



Of Owls



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Long before witches and wizards travelled by floo network, before the discovery of spells to apparate us about and before brooms had been made to fly, there lived a wizard named Aloicious. His long grey hair and crooked frame did little to hide his years, but Aloicious remained as spry as a doxy and his mind was as sharp as their bite. Anyone who ever met him knew that it would take more than his age, whatever that was exactly nobody really knew, to stop Aloicious from an adventure. He was often far from home discovering new lands, wandering about untouched forests, and cataloguing the flora and fauna he met along the way, both magical and muggle alike.

Nobody knew this quite like Tobias who had tried a number of times to convince his uncle to finally put his feet up once and for all, that he eventually gave up trying and decided to join him on his next adventure. No sooner had the words fallen out of Tobias' mouth, had Aloicious unrolled the map he carried with him and using the tip of his wand marked a long line of water bodies jutting north-east inland from the western coastline of what we now know as modern-day Scotland.

The two wizards took tea in the shade of a large oak tree that overlooked both of their small stone cottages, pouring over the hand drawn map that Aloicious had spent years making. Each adventure added more detail to the parchment, but it was no worse for wear. Bright blue lochs and rivers, rich green forests and grey rocky terrain painted the paper, golden lettering giving identity to the various places, and not a wrinkle among them. Rain clouds and sunny spots moved about across the paper indicating the weather on various parts of the map along their route.

There was little left to discuss by the time the sun began to make its way down through the trees along the horizon, other than when they would set out. Tobias pleaded with his uncle for a fortnight to prepare, but soon realized he might be better off arguing with a garden gnome. Before Aloicious could finish his own rebuttal, he returned to the map, a smirk upon his face. He tapped his finger along the base of three mountains. The gilded lettering illuminated to his touch and The Three Sisters sparkled off the page. Tobias considered the suggestion they meet at the base of the first sister in three weeks time. This would allow him the time he needed and would give Aloicious more time to explore along the way.

Together they would travel north along a line of lochs until they reached the last. A long narrow loch that is rumoured to be inhabited by a large prehistoric creature. Tobias didn't want to admit it, but he couldn't wait to leave either.

"One last thing, uncle. Can we agree on no pets this time?"

"Pets?"

"The dragon."

"Penelope? She followed me home, hardly a pet."

"Yes, Penelope. Who burned your cottage down? It took quite a bit of work to find her a new home far enough away so that she wouldn't come back.

"Oh, alright. No pets then if it will make you feel better.

They extended hands and Tobias pulled his uncle into an embrace before wishing him safe travels.

The glow of embers in the hearth cast a soft glow by which Aloicious rummaged through his violet woolen shoulder bag, making his final preparation before retiring for the night. He closed the leather lid and secured the straps but couldn't resolve the feeling that there was something he had overlooked, something he had forgotten to pack. This was all part of the same routine he had gone through before each and every journey. There was always something new to forget, but he always found a way to make do. As long as he had his purple patchwork cloak, his wand of ash and dragon scale core and of course his trusty maps, he would find his way.

Stirring sounds of songbirds and the squabbling of two garden gnomes fighting over a worm caught lying about the dewy grass beneath his window broke his slumber. Aloicious practically jumped out of his feather stuffed bed and stretched his arms towards to sky. His body creaked and cracked as if someone was trying to sneak their way up a flight of old wooden stairs. He threw on his cloak, passed his hand over his chest feeling for his wand tucked inside one of the inside pockets and swung the woolen bag over his head onto his shoulder. The

wizard stepped outside and grabbed the hand carved walking stick leaning next to the doorway before turning to look towards his nephew's home. The stone cottage, with its thatched roof and white wooden shutters much like that of his own, held sight nor sound of Tobias. He waved a hand goodbye knowing he would see him soon enough.

Luck had always favoured Aloicious and no sooner had he stopped to give into the rumblings from his stomach, did he secure passage west with three wizards passing by on horse and cart travelling to Glasgu. Aloicious knew this leg of the journey like the back of his hand, and he was happy to oblige a free ride with new friends. The four wizards passed the time trading tales of tidings that had not yet reached the southern lands where they called home. Aloicious spoke of the various creatures and beasts he had encountered on his travels, referring to his map as often as he could. He queried his companions on any rumours they had heard about this so-called monster of the loch which generated a heated debate. One wizard, a rather stout man who wore a green cape draped over his shoulders and spoke with a thick accent argued it was a water basilisk, while another, a tall wizard with long red hair and a narrow face had heard it was a Welsh Dragon. Aloicious had never heard of a Welsh Dragon taking to water but noted it in the book he kept in his cloak, nonetheless. The only thing they could seem to agree on was that it was green and not easily visible to Muggles.

The had climbed high overhead by the time the wizards had reached Glasgu, a small village nestled along the banks of the river Clota. The horses were tied off in a small clearing next the river that gave the wizards a clear view of the market that had begun to buzz about like a beehive. Tea and cakes were shared as stood along the edge of the river, the air filled with bird song and the splashing of water upon the rocks lining the shoreline. Aloicious was offered the remaining cakes and some salted meat once they had taken their fill, and his travelling partners accepted an invite to visit him in Eidyn on their return home in time for the harvest.

Pleasantries and goodbyes were exchanged and Aloicious was off on his journey once again. Light clouds began to cover much of the sky to his front, while a gentle breeze at his back nudged him forward, not that he needed any encouragement. Many years had passed since Aloicious last travelled this far west, the path was much different than he remembered it. What was once a cart

path big enough for horse and buggy cut into the dirt, was now twice as wide and covered in packed gravel stone. The fisherman and traders benefitted greatly from the improved route back and forth from the sea. Tall grass battled wildflowers for position along the sides of the pathway as it picked its way along the river just out of earshot from the water rushing out towards the sea. Birds whistled and tweeted their songs, but there was only one in particular Aloicious was interested in. The stout wizard in green had told Aloicious to keep an eye out, or rather his ears out for the Willowing Warblers that lived amongst the willow trees nestled along the riverbank.

Stopping to look back to see how far he had come, and to sample some of the deep red raspberries growing next to the roadway, Aloicious froze as he thought he had heard the distinct cooing of the Willowing Warbler coming from towards the riverbank. The wizard pulled his shoulder bag off over his head, careful not to make any sudden movements and placed it on the ground next to the raspberry bushes, but not before taking out his quill and the string bound Book of Beasts he kept to document the creatures he discovered on his travels. Aloicious was never quite fond of the title of his book as many of the so-called beasts he found weren't really beasts at all, but simply forest creatures without any magical qualities. Muggles referred to them as animals. With the tip of his wand, he tapped the spine thrice and it opened itself up to a blank page, while the quill jumped out of his hand and readied itself to take down any notes instructed by the wizard as they both floated along next to him, just close enough where he could read the print.

Creeping through the long grass towards the riverbank, he kept his eyes sharp for the source of the cooing as the book and quill followed him along. Standing on the edge of the river dipping its beak in to the water, he found his quarry, the willowing warbler. Aloicious spoke softly to the quill, and it jotted his words into the notebook. He noted its black beak, yellow eyes, and a bright plume of purple; much like the cloak that Aloicious wore. Looking further up the bank, protected by the canopy of a large willow tree, Aloicious noticed several bird nests he believed to be inhabited by the willowing warblers. He sat watching for some time as they came and went from their nests, chasing after insects and flying about without a care in the world. Their distinctive cooing sang along with the sounds of the river as it splashed along the shoreline and he closed his eyes to take it all in, and this made him smile. Having taken in the tranquility of the

moment, Aloicious made his back towards the cart-road, when his attention was grabbed by the sharp chirrup of a small owl standing in the path of his next footfall.

Heeding the screams from the owl, Aloicious stepped his foot wide, just missing the bird, as he clutched for the branches of a nearby tree to avoid his fall. After regaining his footing, he turned around to see the owl was safe, but noticed it held it's left wing at an odd angle.

"Oh my, what have we here? Did you fall out of a tree learning to fly little friend? Here, let me see what I can do about that wing." He spoke with soft words as he bent down to pick up the speckled brown owl who did little to resist the help offered to it.

The young bird fit in the palm of his hand, and it shivered only for a moment as Aloicious began to hum a soft melody that mothers often sang to young wizards and witches when they were in need of comfort. With his free hand he pointed his wand at the bird and a thin blue light shot out of the end and set the bird's wing back into place. The owl flapped its wings and hooted loudly, for which Aloicious took as a thank you. He patted the owl and began scanning the trees for signs of a nest but found himself stumped as to where the owl had come. The afternoon heat had begun to fade as he searched and concern for the safety of the young owl began to creep into the old wizard's mind. The forest floor was no place for an owl to spend the night, especially one who was all alone and who had not yet learned to fly. Determining he might have a better chance to reunite the young owl after night had fallen, Aloicious decided it best to set up camp for the night and he made his way back to retrieve his things left lying by the side of the road.

With the owl now perched on his shoulder, the wizard made his way back towards the river where he came across a small clearing not far from where he first found the once injured owl. The plot was up from the river just enough that he could barely hear water lapping against the shore and followed a treeline where one might spot an owl perched above, looking down along the grass for unsuspecting prey. He dropped the purple satchel at his feet, retreated a few steps and with a low arching swirl of his wand, the air popped and fizzled a rainbow stream of light as a tent shot out of the bag and set itself up; complete

with bed roll and a round wooden table and single chair stationed outside the yellow flap door. The commotion sent the owl jumping high in the air, flapping in a feathered flurry. Aloicious scrambled himself forward to cup the bird in both hands, avoiding it a second fall. He placed the owl on the table and set a fire to light with his wand before flopping himself down in the small wooden chair to catch his breath. Rummaging into his satchel, the wizard withdrew a chunk of sausage, a large roll, and a cast iron pan which he put down above the fire. The frying pan sizzled the sausage, floating just above the fire as if held up by flickering finger tips of red and orange flame. Next, he took out his map, quill, and a number of small leather-bound books, placing them on the table. The owl had used this time to scurry about feasting on insects escaping the heat but was quite happy to take a piece of roll and sausage when offered. Owls are carnivores after all, although its likely that sausage and roll was not part of their formal diet. As they ate, the old wizard took the time to tell the young owl all about his journey; of the wizards he met along the way and how he hoped to discover what really dwelled beneath the surface of the loch in the north. He marked his present whereabouts on the map as the owl watched with interest before opening his Magizooologists' Handbook which confirmed to him that his little owl friend was in fact a female tawny owl. He decided to call her Edina.

The morning mist began to dissipate from the long grass as the sun plodded its way up through the trees. Aloicious finished the last of his tea and scone before they had time to cool, keeping an eye open for any sign of mother owl. Edina ran about the treeline, satisfying her hunger on a meal of grubs she found hiding under an old, rotted log. With his belly full and his camping implements magically packed away, there was only one thing left to do and Aloicious was rather unclear what to about it. He was rather fond of animals and believed they had every right to enjoy the same freedoms he himself enjoyed. He stood firm in his belief that wild beasts and other animals didn't belong in cages or on display. Nature wasn't always fair, but who was he to take this owl from its home? He let out a deep breath, bending over to say goodbye to the little owl, patting her on the top of her brown feathered head before making his way back out towards the cart-road. He hadn't gone more than 3 steps before the owl began to chirp and cluck after him as fast as her little legs would carry. Aloicious turned around to see her running towards him, wings flailing as if to draw the wizard's attention. The old wizard beamed as he bent down to pick up his new feathered companion,

placing her in the front pocket of his cloak where she could see the journey ahead.

Tall green pine trees, lush thick grasses and the occasional hillock bursting with purple heather passed them by as the pair began to make their way north through the Caledonian forest. There was no shortage of lochs along the way, and little concern of having his water skins and teapot run dry. When he wasn't tracking the call of an unfamiliar beast, or bewildered by the beauty of some new flower, Aloicious kept himself occupied by telling Edina, who sat perched on his shoulder, or tucked into his cloak pocket, all about the places he had been and about a secret world of wizards; not that he thought Edina could tell the difference between a wizard and a muggle.

Edina began to test her wings, allowing Aloicious to lob her into the air so that she could practice her gliding and landing. Each night after tea, Aloicious took the time to update his maps as he reviewed his notes to ensure he captured each detail about the flora and fauna he had discovered that day. Edina could usually be found standing on the edge of the map, watching with interest as he worked. One night, as Aloicious was flipping through the pages of his bestiary, Edina began to click her beak as she jumped onto the open book, making a fuss with her wings. Aloicious sprang from his seat, heart racing, wand at the ready, fearing some beast had stalked them in the dark, when he noticed a red fox painted in water color on the page beneath Edina's feet.

"The fox! Gracious me, you poor thing." as he came to the realization that a fox had taken her mother and siblings. Aloicious quickly turned the page, picking up the little owl to comfort her shaking.

The two unlikely companions carried on their journey until a fortnight had passed and the old wizard and young tawny owl had finally arrived at their destination, not 4 days later than expected. Sitting in his wooden chair next to a small crackling fire sipping his tea, the old wizard craned his neck to take in the beauty of the Three Sisters. The view was too much to put into words. It's as if he had stepped into a painting. The mountain range of three towered high over head, casting their shadows nearly as far as the eye could see. Their base thick with green trees of pine, and each sister was topped with a grey rocky cap, that looked much like the wizard's cap Aloicious wore on his head. From the pitch of

his tent, Aloicious could see several unfamiliar plant species and could only wonder what sorts of beasts lay just outside of view. The tawny owl, who the wizard had since named Edina, hunted the ground for insects, running about in every which way as she gave chase to her prey. The air was filled with the babbles of a nearby brook, and the final calls from birds heading to their afternoon roost. This had been a day he would not soon forget and if that hadn't been enough, Edina hooted for the wizard's attention before jumping up into the air with a flurry of her wings and she flew two big circles around the pitch before landing on his shoulder to cheers and laughter from the old wizard.

The arrival of Tobias was not expected for a few days, and this would give Aloicious ample time to explore the surroundings of the Three Sisters. Aloicious dictated his findings and observations of the flora and fauna he discovered to his magical quill, leaving his hands free to gather berries and wild edibles for each night's tea and the next days breakfast. Edina took an overhead approach to exploration, making wider circles as they went, but never venturing too far out of sight. On one occasion Aloicious found himself rather thankful she had taken to flying when she did as she spotted a mountain troll ambling its way in his direction.

Attempting to capture the beauty of a large red flower with heart shaped petals in sketch, Aloicious had not expected to become entranced by the sweet protective pheromones that the flower produced when he got too close. His gaze was locked on the flower as he crouched frozen within arms length, swaying back and forth with the circling breeze. Soft hooting failed to break the enchantment as the troll continued its path straight towards the wizard. Not wanting to draw the troll's attention, Edina dropped low through the trees with all haste, extended her talons and ripped the head of the flower from it's stem. Now that his senses had come too, the stench of troll alerted the wizard of its position. He kept still and hoped the sound of his beating chest wouldn't give him away. Inch by inch he reached his hand into his robes and felt for his wand. The forest went silent. The mountain troll and its grey pock-marked skin and rats nest hair stood not ten feet behind the wizard, with only a few small trees and bushes separating them. The troll turned to look over its shoulder, but Aloicious was in no position to see what had drawn its attention. He held his wand, ready to react if needed, but hoped by chance to avoid any conflict. Trolls may not be the nicest of creatures, but that didn't mean it deserved to get attacked by someone who could very well be

trespassing in its home. The troll sucked a deep guttural draw of air into his large bulbous nose, scaring birds from their treetops. The wizard winced and suspected that any flying insect that had been too close had surely found its way up the troll's nostrils. The troll sniffed once more before turning his back towards the wizard and headed back towards the base of the first mountain. Off in the distance, feeding on the purple heather blanketing the glen between the first two Sisters, was a small herd of sheep that had appeared to catch the appetite of the troll.

The campfire smouldered, the last bits of smoke wisping their way towards the first few stars finding their spot in the late summer sky. The sounds of songbirds had stilled, and the air had not yet filled with the chirping of crickets or the jug-o-rum of the lonely bullfrog that called out each night for want of a companion. Tea in hand, and his belly stuffed with fresh baked biscuits and wild edibles foraged before his near encounter with the mountain troll, Aloicious flipped through his notes as Edina had gone out for an evening hunt.

A loud rumble, much like the sound of distant thunder broke the calm. The wizard set his gaze towards the sky, not a storm cloud to be seen amongst the twinkling stars. Whatever it was rumbled again, this time with greater force, as if a stack of wine barrels had been loosed within the cargo hold of a wooden ship. Aloicious looked down at his stomach as it rumbled a third time and nearly shook him from his seat.

The wizard set his tea cup down on the table and saw that his hands were now covered in large purple spots. Sweat broke from his brow, and he began to shiver violently as if he had been plucked from icy cold water. Hoping a sip of warm tea would help quell the feeling of intense cold and help to calm him, much of it splashed about the table before he could bring the cup to his mouth, only adding to the anxiety of the moment. His mind raced and his heart beat faster than the wings of a Cornish pixie. Closing his eyes, he forced himself to take a few deep breaths. The mushrooms he thought to himself as he opened his eyes and reached for his book on wild plants that was now covered with spilled tea, practically ripping the pages apart in search of the section on poisonous fungi.

One by one he scanned the pages, until at last until Aloicious saw a drawing of a mushroom much like ones he had eaten earlier that evening; a purple

mushroom with a thick short stalk of lavender with and a darker top that looked much like the purple nightcap he wore to bed. He had made a point of calling them Nightcap, and at the time remarked at how well they tasted. They seemed to taste more like regret now as he felt his stomach churn and fill with intense stabbing pain. He folded open the book in front of him and began to read despite the cold shaking pain that had taken over his body.

Common signs of violosa mushroom poisoning include purple spots on the skin, the feeling of intense cold and loud emanating rumbles as if one has a cast a thunder spell on one's self.

He breathed a little sigh, confident he had found what was causing the distress. Turning the page hoping to find a spell of some sort to cure his malady he continued.

The fast-acting poison of the violosa mushroom is easily remedied by the use of a bezoar. A bezoar being a stone found in the stomach of a goat and placed down the throat of the patient will neutralize the poison quickly and without further complication. Failure to do so will result in a timely and painful death. If a bezoar is not readily available, an elixir of honey grass, bluebell pollen and three drops of dragon's blood should be taken to slow the effects of the poison. A sleeping draught may also be given to the patient, so they may rest through the intense pain and shivers that would soon follow ingestion.

Aloicious forced himself up out of his seat, hobbling his way into the tent while trying to push back the waves of pain that came crashing upon him like an angry sea against the shore. Dumping the contents of his travelling bag on the ground, he rummaged through an endless supply of boxes and paper wrappings hoping to find a bezoar. He had known this whole time that he had forgotten something, and it was at this moment he remembered what it was. He had used his last bezoar in the weeks leading up to his departure and never got around to replenishing his stock. He fell back into a seated position, his vision blurred as tears began to pour down his face. Wave after wave of pain rolled across him, eventually knocking him over onto the floor. There he lay on his side, clutching his stomach as the pain consumed him.

“Get up you daft wizard, you've got to make this elixir!”

Scattered on the ground before him was a flask of sleeping draught and all the ingredients he needed to prepare the elixir described in his book. He grabbed a small silver cup and quickly mixed the elixir together, pouring it down his throat before he could think about gagging. This was no pumpkin juice and he shuddered with the taste it left in his mouth.

Knowing the sleeping draught would take affect immediately, he staggered over to the bed and placed the flask down next to his bedside, rather glad it was corked shut. The pain was relentless as it battered him like a whomping willow. His body, although quite hot to the touch felt as if he was slowly turning to ice. His bones ached and he shivered so hard that it took him three tries before he could complete the incantation to summon his paper and quill to take one last note.

To whom it may concern,

In my haste to fill an empty stomach, it appears I have mistakenly eaten some violosa mushrooms, and have no bezoar to save me from its effects. I have taken a sleeping draught to mask me from the pain, in hopes that I am found in time to be saved. My nephew Tobias of Eiydn was to met me here, but it would appear he has gotten lost along the way. I believe it to be September 28.

His hands shook as he folded the paper in three before sealing it with a mumbled incantation that left a sparse imprint of wax that looked very much like a skull and cross bones across the seam. The quill addressed the letter to Tobias of Eiydn before being dismissed with a final wave from the wizard whose head had begun to feel as if thunderstorm was raging within it.

Aloicious sat down on the bed as beads of sweat poured down his face, and he was greeted with a familiar sight as Edina swooped into the tent and landed on his shoulder as she often did. It was all he could do to keep his focus on her as the pain made it difficult to focus on anything else.

"My dear Edina. I am quite sure this is where our story ends. My foolishness has finally caught up with me. "

The small owl tilted her head from side to side as she watched him, tears streaming down his face. She butted her head against the side of his face.

"If only you could understand me, you could fly this this letter to someone who could help." The old wizard cracked a half smile at the thought as he looked upon his friend.

"Imagine that, Owls delivering letters to witches and wizards. What a silly old sod I've become. Clearly those mushrooms are driving me to madness. I'm not sure where Tobias ended up, I hope he is safe."

"You should go Edina. Fly away. You'll be happy living with your fellow owls. I couldn't have asked for a better travel partner, although I could use a little help from Tobias right about now. Goodbye my dear friend." His heart ached for her, patting her on the head one last time.

Aloicious picked up the letter and tucked it between his arm and chest in hopes someone would find him before it was too late. He took one last smile at his feathered friend, pulled the cork from the sleeping draught with his teeth and tipped it back into his mouth as best he could despite the uncontrollable shivering. The wizard went crashing backwards into his bedroll and lay dead to the world.

Before the break of dawn, Edina returned to the tent as she always had after a night of hunting. Aloicious lay silent and still as he had been when she left. She preened her feathers and eventually tucked herself into the crook of his neck before falling asleep. The sun had climbed high in the sky by the time Edina awoke. Again, Aloicious lay unmoving. She nipped at his ears, butted her head against his nose and stamped on his chest but could not seem to get a response from the old wizard. Edina rubbed her face against his cheek when the letter tucked between his body caught her eye. Tugging at the sealed parchment with her beak, she was able to loosen it free and it landed flat on his chest. The young owl tilted her head back and forth and she stood staring at the inked lines on the paper. Edina broke the silence with a determined hoot, before grabbing the envelope in her talons and with a rush of flapping wings, broke off into flight at full tilt out of the tent.

Edina flew towards Eidyndyn, the setting sun passing over her right wing. As Dusk gave way to darkness, a large yellow moon stationed itself high above the countryside as if to aid in the urgency of the situation. The young owl flew hard through the night, her wings cut through the air like the oars of a ship through water surging her onward. Forests and villages, rivers and lochs passed far beneath her as she pressed on through the night, the letter grasped firmly in her talons. Off in the horizon the night sky finally began to weaken, giving way to blues and violets that made to wash out the blackened veil.

With the first bits of day break painting a rich yellow on the tops of the trees before her, Edina caught a strong wind at her tail and stretching her wings out wide, allowed herself some respite as she scanned the ground below. As she came upon a grove of ancients, the tawny owl spotted a small outpost of wooden huts and stone cottages just beyond their growth. Dipping her wings, she began her descent towards a thatched cottage she felt drawing her attention. A single dwelling among many, whose chimney produced no smoke despite the cool morning air. Without a moment to spare, Edina broadened her wings behind her to land softly on the wooden sill. She clattered her beak on the glass with haste but failed to rouse any inhabitants. Encircling the cottage, Edina berated each window one by one but failed to gain the attention of anyone inside. The owl stood on the window sill looking down at the letter before turning her gaze off into the distance. She took off with a flash of feathers, the letter gripped tightly in her talons, as headed back in the direction from where she had come, allowing herself to be pulled slightly more east.

Edina felt the warmth of the full sun overhead sooth her aching muscles as she soared high above the ground, shifting between currents of air carrying her on. She welcomed the rest when she could take it, the cadence of her wings beginning to fall out of the rhythm that had carried her through much of the night. She had travelled quite a far distance in a relatively short period time, an unknown power pulling her towards a destination she did not know.

Magizoologists have learned much in the study of owls over the centuries and they all seem to find agreement that the Tawny Owl has the best eyesight out of any other owl, capable of seeing a garden gnome twitch its bulbous nose from a half mile away. This makes for an exceptional hunter whether the prey be a juicy grasshopper, a scurrying mouse or the wisping tails of smoke lingering

skyward from a recent cooking fire far below. Dropping her head low, Edina tucked her wings in close to her body and plunged towards the fire with the speed and focus of a Seeker chasing down the snitch. Her ears filled with the sounds of rushing air, but her concentration remained steadfast. With seconds to spare, the small owl fanned her wings wide as she pulled herself up to break her descent, screeching a warning and causing a young wizard who sat huddled next to the fire pit to practically jump out of his robes, clutching his heart as if to stop it from flying out of his chest. Edina landed with a light double hop and offered a quick greeting hoot as the young wizard broke into a raucous laughter at the spectacle.

Catching his breath, the wizard picked himself up and stepped in to take a closer look at his surprise visitor, noticing a bit of folded parchment on the ground next to her. Her large black eyes fixed upon him as he bent down to take a closer look.

"What is this? This is addressed to me, surely this is a ruse."

The owl clucked her beak as the wizard searched over his shoulders and into the trees around him for the perpetrator of the gag.

"Aloicious, is that you? You got me, you can come out now."

He received no answer, no return of laughter to concede his defeat. Nothing more than the rustle of leaves and the exchange of song birds singing.

"I must have dozed off and I'm stuck in a dream. You win. I might as well play along and see where this goes." he chuckled as he bent down to grab the letter off the ground.

"OUCH!" he yelled, jerking his hand out of the way before the tawny owl could nip it a second time. "OK, let me take a look at what you've got here, no more with the beak if you don't mind."

The owl hopped some space between her and the parchment so he could pick it up.

Tobias opened the letter, keeping one eye on the owl as if half expecting it to reveal itself as nothing more than a magical charm. The pain in his hand lend itself to the contrary. He mouthed the words as he read until he could no longer keep the pace.

"Oh, my word! You good little owl. I'm not sure if you can understand me, but can you take me to him? There still may be time." His heart raced in his chest as if it had taken off without him.

Edina clucked and chirped as she jumped up into the air, panic in her cries. Tobias flicked his wand wildly, directing the contents of his campsite into a small green satchel hanging on a nearby tree before throwing the bag over his shoulder.

Above the tree tops she flew, her brown feathers flashing between the breaks in the branches leading Tobias from below. Her hooting encouragement called to him like a siren song as they broke out of the thick green forest, the ground giving way to rocky outcrops along the base of a small hill. Huffing and puffing, legs burning, Tobias stopped for a moment to catch his breath before descending into a small valley, picking his way through several large rocks strewn across the ground as though they had been bowled there by giants from the top of the hillock. Tobias thought about his uncle, the fear of arriving too late only to find him dead began to sink in. He wiped the tears from his eyes, realizing he had lost sight of Edina. The world around him began to spin and he fell forward, just managing to keep his balance with the help of a well-placed stone. He turned himself about, scanning the skies for signs of his guide, when he heard her cries. He broke into a run before spotting her shoot out of a small woodlot not far below where he stood. Tobias traced her path as she circled back into the trees, spotting the brown and green patchwork tent he recognized as his uncles just inside the treeline.

Tobias wove his way in and out of the last of the thrown stones before long jumping a rather large clump of pickleberry bush. Grabbing for the clasp on his satchel, he began to toss the contents out one by one until he reached the tent and was left holding a bezoar. He hoped it wasn't too late for his uncle, but this bezoar nut was the only thing that could be used to draw the poison from his body. Breathing frantically, Tobias threw open the flap door and dove into the tent, practically landing on his uncles still and motionless body. Tobias grabbed his

uncle's hand and began to call to him, his voice rising to a shout as it failed to wake him. He closed his eyes and pressed his cheek against his forehead, feeling for any trace of warmth and life.

"He's still alive!"

Tobias leaped out of the tent with his wand held high, flames erupting from its tip setting the cold campfire ablaze. His uncle's kettle burned bright red and within seconds it began to shrill like the whistle atop the Hogwarts Express. With a flourish of his wand, Tobias instructed the steaming kettle to sit itself down upon the table next to where Edina stood. She watched the strangers every move, her eyes focussed on him with the same curiosity she gave Aloicious when he looked over his maps. Hunched over the table he began to shave small thin strips of the bezoar into the boiling water, pausing for a moment when he met the gaze of Edina watching him and wondered how much Aloicious had taught the young owl.

"Do you know what Hopping Honeysuckle is? It's a small red and yellow flower. It hops. I could use some for this tea."

Her big black eyes blinked back, and Tobias cracked a smile realizing he had just asked an owl if she could find him some flowers that hopped for a tea he was making. He wasn't quite sure what he had expected to happen, but when Edina clucked loudly and broke off into flight, he stood there gaping with his eyes as wide as tea saucers. No sooner had the last bits of bezoar been thrown into the kettle, did Edina return clutching the bright red and yellow flowers trying to hop their way out of her grasp.

Tobias held out his hand for Edina to drop her precious cargo and she returned to her spot on the table as if to await further instruction. He tore the heads off three flowers before they could escape and threw them into the kettle, watching as the last traces of steam began to swirl and thicken as it changed colors from white to pink to red. Tired and weary, Tobias didn't trust himself with the kettle and followed behind with his wand raised providing it with silent instruction. He picked up the empty cup lying next to his uncle and steadied himself as the kettle tipped itself over until the cup was full. Tobias tapped the top of the tea three times with the tip of his wand and the steam dissipated. The

kettle came crashing to the ground when Tobias dropped his wand when he reached over to lift the old wizard's head off the pillow. Tobias drew slow breaths as he tilted the cup towards his uncle's mouth, slowly pouring the entire cup down the throat of his dying uncle. He placed his head back down on the pillow and eyed Edina standing on Aloicious' chest watching over him.

Tobias patted the owl on her head, "We must wait now tiny friend, there is little we can do but hope. It has been a long day and I should think I will need to find some sleep before tomorrow arrives."

Edina curled herself up next to Aloicious while Tobias piled his cloak into a makeshift pillow and with a deep sigh, lied down on the floor next to his uncle.

Night passed without a stir from the tent and in time the sun began to peek its way inside the flap door that had hung open. The sounds of cracking bones, unhappy with having spent the night on a hard packed ground woke the owl, who remained tucked into Aloicious as she had the night before. Tobias knew the tea he had concocted was a long shot to reverse the effects of the poison, but what little hope he once held had vanished when his uncle had failed to waken through the night. He glanced down at the owl and wiped the sadness from his eyes that had begun to obscure his vision.

"I was too late. There is no way to bring him back. A bezoar works rather quickly and administered through a tea would reverse even the strongest poison with a few hours. I can't think his body will hold on much longer. I'm so sorry."

The young owl clicked her beak loud enough to wake the dead, ramming her head against Aloicious' face as if she was a little feathery battering ram. She clucked and hooted, stamped her feet on his chest and flapped her wings against his face. She would not relent. The pair had been together ever since Aloicious found her on the forest floor; broken winged and all alone. He mended her bones, taught her to fly, showed her the places on his map and seemingly taught her about the flowers of the forest. Tobias reached down to grab Edina before she hurt herself and found himself nearly jumping out of his shoes.

"Merlin's beard! What's with all the racket!" Aloicious shouted as he sat up, Edina clutching her claws into the front of his robes to save herself from getting tossed on the ground.

"I was having the most amazing dream, my nephew had..."

"Tobias?! Is that really you?"

"Edina! What is happening? Someone catch me up!"

Edina jumped up in the air and began to fly circles inside the small tent, hooting about and causing quite the raucous.

"Uncle, you're alive! I had feared I was too late."

"I'm here. A bit stiff, but the pain is gone, and my mind is clear. Thank you, my boy, you saved the life of a foolish old wizard. However did you find me?"

"I figured myself to be a day away from where we said we'd meet when I stopped for the night. I was steeping my morning tea when I heard a rather odd sound. Two large whooping noises followed by what sounded like a large whack", slamming his hands together to the delight of his uncle.

"A woolly strangay?"

"Yes, indeed! I packed the tent and started off after it. By midday I got all turned around and eventually remembered you telling me they will throw their voice to send a potential threat off into another direction."

"Magnificent creatures they are, did you manage to see it?"

I couldn't track where it had gone and by the time I decided to call off my search, I was lost and couldn't find my bearings. I spent the next two days wandering about mapping out where I had been until I found myself on the far side of the second Sister. It was getting late, so I set up camp for the night. The next morning as I sipped my tea, an owl came screeching down towards me from just over the tree tops, nearly scared me to death. She swooped in, dropping an envelop at my

feet. I thought I had gone mad. Lost in the middle of the forest, and an owl drops at bit of parchment at my feet that has my name on it. I still can't find the words or thought to make any sense of it.

"I read the letter and we were off no sooner that I had discovered what happened. She led me right to you. I prepared you a bezoar tea with added honey suckle that Edina went and picked when I asked her if she knew what it was.

"This is Edina. She had fallen from her nest as it were, wing broken and nobody to look after her. No sign of mom or any siblings, she was left all alone. I mended her and when I took my leave, she followed me as fast as her little legs could carry, so I sat her in the pocket of my cloak and off we went. She eventually learned to fly, and as we went, I showed her my maps and told her all about the places I had been and about the different flora and fauna along the way."

"It's lovely to meet you Edina, thank you for saving my uncles life. I am in your gratitude." Tobias told the owl.

"I saved your life, and you saved mine. We are in each others debt forever. That's how it works."

Edina leaned herself into his cheek, hooting soft whispers to the old wizard.

Aloicious squinted his eyes against the sun as he stepped outside the tent, feeling the warmth melt away the stiffness that had crept into his body. He reached his hands to the sky, stretching himself out before walking about the camp to get the blood flowing once again.

"I am no worse for wear, but I regret that I should see the healer before we write the next chapter in our adventure. We will take our time, but I have the strength in me for the return home. I have caught up on my sleep that's for certain." He said with a grin.

A week had passed, and the three travellers arrived safely back home to be greeted by a fellow wizard tending to his garden as the sun began to drop down over the trees.

Aloicious? Tobias? I wasn't expecting you home so soon. How was the adventure?

"I think it's fair to say we have quite the tale to tell, but it's getting late for such tales. Perhaps we can catch you up over morning tea." Aloicious replied.

"That owl!" He burst as Edina landed upon down upon Aloicious' shoulder.

"I've seen it before, carrying a letter of all things. Sat down on your sill Tobias, looked into each of the windows as if it was looking for someone. She left as quickly as she had arrived. I figured I had gotten too much sun. I was afraid to tell anyone what I had seen, but then again who would have believed me?"

Tobias and Aloicious exchanged looks; eyes wide, jaws dropped open and they both broke into laughter.

"On second thought, maybe we can have that tea now, its not as if I haven't gotten enough sleep. Talbot, this here is Edina."