



Plop is a baby barn owl.

He is fat and fluffy.

He has big, round eyes.

He has soft, downy feathers.

He is perfect in every way,
except for just ONE thing . . .



1

DARK IS EXCITING

Plop was a baby barn owl, and he lived with his mummy and daddy at the top of a very tall tree in a field.

Plop was fat and fluffy.

He had a beautiful heart-shaped ruff.

He had enormous, round eyes.

He had very knackety knees.

In fact he was exactly the same as every baby barn owl that has ever been – except for one thing.

Plop was afraid of the dark.

‘You *can’t* be afraid of the dark,’ said his mummy. ‘Owls are *never* afraid of the dark.’

‘This one is,’ Plop said.

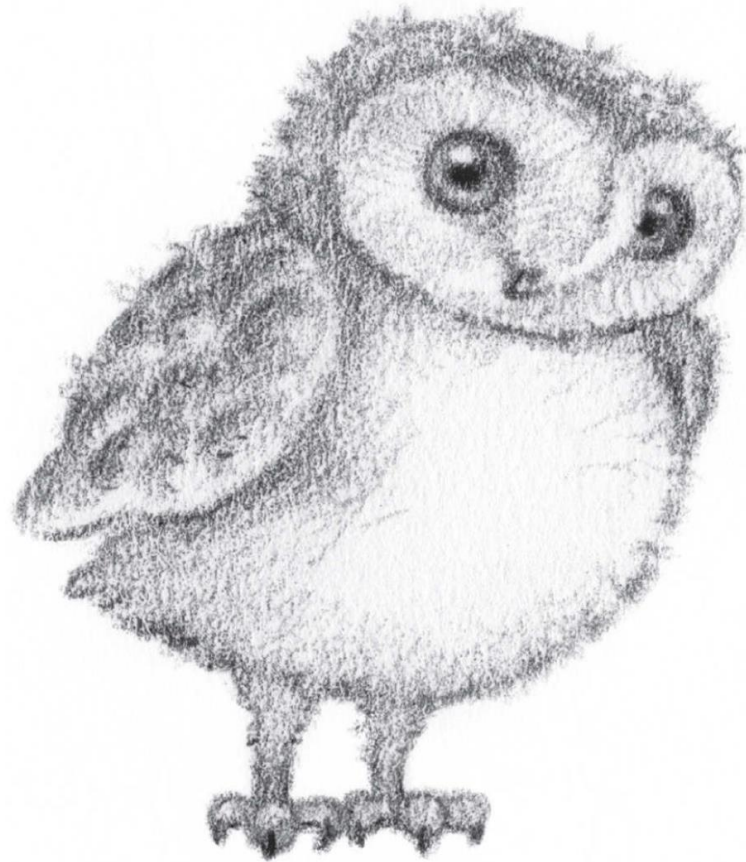
‘But owls are *night* birds,’ she said.

Plop looked down at his toes. ‘I don’t want to be a night bird,’ he mumbled. ‘I want to be a day bird.’

‘You *are* what you *are*,’ said Mrs Barn Owl firmly.

‘Yes, I know,’ agreed Plop, ‘and what I am is afraid of the dark.’

‘Oh dear,’ said Mrs Barn Owl. It was clear that she was going to need a lot of patience. She shut her eyes and tried to think how best she could help Plop not to be afraid. Plop waited.



His mother opened her eyes again. 'Plop, you are only afraid of the dark because you don't know about it. What *do* you know about the dark?'

'It's black,' said Plop.

'Well, that's wrong for a start. It can be silver or blue or grey or lots of other colours, but almost never black. What else do you know about it?'

'I don't like it,' said Plop. 'I do not like it AT ALL.'

'That's not *knowing* something,' said his mother. 'That's *feeling* something. I don't think you know anything about the dark at all.'



'Dark is nasty,' Plop said loudly.

'You don't know that. You have never had your beak outside the nest-hole after dusk. I think you

had better go down into the world and find out a lot more about the dark before you make up your mind about it.'

'Now?' said Plop.

'Now,' said his mother.

Plop climbed out of the nest-hole and wobbled along the branch outside. He peeped over the edge. The world seemed to be a very long way down.

'I'm not a very good lander,' he said. 'I might spill myself.'

'Your landing will improve with practice,' said his mother. 'Look! There's a little boy down there on the edge of the wood collecting sticks. Go and talk to him about it.'

'Now?' said Plop.

'Now,' said his mother. So Plop shut his eyes, took a deep breath, and fell off his branch.



His small white wings carried him down, but, as he said, he was not a good lander. He did seven very fast somersaults past the little boy.

'Ooh!' cried the little boy. 'A giant Catherine-wheel!'

'Actually,' said the Catherine-wheel, picking himself up, 'I'm a barn owl.'

'Oh yes – so you are,' said the little boy with obvious disappointment. 'Of course, you couldn't be a firework yet. Dad says we can't have the fireworks

until it gets dark. Oh, I wish it would hurry up and get dark soon.'

'You want it to get dark?' said Plop in amazement.

'Oh, YES,' said the little boy. 'DARK IS EXCITING. And tonight is specially exciting because we're going to have fireworks.'

'What are fireworks?' asked Plop. 'I don't think owls have them – not barn owls, anyway.'

'Don't you?' said the little boy. 'Oh, you poor thing. Well, there are rockets, and flying saucers, and volcanoes, and golden rain, and sparklers, and . . .'

'But what *are* they?' begged Plop. 'Do you eat them?'

'NO!' laughed the little boy. 'Daddy sets fire to their tails and they *whoosh* into the air and fill the sky with coloured stars – well, the rockets, that is. I'm allowed to hold the sparklers.'

'What about the volcanoes? And the golden rain? What do they do?'

'Oh, they sort of burst into showers of stars. The golden rain *pours* – well, like rain.'

'And the flying saucers?'

'Oh, they're super! They whizz round your head and make a sort of *wheeee* noise. I like them best.'

'I think I would like fireworks,' said Plop.

'I'm sure you would,' the little boy said. 'Look here, where do you live?'

'Up in that tree – in the top flat. There are squirrels farther down.'

'That big tree in the middle of the field? Well, you can watch our fireworks from there! That's our garden – the one with the swing. You look out as soon as it gets dark . . .'

'Does it *have* to be dark?' asked Plop.

'Of course it does! You can't see fireworks unless it's dark. Well, I must go. These sticks are for the bonfire.'

'Bonfire?' said Plop. 'What's that?'

'You'll see if you look out tonight. Goodbye!'

'Goodbye,' said Plop, bobbing up and down in a funny little bow.

He watched the boy run across the field, and then took a little run himself, spread his wings, and fluttered up to the landing branch. He slithered along it on his tummy and dived head first into the nest-hole.

‘Well?’ said his mother.

‘The little boy says DARK IS EXCITING.’

‘And what do you think, Plop?’

‘I still do not like it AT ALL,’ said Plop, ‘but I’m going to watch the fireworks – if you will sit by me.’

‘I will sit by you,’ said his mother.

‘So will I,’ said his father, who had just woken up. ‘I like fireworks.’

So that is what they did.

When it began to get dark, Plop waddled to the mouth of the nest-hole and peered out cautiously.

‘Come on, Plop! I think they’re starting,’ called Mr Barn Owl. He was already in position on a big branch at the very top of the tree. ‘We shall see beautifully from here.’

Plop took two brave little steps out of the nest-hole.

‘I’m here,’ said his mother quietly. ‘Come on.’

So together, wings almost touching, they flew up to join Mr Barn Owl.

They were only just in time. There were flames leaping and crackling at the end of the little boy’s garden. ‘That must be the bonfire!’ squeaked Plop.

Hardly had Plop got his wings tucked away when,

‘*WHOOSH!*’ – up went a rocket and spat out a shower of green stars. ‘Ooooh!’ said Plop, his eyes like saucers.

A fountain of dancing stars sprang up from the ground – and another and another. ‘Ooooh!’ said Plop again.

‘You sound like a tawny owl,’ said his father. ‘Goodness! What’s that?’



Something was whizzing about, leaving bright trails of squiggles behind it and making a loud

whieee noise.

‘Oh, that’s a flying saucer,’ said Plop.

‘Really?’ his father said. ‘I’ve never seen one of those before. You seem to know all about it. What’s that fizzy one that keeps jiggling up and down?’

‘I expect that’s my friend with a sparkler.

Ooooooh! There’s a me!’

‘I beg your pardon?’ said Plop’s father.

‘It’s a Catherine-wheel! The little boy thought I was a Catherine-wheel when I landed. Oh, isn’t it beautiful? And he thought *I* was one!’

Mr Barn Owl watched the whirling, sparking circles spinning round and round.

‘That must have been quite a landing!’ he said.

Task: this week we will be working on **summarising**. Remember, summarising is pulling out the **most important things that have happened**. Read my summary below. Is it a good summary? Explain why. Are there any important points that I have missed? Explain what you think should have been included and why.

My summary of this chapter:

Plop is a baby barn owl who lives with his mummy and daddy and he is afraid of the dark. His mummy told him to go and find out more about the dark. Plop met a little boy who loved the dark. Plop saw some fireworks. He knew a lot about them.