

Short Reads
For People
With No
Time



The
Truth
About Owls
by Amal El-Mohtar

The Truth About Owls

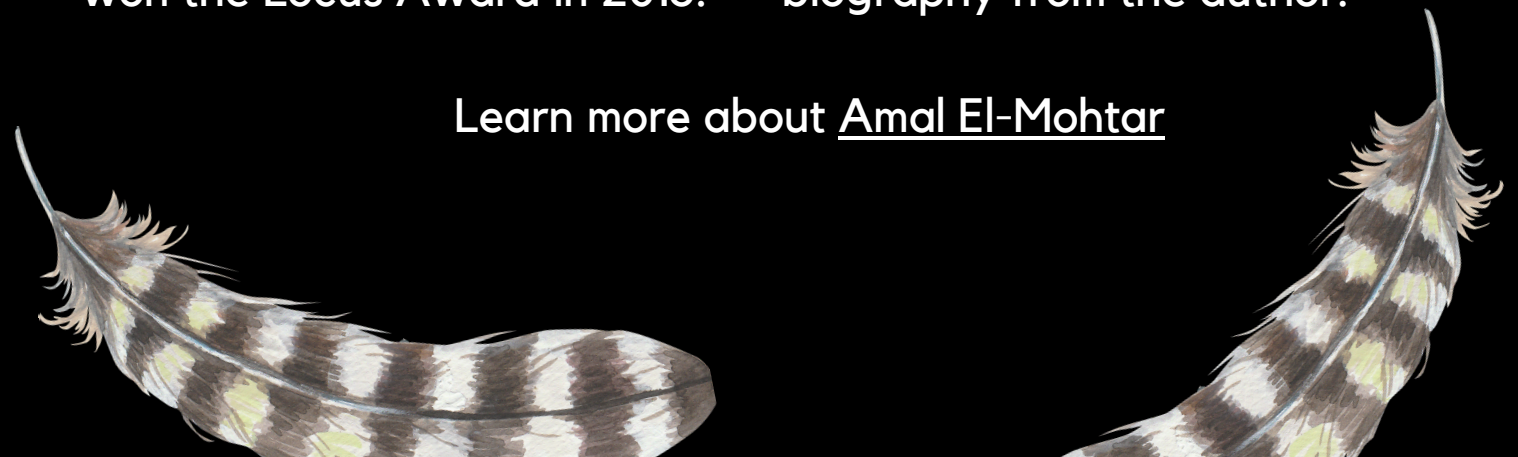
A young girl, forced to flee with her mother from their home in Riyaaq to the UK, finds companionship in an unsuspecting place. "The Truth About Owls" examines alienation, identity, power, and loss.

[Read "The Truth About Owls"](#)
[Listen to "The Truth About Owls"](#)

Read this [Introduction to "The Truth About Owls"](#)
by the author for more information.

"Amal El-Mohtar is an award-winning writer of fiction, poetry, and criticism. Her stories and poems have appeared in magazines including Tor.com, Fireside Fiction, Lightspeed, Uncanny, Strange Horizons, Apex, Stone Telling, and Mythic Delirium; anthologies including The Djinn Falls in Love and Other Stories (2017), The Starlit Wood: New Fairy Tales (2016), Kaleidoscope: Diverse YA Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories (2014), and The Thackery T. Lambshead Cabinet of Curiosities (2011); and in her own collection, The Honey Month (2010). Her articles and reviews have appeared in the New York Times, NPR Books and on Tor.com. She became the Otherworldly columnist at the New York Times in February 2018, and is represented by DongWon Song of HMLA. "The Truth About Owls" won the Locus Award in 2015." - biography from the author.

Learn more about [Amal El-Mohtar](#)



Write it Down!

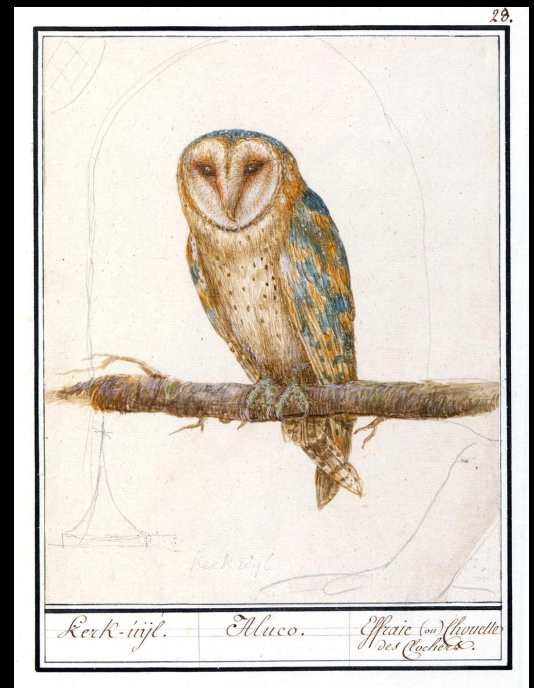
Discussion Questions

How do you interpret Anisa's power? How does Anisa view her power? How does her power shift at the end of the story? What is the cause?

Why do you think Anisa keeps returning to the Owl Centre?

How does Anisa explain her quick bond with Blodeuwedd? How is it different than her other relationships?

What is the significance of the Blodeuwedd mythology in this story? Consider this line by Anisa: "[Math]'s the worst... he takes flowers and tells them to be a woman; as soon as she acts in a way he doesn't like, he turns her into an owl. It's like—he needs to keep being in charge of her story, and the way to do that is to change her shape."



Why would Anisa's mom tell her to tell people she was born in the UK? How does this relate to Anisa's feelings of isolation and her need to learn how to cultivate a sense of danger and threat among her peers?

Each section starts with a statement on owls. Which one stood out to you? Why? How does it relate to that specific section?

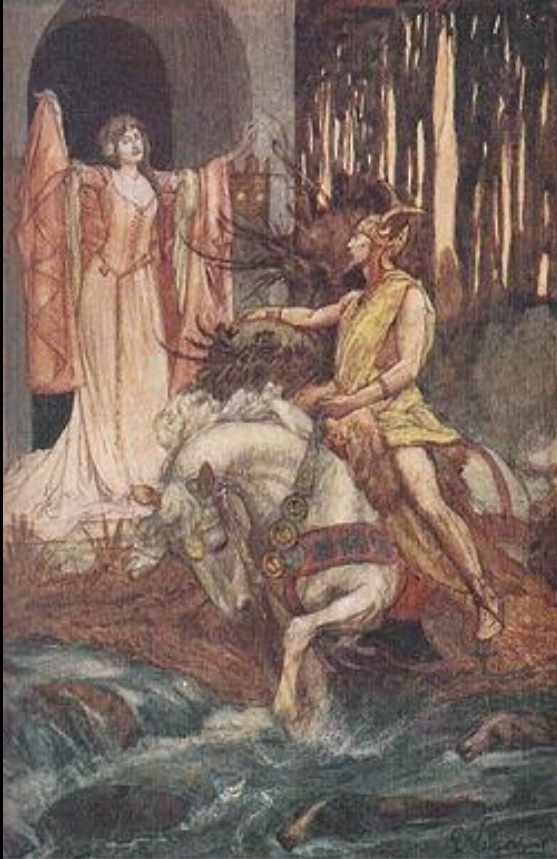
When Anisa is little she asks if the bombing was because of the owl and her grandmother laughs. Why would Anisa link the two? Why would her family laugh? Why do you think Anisa didn't tell her family she was still terrified after that horrific event?

Write it Down!

Prompts

Write a short, short story (50 words) on this excerpt:

"Owls are predators. There are owls that would tear you apart if you gave them half a chance."



Blodeuwedd meets Gronw.
E. Wallcousins
'Celtic Myth & Legend'
Charles Squire (1920)

Write a short story that references a fable or folktale. Check out [Fairy Tale Review](#), "a literacy journal dedicated to publishing new fairy tales", for ideas.

Bonus: Write a story where the main character is from a fable or folktale.

Summarize "The Truth About Owls" using only emojis. Below is an example from last month's [Short Reads](#), "Walking Awake" by N.K. Jemisin.



Emoji Guessing Game

Text your friend six to ten emojis summarizing a book, story, movie or song and have them guess the title.

For Visual Artists

Sketch, paint, or digitally illustrate Anisa at the Scottish Owl Centre with Blodeuwedd. **Bonus:** create an image of Anisa and Blodeuwedd in style of a folktale illustration like the one above.

If you would like to share your writing samples, artwork, or thoughts about this story, please email: ssfyouth@plsinfo.org

More Reads

Amal El-Mohtar and Other Authors

Short Stories

Pockets

by Amal El-Mohtar

Resilient

by Mayra Cuevas

Like Magic

By Cindy Pon

Wing

by Amal El-Mohtar

Novels and Collections

American Street

by Ibi Aanu Zobo

Astonishing Color of After

by Emily X.R. Pan

The Poet X

by Elizabeth Acevedo

Darius the Great Is Not Okay

by Adib Khorram

Pet

by Akwaeke Emezi


They Called Us Enemy

by George Takei

The Mabinogion

Translated by Lady Charlotte Guest



The background is black and features several large, detailed feathers with brown, white, and yellow patterns. The feathers are arranged around the central text, with some at the top, bottom, and sides.

Have comments or
want to suggest
a short story?

Email us!

ssfyouth@plsinfo.org