

The Owl in the Dovecot

by Jean McIntosh

FATHER," said Jack, when he came home from school one day, "I have had a lesson to-day about the owl."

"Have you?" said Jack's father. "And what did the teacher tell you?"

"Well," said Jack, "the teacher told us how it slept in the day time and only came out after dusk. Have you ever seen an owl, father?"

"Yes I have," answered Jack's father. "Come and I will tell you about it."

So Jack sat himself down on the mat before the fire, and father cleared his throat and began,—

"Once upon a time, when I was a boy like you, I had a little brother, and his name was Bob.

"Now Bob and I used to play together, go to school together, go to bed together—in fact, we did nearly everything together.

"Bob said one day to his mother, 'Mother, I should *love* to have some real doves. Do, please, get me some.'

"So mother said, 'Well, I will help you to get some, but you must save up all your pennies as well.'

"Bob and I saved up our Saturday pennies for a long time. At last, with mother's help, we had enough to buy some doves. They *were* pretty, all white, with rings round their necks.

"I can remember what fun we had putting up the dovecot. We placed it against the wall of the house, and not far from our bed-room window.

"Our house was in the country, and when Bob and I were in bed at night we could hear the owls hooting and crying to one another. It was a weird sound, and if Bob and I had not known what it was, I think we should have been very much afraid. But then, you know, it was only the owls' way of talking to one another.

"Well, one night, a long time after Bob and I had gone to bed, we heard a very strange noise.

"Did you hear that noise, Bob?" I said.

"Yes," said Bob. 'I wonder what it is.'

"The noise still went on, so Bob said,—

"Let's get up. I believe the noise is in the dovecot.'

"So we both jumped out of bed, and got into our clothes as fast as ever we could.

"Bob picked up the candle, and we ran out, and what do you think had happened?

"First of all, we saw the door of the dovecot wide open. Bob had forgotten to close it for the first time. There, lying dead upon the floor, was one of our pretty doves.

"By this time father and mother came rushing out to see what all the noise was about.

"They brought a lantern, and we looked inside. The other doves were trying to hide in the corners, or clinging to the wire-netting in a great state of fear.

"At last we could see a great dusky owl crouching on a box near the roof. Its feathers were all ruffled up, and its great black eyes staring at us as it kept rocking to and fro. Then it lay down on its back and pretended it was dead.

"All at once it got up in a great rage, struggling, scratching, and flapping its wings to try to escape.

"Let us carry the box to the summer-house," said Bob.

"So we took the box out with the owl in it, and carried it to the summer-house, and left it there for the rest of the night. You see we wanted to see the owl in daylight.

"Very, very early in the morning there came another owl to seek its mate; and when it could not find it, the bird sat upon the roof of the house and called and called again in very mournful tones for quite a long time.

"The next morning Bob and I went straight to the summer-house to see our captive.

"It was now quite quiet, and sat on Bob's hand letting him stroke it gently.

"What shall we do with it?" said Bob to me.

"Let us take it to the old tree in the field," I answered.

"So Bob put it down near the hollow of the tree, and it shuffled away into the darkness.

"And that is the end of the story," said Jack's father.

"But why did you let it go?" cried Jack.

"Well, the farmer does not like people to kill owls, as they eat up the mice that do harm to his corn-fields."

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