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Beth Martinelli

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Bat Child Found in Cave!

by Beth Martinelli

He hunts rodents and plucks the ripest gooseberries.
The smell of mint follows him. His fangs bristle,
hang in deadly points, but the child only chases the mice
and nervous squirrels; he's a strict vegetarian. At two feet, two inches,
police and scientists warn he's extremely dangerous.
He skits and menaces along like several pieces
of shadowy paper. Unlike true *Eptesicus fuscus*, he sees
right through the dark; the night air opens for him
as he rustles cypress trees and flirts with a reticent Barred Owl.
Three miles away, car engines start, startle him,
and in the next town, children's whispered bedtime stories beckon.
Hovering in their windows until just before dawn, does he understand
the words he hears with such impossible precision?
He must count chickens and windowpanes in his head
to fall asleep. Dangling with the iridescent stalactites at noon,
he dreams of teeming reefs of coral and snowflakes,
a fresh plateful of juniper. Miles underground his cave is quiet.
The chamber hunches with cold, his fuzzy slippers wilting
in a corner like a large pair of dandelions. A wicker basket
brims with clementines. A table with fresh linen, fluted crystal.
The hall floors sparkle, delirious with importance, the front door
always standing open. His wings raise a small wind, he listens,
shudders at his own ancestry. On his way home, the boy cuts across
the moon.
And the fading moon tries. Fails to focus through the silent, sour milk
sky.