

Chapter 6

The speckled heir bearing egg tumbled precariously downward, bouncing from needled bough to needled bough.

Just when it appeared as though the precious egg would tumble clear to the forest floor, pulling a classic *Humpty Dumpty*—definitely no king’s horses and king’s men to even try and put this heir bearing egg back together in this strange land—its plunge was halted by an especially stout branch.

Once its perilous downward decent was stopped, the large egg started rolling across the branch, much to the horror of a particularly plump and drab colored Pigeon, Joy-Layn, who was nearby minding the nest of Jon-Nay and Gyr-Trood, two local Owls.

Pigeons, as a rule, are not very bright, and Joy-Layn was certainly no exception. Beside herself with panic, she fluttered up to the teetering heir bearing egg, and not knowing what else to do, pushed it over towards the nest she was watching. When it was directly over the nest, she let it slide off the branch.

“There, the soft nest will cushion the fall so the egg won’t break,” she cooed out loud, then added smugly, “I’m so smart I sometimes amaze myself!”

Imagine her surprise when she heard the loud crack of the egg landing.

“Oh, my word!” exclaimed the simple-minded bird. “What in the world was that?”

Then she remembered her responsibility for today. Jon-Nay and Gyr-Trood—such nice Owls—had asked her to watch over the egg in their nest. The panic she had felt mere seconds before was nothing compared to what she was feeling now!

You see, Joy-Layn’s ill conceived plan failed to take into account her current charge, and the small pale Barn Owl egg was no match for the larger and much thicker shelled and speckled heir bearing Eagle egg.

With her little Pigeon heart pounding loudly in her chest, she dropped to the nest below, and when she looked inside, she fainted at the sight, as Pigeons are often prone to do. The great Eagle egg had crushed the doomed Owl egg.

Quite fortuitously, two bright black and white Magpies happened along and spied the distraught bird in her moment of distress.

“Is she dead?” asked Ba-Lee, in a high-pitched voice that betrayed his youth, as he cocked his head from side to side. “Should we sound the call? Seek re-enforcements?”

“Hush, you silly simpleton. She’s just fainted, that’s all. It happens all the time with Pigeons you know. Stout in body, but weak in heart and mind, those birds,” answered Fa-Nor, the senior Scavenger. “Let’s wake her up, it looks as though she may require our services after all. See the broken Owl egg? Messy business, that.”

“And messy business is our business, right boss?”

“Right-o laddie, our business indeed. Come now, you pick up the broken shell, and I’ll try to rouse the Pigeon.”

But try as he might, Fa-Nor couldn’t wake Joy-Layn. After numerous attempts, he finally gave the order to leave. Magpies never claimed to be patient Scavengers after all, and they had other business—messy business—to attend to. So broken pieces of shell held tight in their grasp, the two Magpies flew deeper into the forest of Darcatio.

Shortly after the Scavengers left, Joy-Layn awoke by herself. She got on her feet, and quickly straightened her ruffled feathers. Then she remembered what had happened.

“The Owl egg! Where is the broken egg?” she cried.

Though she looked as hard as she was able, the poor shattered Owl egg was nowhere to be seen in the nest.

“Maybe I just dozed off and had a bad dream,” she said out loud, to no one in particular.

Just in case her Pigeon eyes were playing tricks on her, she covered them with her stubby gray wings, and started to count out loud. “One, two, three, five, six, seven, nine, ten (she never seemed able to remember four and eight).”

After reaching ten, she uncovered her eyes and resurveyed the scene. Still only one egg, and although it *was* larger than she remembered, and she didn’t recall the egg having speckles, everything *surely* must be okay. And just in time too, because a loud “Who! Who! Who?” echoed outside the nest.

Jon-Nay and Gyr-Trood were home.

“We’re home Joy-Layn,” announced Jon-Nay as he landed on the edge of the carefully constructed nest, and spun his feathered head around to look behind him for Gyr-Trood.

Once again, Joy-Layn’s luck held. Jon-Nay and Gyr-Trood were mere Barn Owls, birds of prey to be sure, but not nearly so wise as the Great Horned Owls. For if they had been Great Horned Owls, Jon-Nay would surely have noticed that his mate’s egg had changed in their brief absence.

But as it was, neither he nor Gyr-Trood gave the egg a second glance.