

“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.”

“Well, when ya’ve finished *thinkin’*,” Giles yelled down, “come on back up. An make it snappy, afore ah decide tae eat both bowls of breakfast maself.” With that he turned around and marched back into the trunk, his tail giving an impatient final swish as he disappeared into the tree.

Without any warning, the owl’s wings burst into a blur of brown and Rosie found herself rocketing upward. An instant later she’d reached and landed on the branch from which Giles had been scolding her.

“So there ya are, at last. Well come on in,” Annie heard Giles say from within an opening in the tree’s trunk. The owl hopped over to the lip of the opening, bending her head forward to look within. What she saw took Rosie’s breath away. The inside of the trunk had been hollowed out and the interior looked for all the world like a rustic cabin in the woods, the sort of thing that Rosie had watched on television countless times.

A small round table stood in the middle of the room, covered with a neat red and white checked tablecloth. In a vase in the center of the table was a bunch of freshly cut yellow, white, and orange wildflowers. Pictures dotted the walls and opposite the entrance there stood an expansive cupboard. Giles was standing to the side of this, a low counter in front of him. From what Rosie could see, the squirrel was heaping something into a pair of bowls.

“There now, tha’s finished,” he said, turning around and walking toward Rosie. Giles was holding onto a bowl with each front paw and made it look like the most natural

thing in the world for a squirrel to be walking on its hind legs, carrying bowls and holding a conversation.

“Well, c’mon, c’mon. Take your oatmeal while it’s hot, eh?” Giles commanded. “Come in already.”

Needing no further encouragement, Rosie’s host entered the room and hopped over to the table. Giles sat directly down on the floor, his size allowing him easy access to the tabletop from that position. Rosie noticed a small block of wood in front of the table on the opposite side, a convenient perch from which the owl could easily reach the bowl.

The table grew larger in her vision as the owl hopped over. Curls of steam rose above the bowl and the smell of freshly ground oats bathed in sweet honey made her mouth water. It must have had the same effect on the owl, for Rosie could see her beak diving into the bowl as she wolfed down the food and she could taste the sweet mixture as the owl swallowed.

“Here, here, slow doon! Ya’ll choke if ya keep on gol-lapin’ yer food like that. Try an’ eat like a civilized bein’ fer once,” lectured Giles. He reached down to pick up a spoon and began to ladle the oatmeal into his mouth. “Fome day I’m gonna teach ya fome mammerf,” he said indistinctly, speaking around a mouth full of oatmeal. “Yer sadly in need a’ some, ya know that. Use yer spoon,” he finished, slightly more understandable after having swallowed the food.

Rosie watched as the owl, responding to Giles’ lecture, reached out its wing and picked up a spoon. To Rosie’s amazement, she saw that the owl had a complete set of workable fingers on the end of its wing.

*Hands together with wings?* thought Rosie in confusion. *What’s going on?*

“Now that’s better Annie,” Giles said with approval as the owl proceeded to attack the oatmeal with the spoon.

*Annie!* The name exploded in Rosie’s consciousness. *That was the name of the owl in Dad’s story!*