

Chapter 2

Friends in the Forest

“C’mon now Annie, up with ya! Ya canna sleep all day, much as ah know ya’d like tae try. Git up!”

Rosie, floating in that indistinct boundary between waking and sleep, heard the shrill, commanding, and completely unfamiliar voice, but chose to ignore it. It was so nice to stay asleep, so warm and comfortable. So peaceful.

Several long moments passed. “All right, ah warned ya!”

In the next moment, Rosie was shocked into complete and utter wakefulness as effectively as if dashed with cold water. How could she not have been? Her entire bed was tipping over and she was rapidly rolling out!

Rosie’s eyes snapped open to a nightmare. Her room was gone, replaced by tall trees. Branches and leaves seemed to whirl around her as her bed tilted farther and farther until she felt herself sliding off. Horrified, she realized there wasn’t any floor beneath her, just more leaves and branches and, far below, a very solid looking forest floor. She tried to grab the side of the bed, but found she couldn’t move. It was as if she were suddenly paralyzed.

Her brain raced, desperately trying to make sense of it all. She wanted to scream but found that her voice answered her commands no better than had her arms. Before she could do anything more, Rosie felt herself hurtle off the bed entirely and into the empty air. Just before tumbling

over, she caught a glimpse of a monstrous black squirrel that, impossibly, seemed to be the one tipping her bed.

Down she fell for what seemed like an eternity. The air whistled by her as she braced for the sudden impact that was sure to occur as the ground, by now rushing up to greet her, made fatal contact. The terror made her want to close her eyes, to hide from what was happening, but somehow even this small comfort was withheld. Her own body ignored her requests and her eyes remained wide open. And then, unbelievably, her headlong plunge began to slow.

Rosie was aware of rapid motion taking place to either side and of a whirring noise that filled the air around her. Still simply an unwilling witness to the unfolding events, Rosie saw the forest floor come closer and closer until, miraculously, she came to a stop just as she reached the leafy surface. At the same moment the blurs on her right and left disappeared and the whirring sound ceased.

“And a fine good mornin’ tae ya,” a voice from on high yelled down, its sound faint but clear in the cool morning air. Rosie’s view rotated upward and she was able to see, high in the tree, a very cross looking squirrel staring down at her, presumably the same squirrel that had just heaved her from the bed. “Ah was beginnin’ tae wonder if ya weren’t gonna fergit flyin’ completely an’ had simply decided tae end it all.”

“That wasn’t very funny Giles! You could have killed me,” a high-pitched voice yelled back at the squirrel. Rosie couldn’t understand how but the voice seemed to be coming from herself, even though she hadn’t tried to say anything at all. *Odd name for a squirrel too*, Rosie thought. *But then again what isn’t odd right now?*

“Kill a wee birdy by pushin’ it off’n a tree branch?! Ach, an’ that’s as ridiculous a thing as ah’ve ever heard. Just tryin’ tae wake ya up, ah was.” The squirrel pulled his head back but Rosie could still hear him muttering to himself. “Tryin’ tae kill ’er indeed! After all tha times ah’ve pulled tha half pint oot of troubles of her own makin’

an' she accuses me of tryin' tae kill her. Hmmph! Tha's gratitude for ya." The voice grew muffled and then silent as the squirrel entered a hole in the main body of the tree.

Owl? Talking squirrels? What's going on? That squirrel was talking to me but how can a squirrel talk? And why did he think I'm a bird? Rosie tried again to raise her arms or even just move her eyes, but experienced the same strange disconnection as before. It felt as if she were being forced to watch a movie and lacked the ability to look away. Even as she tried to solve these puzzles, striving to fit them into the framework of her familiar world, she continued to see trees and bushes, all seemingly solid and real.

Without her willing it, the view shifted, turning downwards and around. Numb to surprise by all the shocks she'd encountered, she saw at her sides not arms, but wings. The view continued to change, moving across the wings and finally showing the back of a juvenile owl. Each feather was clearly visible, the feathers all a deep chocolate-brown, edged with white. With a slowly dawning realization Rosie came to the reluctant conclusion that the squirrel had been right. She *was* an owl.

With that realization came another. Everything around her looked **big**: the squirrel that had pushed her out of the tree, the grass and flowers, everything in fact. It all seemed huge and out of scale. But if she was really inside a small bird then everything wasn't really gigantic, it was just that she was now very small. *If this is a nightmare it's a really weird one*, she thought anxiously to herself. *And if it's not a nightmare then I've REALLY got some problems.*

Before she could carry this train of thought any farther Giles popped his head out of the tree and called down. "Hoy down there, are ye comin' up fer breakfast or not?" he demanded crossly. "Or are ya thinkin' ah'll try tae murder ya now?"

"No, I know you won't murder me," Rosie heard her other self answer tartly. "I was just thinking." For the first time Rosie realized with a shock that there must somehow

be two of them inside this owl body – its original owner and Rosie. The rightful owner seemed to have no idea Rosie was there with her and Rosie had no way of letting her know.

“Thinkin’,” Giles muttered peevishly to himself under his breath. “Tha day tha ninny starts thinkin’ll be tha day ah learn tae fly.”