

DARK IS KIND

When the very last firework had faded away, Mr Barn Owl turned to Plop.

‘Well, son,’ he said. ‘I’m off hunting now. Would you like to come?’

Plop looked at the darkness all around them. It seemed even blacker after the bright fireworks. ‘Er – not this time, thank you, Daddy. I can’t see; I’ve got stars in my eyes.’

‘I see,’ said his father. ‘In that case I shall have to go by myself.’ He floated off into the darkness like a great white moth.

Plop turned in distress to his mother.

‘I *wanted* to go with him. I *want* to like the dark. It’s just that I don’t seem to be able to.’

‘You will be able to, Plop. I’m quite sure about that.’

‘I’m not sure,’ said Plop.

‘Well, I *am*,’ his mother said. ‘Now, come on. You’d better have your rest. You were awake half

the day.’

So Plop had his midnight rest, and when he woke up, his father was back with his dinner. Plop swallowed it in one huge gulp. ‘That was nice,’ he said. ‘What was it?’

‘A mouse,’ said Mr Barn Owl.

‘I like mouse,’ said Plop. ‘What’s next?’

‘I have no idea,’ his father said. ‘It’s Mummy’s turn now. You’ll have to wait till she gets back.’

Plop was always hungry, and his mother and father were kept very busy bringing him food all night long. When daylight came, they were very tired and just wanted to go to sleep.

‘Bedtime, Plop,’ said Mrs Barn Owl.

‘I don’t want to go to bed,’ said Plop. ‘I want to be a day bird.’

‘Well, I *am* a night bird,’ said his mother. ‘And if your father and I don’t get any sleep today, *you* won’t get anything to eat tonight.’

Plop did not like the sound of that at all, so he drew himself up straight and tall – well, as tall as he could – and tried to go to sleep.

He did sleep for half the morning, but then he woke up full of beans – or perhaps it was mouse –

and he just could not go back to sleep again.

He jiggled up and down on the branch where his poor parents were trying to roost. He practised standing on one leg, and taking off, and landing, and other important things that a little owl has to learn to do. Then he thought he would try out his voice. He tried to make a real, grown-up barn owl noise.



‘EEeek!’ he screeched. ‘EEEEEEK!’

It sounded like the noise a cat makes if you accidentally tread upon its tail. Plop was very pleased with it.

Mrs Barn Owl was not. She half opened one bleary eye. ‘Plop, dear,’ she said. ‘Wouldn’t you like to go down into the world again and find out some more about the dark?’

‘Now?’ said Plop.

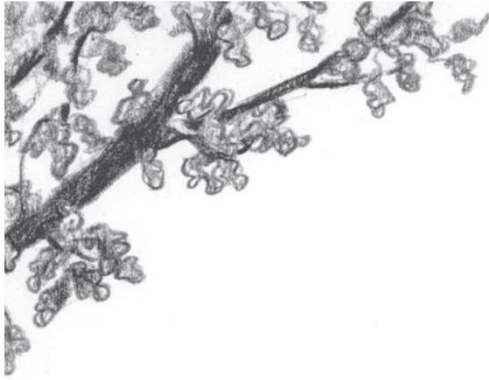
‘Now,’ said his mother.

‘Don’t you want to hear my screech first? It’s getting jolly good.’

‘I heard it,’ Mrs Barn Owl said. ‘Look, there’s an old lady in a deckchair down there in that garden. Go and disturb – I mean, go and find out what she thinks about the dark.’

So Plop shut his eyes, took a deep breath, and fell off his branch.

He did not get his wings working in time. He fell faster and faster and finally plunged at the old lady’s feet with an earth-shaking thump.



‘Gracious!’ cried the old lady. ‘A thunderbolt!’

‘A-a-a-actually, I’m a barn owl,’ said the thunderbolt when he had got his breath back.

‘Really?’ said the old lady, peering at Plop over the top of her glasses. ‘I do beg your pardon. My eyes are not as good as they used to be. How nice of you to – er – drop in.’

‘Well, it wasn’t nice of me, exactly,’ Plop said truthfully. ‘I came to ask you about something.’

‘Did you?’ said the old lady. ‘Now what could that be, I wonder?’

‘I wanted to ask you about the dark. You see, I’m a bit afraid of it, and that’s rather awkward for an owl. We’re supposed to be night birds.’

‘That is a problem,’ said the old lady. ‘Have you tried carrots?’

‘What?’

‘Don’t say “what”, say “I beg your pardon” if you don’t hear the first time. I said, have you tried carrots? Wonderful things, carrots.’

‘I don’t think owls have carrots – not barn owls, anyway.’

‘Oh. A pity. I’ve always sworn by carrots for helping one to see in the dark.’

‘I *can* see in the dark,’ said Plop. ‘I can see for miles and miles.’

‘Now, don’t boast. It is not nice for little boys to boast.’ The old lady leaned forward and peered closely at Plop. ‘I suppose you are a little boy? It’s so difficult to tell, these days. They all look the same.’

‘Yes,’ said Plop. ‘I’m a boy owl, and I want to go hunting with Daddy, but he always goes hunting in the dark, and I’m afraid of it.’

‘How very odd,’ said the old lady. ‘Now, I love the dark. I expect you will when you are my age. DARK IS KIND.’

‘Tell me,’ Plop said.

‘*Please*,’ said the old lady. ‘Such a little word, but it works wonders.’



‘Tell me, please,’ said Plop obediently.

‘Well, now,’ the old lady began. ‘Dark is kind in all sorts of ways. Dark hides things – like shabby furniture and the hole in the carpet. It hides my wrinkles and my gnarled old hands. I can forget that I’m old in the dark.’

‘I don’t think owls get wrinkles,’ said Plop. ‘Not barn owls, anyway. They just get a bit moth-eaten looking.’

‘Don’t interrupt!’ said the old lady. ‘It is very rude to interrupt. Where was I? Yes – dark is kind when you are old. I can sit in the dark and *remember*. I remember my dear husband, and my children when they were small, and all the good times we had

together. I am never lonely in the dark.'

'I haven't much to remember, yet,' said Plop. 'I'm rather new, you see.'

'Dark is quiet, too,' said the old lady, looking hard at Plop. 'Dark is restful – unlike a little owl I know.'

'Me?' said Plop.

'You,' said the old lady. 'When I was a little girl, children were seen but not heard.'

'I'm not children,' said Plop. 'I'm a barn owl.'

'Same thing,' said the old lady. 'You remind me very much of my son William when he was about four. He had the same knackety knees.'

'Are my knees knackety?' asked Plop, squinting downwards. 'I can't see them. My tummy gets in the way.'

'Very,' said the old lady, 'but I expect they'll straighten out in time. William's did. Now, I'm going indoors to have a little rest.'

Plop was surprised. 'I thought it was only owls who slept in the daytime,' he said. 'Are you a night bird, too?'

The old lady smiled. 'No, just an old bird. A very tired old bird.'

'Goodbye, then. I'll go now,' said Plop. 'Thank you

for telling me about the dark.'

He fluttered up to the old lady's shoulder and nibbled her ear very gently.

The old lady was enchanted. 'An owl kiss!' she said. 'How very kind.'

Plop jumped down again and bobbed his funny little bow.

'Such charming manners!' said the old lady.

Then Plop took a little run, spread his wings, and flew up to the landing branch.

'Well?' said his mother.



‘Hear! Hear!’ he said.

Task – To write a summary of this chapter.

Remember – a summary pulls out the **most important things that have happened.**

‘The old lady says DARK IS KIND.’

‘And what do you think, Plop?’

‘I still do not like it AT ALL. Do you think my knees are knackety?’

‘Of course,’ said his mother. ‘All little barn owls have knackety knees.’

‘Oh, good,’ said Plop. ‘And what do you think the old lady said? She said children should be seen but not heard!’

Mr Barn Owl opened one sleepy eye.