a pale, dog-like creature slinking off into the darkness. I had even seen one or two coyotes during the day, though usually at a distance as they crossed a farmer's field. I knew there were coyotes in the Emyvale area, as I had seen their tracks across my snow covered fields on more than one occasion, and my kids and I had often heard coyote pups yapping on early summer nights. Perhaps that was why I wasn't particularly surprised on encountering these two in my woods. Still, on the side of caution, I slowly retreated and put my back to a large maple tree behind me. My movement, slight as it was, must have pipped the curiosity of the coyotes, because they turned and moved in my direction. For the most part, I stood in shadow, but I had no doubt at all that the coyotes knew exactly where I was. They approached to within about 50 feet of me, stopping periodically to sniff the air. Their boldness and the light of the full moon allowed me an opportunity to get a good look at them. They were about the size of a full grown German Shepherd, although they looked somewhat heavier through the shoulder area. Their fur was a light, tawny-grey colour, with distinctive dark streaking through the collar and along the back. Their muzzles were darker than the rest of their heads. I couldn't tell the sex of either coyote, as they appeared to be roughly the same size. But it was their eyes that struck me the most; they appeared to glow. Even though I knew the effect was caused by the moonlight reflecting off the snow and then off the back of their retinas, as it does with most animals when, at night, a light hits their eyes a certain way, it lent the two coyotes an almost supernatural quality, as if these were two unearthly beasts from a Grimm's fairy tale stalking the land in the dead of night. They approached to within about 30 feet of me, no doubt wondering what the heck I was doing standing against a tree in the middle of the woods at that time of the night. They made no sound, except for the crunch of their feet on the snow. They stopped and watched me; and I them. We stood like that, looking at each other in silence for about 2 or 3 minutes. Then, I raised my arm, more to see their reaction than anything else. My movement caught them by surprise, and obviously startled them. With a sharp "woof", they turned and dashed off through the woods. Only for a few seconds more could I see them running through the moonlit trees... now light... now shadow...now light...then, like smoke wafting up into the night air, they were gone.

I stood there, listening to the soft breeze through the trees, and the sound of my own heart beating. I started to walk back towards the house, and was surprised to find myself trembling slightly. I had not been afraid; at no time did I feel that I