


ODDRY

by

OBIE SCOTT WADE



Illustrations  
by  
MOAYOSHI RINO

*This book is dedicated to my beautiful sister,  
Kelly Deonne Winslow.  
May you always fly free as a bird  
and have true love in your nest.*

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## PROLOGUE

Red-tailed hawks build their nests on tall buildings all over New York City, but only one nest has a nine-year-old girl living in it. Her name is Oddry. Her parents, Ryden and Lila, named her that because, as hawks, they find sharing their home with a human a bit odd. But they wouldn't have it any other way. They love Oddry as if she were their own hatchling, and she knows it. She feels it. Theirs is a very warm and happy family. Every night they snuggle up together in the nest and talk and tell stories until they fall asleep.

Oddry's favorite story is the one about how they found her abandoned in Central Park when she was a newborn baby. She was frail and hungry, so they took her in, fed her, and taught her how to speak Hawk.

Besides her parents and the other wild animals in the city, nobody knows that Oddry lives in the nest. Located on the very top floor of a very tall apartment building on Central Park East, Oddry's nest is built snugly against the window of an old abandoned ballroom. Granted, many people claim to have seen Oddry out of the corner of their eyes here and there, and some have even made drawings of her. But no one can prove she is real.

Because of that, Oddry has become a world-famous urban legend called Bird Girl. It isn't a very fancy name, but she likes it. She is tickled by the fact that people everywhere talk about her, especially since she isn't even allowed to talk to them. Oddry has chatted with many wild animals throughout Central Park over the years, but she has never once spoken to another human. Secretly she wants to do so more than anything, but she's never told her parents that.

They forbid it, and she obeys. They don't trust humans at all, except for Oddry. Ryden and Lila strongly believe that if humans discover Oddry, she will be taken away, and they will lose her forever. Just the mere thought of that causes them to molt with worry, and Oddry hates that.

Little does Oddry know that she is about to meet her first human.

CHAPTER  
1

No one was sailing boats on Sailboat Lake that morning in Central Park—not that fall day anyway. It had been storming off and on all morning, and Central Park seemed almost empty. Most of the adults were busy rushing to cabs, while the kids scurried under colorful umbrellas on their way to school—all except for one kid that is: Oddry.

High above Central Park, curled up in the safe haven of her secret nest, Oddry slept. She was in the middle of a dream about collecting rocks on Mars when a boisterous thunderclap caused her to stir. But she still did not wake up. She simply nestled in deeper and went on dreaming...until a drop of rain landed on the tip of her nose, and she twitched. She licked it off and slowly opened her big, glacier-blue eyes. Giggling now instead

of sleeping, Oddry arched her back and wiggled her toes. She let out a big yawn and sat up, scratching her belly with her left hand. Then she scratched it with the special gadget she wore in place of a right hand. It was a peculiar-looking contraption made from rubber bands and springs, with Popsicle sticks for fingers. You see, Oddry had a left hand, but she was born without a right one. Instead, she invented mechanical attachments that she wore in place of a hand. She called them handables. She made them out of junk she collected all over the city. They allowed her to do extraordinary things. She had a lot of them, and she kept several in a seemingly bottomless satchel she always wore across her chest.

Oddry looked around and was surprised to find herself alone in the nest. “Huh. I wonder where my parents are,” she said to herself. Then it dawned on her. “Oh, I’ll bet they’re in the park, feastifying on a big, fat pigeon.”

She stuck her handable into her satchel and, with a *click-click*, switched to her custom-made binocular handable. Like a soldier on a mission, Oddry propped herself up on the rim of the nest and carefully scanned Central Park for her folks.

“Wow, these new lenses I installed are amazionic.” Everything was magnified perfectly. She saw raindrops making circles on the lake and blue jays catching worms in the windblown grass. But for the life of her, she could not locate her parents.

*I wonder if they’re in the ballroom*, she thought, poking her head through the open window next to her nest.

“Hello?” Oddry said to the abandoned ballroom that she called home. It looked like the inside of an antique jewelry box, and it smelled like old perfume and damp cedar.

“Well, they’re not in here,” she said, hopping into the ballroom and skipping across the creaky, old dance floor. Oddry whistled a little birdlike tune as she went... and then she laughed when the room echoed it back. She knew it would. This was her hangout: a delightfully spooky party room with chandeliers draped in cobwebs and cracked mirrors on the walls.

“Aha!” exclaimed Oddry. “I think I know where my parents are. I’ll bet they’re playing hide-and-seek in the skyscrapers, and I know just where to look.”

As if on a shopping spree, Oddry excitedly perused the selection of curious handables sitting on the old wooden bar. There were hundreds of these handmade devices, in various stages of completion, scattered throughout the ballroom. Since Oddry was the type of person to start one project and then abandon it for a completely different one, the ballroom was a total mess. The whole place was filled with piles of cool junk—everything from old bikes, batteries, and umbrellas to cell phones and eyeglasses. People lost all sorts of things in Central Park, and Oddry collected them for parts. She may have been a genius inventor, but she was a lousy housekeeper.

“Hmmm, I think I’ll need this one”—she grabbed a strange claw with wheels—“and these two.” She packed a pair of tiny, prickly balls made from forks. “Oh and, of





course, this one.” She carefully selected a very mysterious handable, made from sticks and umbrella skin. She stuck her choices into her satchel and then ran back over to the window.

She hopped into the nest, grabbed a little twig, and tossed it into the air. “*Squawk*,” she shouted excitedly as the twig twirled this way and that in the gusty breeze. “I guess I’m going where the wind takes me today,” she said like a true adventurer. With that, she stepped up to the edge of the nest, straightened her satchel across her chest, and then dove into the air with grace and ease. She was suspended in midair, five hundred feet above the ground, and then *pchoom!* She shot straight down like a bullet, headfirst, falling three stories, and then nine, and then fifteen. Oddry had practiced this radical stunt many times before, and she loved it so much that she screeched like a hawk.

“*Skreeeee-haaaaaaaaw!* Come on, gravity! Give me your best shot!”

Gravity did. Falling at over one hundred miles per hour, Oddry reached into her satchel and switched to a new handable, the mysterious one from the bar. Heading for a messy meeting with an unforgiving sidewalk, she activated it—*fwoomp*—and it expanded into a cool mini-hang glider that caught her fall.

“*Hoo-hooooo!*” Oddry laughed like a cuckoo bird as she caught an updraft and masterfully arced up and away, over the park.

*Oh, what a beautiful day,* Oddry thought as she glided over the trees, smiling and waving at some of the wild animals below. *Gosh, if I smile any harder, I'll need a bigger mouth.*

As Oddry veered right and flew over her building, she practically flew into her parents. They were gliding quietly above the alley behind their building.

Oddry screeched excitedly. "*Braaaaak!* There you are."

"Shhhhhh," said her mom, pointing at the massive moving truck wedged into the alley below. "Someone's moving into our building," whispered Lila.

Oddry cocked her head, like a bird, and looked down at the truck with one eye. Then she noticed the long black limousine parked *behind* the truck.

"Oh, no." Oddry got a lump in her throat. "The only empty apartment is the abandoned penthouse, just below my ballroom. And they're connected," Oddry said, feeling very concerned.

"They're not just connected, dear. They go together," said her mom, trying not to look *too* sad. "They're both part of the same place."

Oddry gasped and then felt something she'd never felt before...she began to worry.

Her dad glided up to her side like an exotic kite and gently stroked her cheek with his wing tip.

"Morning, chick."

"Morning, Dad."

"You know what this means, don't you?" Ryden asked Oddry, referring to the moving truck.

"Unfortunately, I do," she replied. "Let me fly down and check out the situation. OK?"

"No," said Ryden. "We cannot risk them seeing you."

"They won't," said Oddry. "I promise."

Before Ryden could stop her, Oddry dove into the alley, like a bird after its prey. As she descended, she saw herself reflected in big rain puddles in the alley.

*Hey,* she said to herself. *Looks like we're in for quite a bizzarrio day.*

In a flash, she passed all the fire escapes and then stuck a perfect landing and hid behind a row of garbage cans. Besides her parents, nobody saw her.

Oddry sat quietly for a second. "Why today?" she whispered to herself. "Why, after all these years, does somebody have to move into that silly penthouse?"

She switched to her binocular handable, like a superspy.

"All right, let's see what we've got here," she said, peeking out at the people in the limo.

*What the—?* Oddry was so surprised by what she saw that her eyes almost bugged out through the end of her binoculars.



CHAPTER  
2

*He doesn't look very happy at all.* Oddry peered at the eleven-year-old boy sitting in the backseat of the limo. *I wonder what's wrong with him.*

The boy, who had soulful brown eyes, appeared to be lost in a daydream as he shared the backseat of the limo with a man and a woman who were apparently quite wealthy.

*They're probably his parents,* Oddry thought, spying on the man.

Dressed in a very fine suit and tie, the man emerged from the limo with the confidence of someone who had done so a million times. Like a nice boss, he began speaking with the men from the moving truck. "There's



a nice tip in the deal if you don't damage anything," he said to the movers, who gladly accepted the challenge.

With her powerful lenses, Oddry zoomed in on the boy's freckly face as he started to get out of the car. *I like his hoodie*, she thought. *It's got a bird on it. That's a good sign.*

Suddenly, the woman punched him in the back, right between the shoulder blades, and hissed, "Where do you think you're going, stupid?" Then she jerked him back into the car by his hair.

"Ow!" the boy whimpered, rubbing his head.

The man from the limo did not see or hear any of this drama, but Oddry did, and she gasped.

"I asked you a question, Will. Where do you think you're going?" demanded the woman.

"I...I just wanted to look around," Will said nervously.

"Well, don't!" the woman snapped condescendingly. "It's wet out there, and I don't want you tracking mud in the car."

"OK," said Will timidly.

"OK, what?" demanded the woman.

"OK, Cheryl," Will said nervously.

Oddry barely had time to feel bad for Will before one of the fatter, jollier movers stumbled her way. He was balancing a stack of empty junk-food containers from breakfast.

*Uh-oh. I'd better get out of here clickety-split.* In a snap, Oddry switched to her battery-powered screwdriver handable and quickly removed a metal grate from the side of her building, revealing an open air shaft. She hopped into it and disappeared, but not before the mover caught a glimpse of her. His jaw dropped, and so did his tower of trash, spilling all over the ground.

CHAPTER  
3

The palatial penthouse apartment had been abandoned for over seventy years, and the whole place had the quiet stillness that only a layer of dust or snow could provide. It was filled with antique furniture that had been covered with white sheets that made the furniture look like ghosts. The apartment was so expansive it took up the two top floors of the building. The top floor was the secret ballroom, a smaller floor that sat on top of the apartment like a delicious cherry on a huge cake. The apartment was so fancy it had eight bedrooms, four bathrooms, and its own library, just like the kind seen in castles. The walls of the library were massive wooden bookcases with images of snakes and angels carved into them.

Suddenly, the big secret door in one of the bookcases creaked open, revealing the grand marble staircase that led up to the ballroom. On those stairs, Oddry hid in a convenient shadow. Holding the only known key to the bookcase, she peeked out and looked around to make sure the coast was clear.

*Maybe these people don't even know about the ballroom, and everything's gonna be just screechy keen,* she thought, closing the bookcase behind her. They have plenty of room in this old place. *They don't need the ballroom, too.*

*Click.* She locked the bookcase tight. *There. Hopefully it'll stay locked forever. Now to make my exit.*

Oddry crept out of the library and into the foyer, an area so roomy and elegant it boasted its own chandelier. *Should I slip out through a heater vent? Or zip out through one of the bathroom windows? Hmmm. I'll do the window.*

Oddry had veered left, down a hallway when—*swish*—Will came bursting in through the front door and saw her. He jerked to a halt. Their eyes locked. Oddry's heart skipped a beat. She was suddenly face-to-face with another human, and she was freaking out.

*"Bagoock!"* she squealed and darted down the hallway.



Will ran over to the hallway just in time to see her dash into the bathroom and close the door. He pushed up his sleeves and took off after her, but didn't get very

far because Cheryl grabbed his right forearm and held him back, her hand closing like a hateful clamp.

"We don't run in the house. Do we, Will?" she sneered through gritted teeth, digging her long, manicured fingernails into his forearm.

"Ow, Cheryl. Stop, please. That hurts." Will pulled his arm away and rubbed the sore spot.

"Don't you pull away from me." Cheryl had raised her hand to slap Will when his dad walked into the apartment. She turned the slap into a pat on Will's cheek and said in an overly sweet, singsongy voice, "Isn't this place lovely, Will?" She was only mean to Will when his dad wasn't around. She was a good actress. In fact, at one time, Cheryl had been a professional actress. She was tall and slender and had an attractive, turned-up face, like a devious-looking forty-year-old rabbit with a chic helmet of hair and big white teeth. She'd had *some* success with acting, bit parts here and there, but ultimately she didn't amount to much, and Will knew she was still bitter about it.

"Dad, I saw someone run down the hall and into the bathroom! Like a homeless girl or something! It was weird."

"Uhhhhh, OK," said Victor, Will's dad. "Are you sure you're not imagining things again, son? You have a very healthy imagination, and that's a good thing, but—"

“No, I promise. You have to believe me!” Will begged. “She’s in the bathroom. Come with me. Hurry!” Will ran to the bathroom as fast as he could.



Inside the bathroom, Oddry frantically searched her satchel for a specific handable and pulled one out that was a cross between a boxing glove and a buzz saw. *Oh, screech*, Oddry thought. *That’s definitely not the right one.* She reached into her satchel again, this time digging so deep it looked like her satchel was going to swallow her.

She heard footsteps running down the hall. *Oh no, it’s him.* Then she saw his shadow lurking under the door, and the hair on the back of her neck stood up. It was at that instant that she finally found the exact handable she was looking for. *Aha.*

As Oddry stepped up to the window and opened it, she suddenly felt like everything was happening in slow motion, like an underwater ballet.



Will burst into the bathroom just as Oddry activated her battery-powered propeller handable. It fired up and lifted her out the window with the impossible grace and lumbering speed of a bumblebee. Will saw everything. “No way,” he whispered. His eyes got so big that he could actually feel the wind from Oddry’s propeller

blowing across them. He dashed over to the window to see where Oddry went, but she had vanished. “Hello?” he desperately called into thin air.

Of course, Victor and Cheryl, who entered the bathroom three seconds after Will did, saw nothing except a troubled eleven-year-old looking crazy.

“She flew out the window,” Will shouted. “I know it sounds crazy, but she did. You have to believe me. There was somebody in here. I swear! But she just flew out the window!” Will suddenly realized how silly he sounded. “Please, Dad, you have to believe me. I’m not crazy.”

Victor didn’t *quite* know what to say. “Will, I believe that *you* believe you saw something, and that’s all that matters to me.” Victor hugged his son and patted his head. “It’s all right. This is a new place, and we’re all a little stressed out from the move.” Then Victor noticed the red claw marks on Will’s arm. “What happened to your arm, son?”

Will took a deep breath and was about to tell on Cheryl for hurting him when he noticed her glaring at him, secretly threatening him with those cold, gray eyes of hers. He became too scared to tell.

“Oh, I... fell down,” Will lied, looking at the floor.

CHAPTER  
4

Will's right eye was twitching from stress, as it often did. *What a weird day. I really need a drink of water*, he thought, heading into the kitchen. He grabbed a glass and said hello to the friendly women who had been hired to unpack all the dishes and clean the apartment. They all said hello back, and Will liked them right away. He enjoyed having a lot of people in their new home. He imagined they were all part of the big, happy family he'd always dreamed of having. He fantasized that the old kitchen, with its pink metal cabinets and white tile counters, was their ice-cream parlor, an old family business they ran together.

That's when he noticed an odd cabinet all by itself on one wall. He walked over to it for a better look. *That's weird*, he thought. *It's not at all like the rest of the cabinets.*



All of the other cabinets stuck out from the wall, but this one was built *into* the wall and had a small, diamond-shaped window in the middle of its door.

“Looks like you found the dumbwaiter,” said an older, plumper cleaning woman named Helena.

“Who are you calling dumb?” asked Will, and all the ladies laughed.

“No. That’s the dumbwaiter.” Helena giggled, sliding open the door to reveal a small wooden cabinet filled with cobwebs. “See? You put food in there and pull that chain or push that button, and it goes up, like a mini elevator.”

Will didn’t believe it. “Up? Up where? This is the penthouse. We’re supposed to be on the top floor. Right?”

Helena looked him up and down. “Well, I don’t know, toots. It’s your house. You tell me.” The other ladies laughed at Helena’s sassiness.

Will looked confused. *Wow, I don’t know what’s weirder—a food elevator that goes to nowhere or being called toots.*

Helena closed the dumbwaiter door, and then she closed a second door that hid the dumbwaiter. When that second door was closed, it looked just like the wall.

Will looked up at the plaster ceiling. *Hmmm, he thought. I wonder what’s up there. This is a total mystery, and I don’t like mysteries. I’m going to get to the bottom of it*

*though. Or, in this case, the top of it.* Will chuckled at his little joke then set out to find his dad. *He needs to see this.*

The penthouse had belonged to Will’s grandparents before they passed away, and his dad had just inherited it two weeks ago. Before that, they didn’t even know it existed. This was the first time any of them had ever seen the place, so they actually *didn’t* know about the ballroom. For some unknown reason, Will’s grandparents had closed up the penthouse decades ago and left it to sit. This was long before Victor was even born.

Will walked down one of the long hallways in search of his dad but, of course, got a little lost. He asked one of the movers for directions to the master bedroom and finally found it. Will paused at the door. It was open a little, and he could hear his father and Cheryl arguing on the other side. Cheryl was yelling at Victor, having a fit about which interior decorator they needed to hire. She was being verbally abusive, and Will wanted it to stop immediately. *My dad does not deserve to be spoken to that way*, he thought. So he charged into the room, jumped on the bed like a trampoline, and shot through the air like a ninja, delivering a karate kick to Cheryl’s neck. “Hiyah!” he shouted. The blow knocked her out, and she crumpled to the floor. “There! Take that!” he yelled.

Then he realized that he’d only imagined doing all that, and he was still standing outside the door, trembling in anger. Feeling powerless, he slumped away unseen and found his new bedroom.

For the most part, his room was all set up. His bed was there. Two cleaning women were unpacking his clothes and filling his dresser. When one of them began unpacking his underwear, he excused them. “Oh, thank you for everything, but that’ll be all. I can do that,” he called out, letting them go and closing the door behind them.

As Will put his clothes away, Central Park caught his eye *and* his imagination. He gazed out the window at it. It was a perfectly rectangular forest with tall buildings standing at attention all around it—such an odd place, right there in the middle of a city, on an island. It was the first time Will had ever lived on an island. He’d actually never been to a forest before, either. As leaves fell from some of the trees, Will started fantasizing about the tree house he could build in the park, someplace where he could get away from Cheryl.

Suddenly, something squeaked. The light fixture dangling from Will’s bedroom ceiling began to sway back and forth, all on its own.

Will was spooked, like someone seeing a ghost. *Whoa-kay then. What in the world?*

The light fixture swung faster and squeaked more violently. Will flinched, as if it was going to fly off and hit him. *All right, that’s it. I have got to see what’s on top of us.* He grabbed his coat. *If I go over to the park and look back at the building, I should be able to get a clear view of what’s*

*up there. That old dumbwaiter has to go someplace, and I’m going to find out where.*

On a mission, Will put on his coat. He threw open his bedroom door and practically ran into Cheryl. “Where do you think you’re going?” she asked in a condescending tone that sent shivers up Will’s spine.

“Uhhhh...” Will stammered. His eyes darted furtively around the hall.

“You look like you’re up to no good, Will.” Cheryl smirked. “What’s going on in here?” She poked her nose into his bedroom, and he *hated* that.

He did not want Cheryl in his room, so he closed the door partway before she noticed the swinging light fixture. He simply said, “Nothing. Bye.” He closed the door the rest of the way, stood against it, sighed in relief, and had trouble taking deep breaths. *Uggh, she makes me sick. I feel like I might throw up.* He swallowed his spit and flopped onto his bed, where he just lay, staring up at the ceiling. Until...

*That’s weird. The light fixture isn’t moving anymore.* He stared at it. *It really was moving before, wasn’t it? I mean I saw it, and I could actually hear it squeaking. Right? Or did I just imagine it?* He moaned. *I really don’t know anymore. Whatever. I just want to rest.*

Will closed his weary eyes, and it wasn’t too long before he gently drifted off into dreamland. As usual, his pleasant dream about finding a best friend turned into a nightmare about a giant fire-breathing dragon

with Cheryl's hateful head on it. "NO!" Will yelled as the hideous beast chased him through a strange and rocky desert landscape, lunging at him, shooting fire at his behind. "Stop! Please! Leave me alone!" The merciless serpent chased him toward the edge of a very steep cliff, high above a valley filled with razor-sharp swords, all pointing up. As Will reached the edge of the cliff, he slid to a stop and turned to face the dragon. He raised a fist to confront it but found he could not speak. He felt his face in desperation and was mortified to find that his mouth had disappeared completely. But the dragon had a mouth, a great big one. It smiled cockily and cackled like Cheryl as it approached. "Well, well, well...it looks like this is the end, you little cockroach."

Will had instinctively picked up a rock and was about to throw it at the dragon, when she blew him over the edge of the cliff with an explosive burst of flames.

As Will plummeted toward the spiky swords below, he could actually hear them calling hungrily to him, waiting for him. He tried to scream, but because his mouth was missing, he couldn't even make a sound, which made it worse. All seemed lost.

Seconds away from being impaled, Will jerked awake, gasping in anguish. "Oh my God," he panted frantically, touching his face. "Phew, thank goodness my mouth is back." Wide-eyed, he looked around his room. It was dark. Hours had passed. Besides the light of the full moon peeking in through his bedroom window, the only light that Will saw came from his alarm clock. "What? Uh-uh. It's almost midnight?"

CHAPTER  
5

As Victor and Cheryl (in her human form) slept, Will snuck past their bedroom, being extra careful not to wake them. He tiptoed through the darkened apartment, past the library and the solarium, through the foyer, and then past the dining room and into the kitchen. *I'd better leave the light off*, he surmised, heading for the door that looked like the wall. He clicked it open and stared at the dumbwaiter door. *All night, I've imagined taking you for a ride, but you're a lot creepier than I thought...* He opened the dumbwaiter door, and a dusty, old breeze slithered out and coiled around him. *Brrrrr. That's gross.* He got scared. *Maybe I should just forget about all this and go back to bed before Cheryl wakes up and kills me.*

He turned to leave but then stopped when he heard something especially unsettling – tiny footsteps

overhead. *What the—?* It sounded as if someone was running on the roof. *All right, that's it. Let's get this over with.*

Will's fear was shoved aside by his curiosity. He crawled inside the dirty, old dumbwaiter. Cobwebs clung to his face. "Pffffff." He blew them off his lips. The little food elevator was just large enough for him to sit inside with his knees folded tightly against his chest. "Uhhhh," he grunted, imagining he was a contortionist in the circus.

"Good-bye, kitchen," he said as he closed both doors. *Whoa. It's pitch black in here. OK, where's that stupid chain?* He felt around for it, located it, and then slowly heaved himself up the shaft by pulling on it.

In no time, Will was up inside the wall, trying his best not to freak out. *What if I get stuck in here?* he thought, a bead of sweat forming on his upper lip. *I could die, and nobody would know it...until I started to reek.*

He pulled harder on the chain and suddenly rose to a door with a little window in it that matched the one in the kitchen.

The dumbwaiter bumped to a dead stop, and Will hit his head on the ceiling. "Ow." He rubbed his head and peered through the window. He couldn't see anything at first. Except for a few stray peels of moonlight creeping in through tattered curtains, the room was completely dark. Will's eyes were working so hard adjusting to the dark, he thought he could *hear* his pupils

dilating—*fwweep*—and suddenly there it was, directly in front of him: a secret ballroom, coming into focus like a mirage.

"Whoa...this place is amazing."

Will carefully stepped from the dumbwaiter and drifted into the dreamlike haze of the ballroom. *It's like a glitzy carnival fun house in here,* he thought, seeing his reflection distorted in cracked mirrors. *Where am I?*

Tiptoeing across the old wooden dance floor, he stepped on a creaky board and froze. His mouth went dry from nerves, and then he stepped deeper into the shadow-filled room... and right into a bear trap. *Snap.* It bit his right leg really hard. "Ow!" he yelled and fell down. "Oh my God, get it off!" He was pulling at the trap, jerking on it when... *Wait a minute,* he realized. *This isn't actually a bear trap.* He pulled the contraption off his leg and held it up with two fingers to examine it in the moonlight, scrunching his nose as if it stunk. *This is weird. It's part claw and part pulley system. Could it be some sort of whacked-out zip-lining tool?*

"Put that down!" screamed a voice from the darkness.

Will was so spooked that he dropped the device and stood up to see who was yelling, only to be blinded by a bright flash of light. He stumbled backward. He couldn't see anything now, except a bunch of big, blue spots floating in the air, and he started to panic. He clawed his way through the dark, in search of the dumbwaiter, almost in tears.

Will started hyperventilating, gasping for air, until his poor heart pounded so fast that he passed out and fell face-first onto the dance floor. *Thud-ump.*

Where his grandparents had gracefully waltzed many years ago, Will now lay unconscious, drooling spit bubbles and inhaling dust.

CHAPTER  
6

When Will awoke in the ballroom, he found himself face-to-face with two screeching birds of prey with big, bulging golden eyes and supersharp beaks.

Horrified, he tried to scoot away, until he realized that he was tied up with a rope and *couldn't* move. *Oh my God! Am I having another nightmare?*

“How long are you going to live here?” inquired a quirky girl, stepping from the shadows.

Will was terrified, but he recognized her. “It’s you... from the bathroom. Who are you? And what are these birds doing up here? Are they gonna hurt me?”

Oddry raised her right eyebrow. “They might, if I let ‘em.”





Will started screaming, “Dad! I’m up here! Help!”

Oddry laughed. “Ha. They can’t hear you, silly. Don’t bother.”

Will struggled. “Let me go! Now!”

Oddry thought about it. *Should I let him go? No, probably not. But what am I going to do with him? He already knows I’m here. I can’t keep him tied up forever. And, you know, for some weird reason, I feel a connection to this kid. I can’t explain it, but I do.* “All right. I’ll let you go,” Oddry said.

“Seriously?” Will asked, shaking his head in surprise.

“Yes. But you have to promise me one thing first.”

“Well, I’m not really in any position to negotiate, am I? What is it? What do you want from me?”

Oddry got right in his face and stated very firmly, “You can’t tell anybody about me. Understand? Nobody. Got it?”

The hawks pecked at Will in anger. Will yelled and flinched. His voice quivered as he said, “OK. I promise I won’t!”

With that, Oddry softened. She didn’t want to scare Will, but this was really important to her. He had to keep her secret.

“These are my parents, Ryden and Lila. We live in that nest right there, and it cannot be disturbed.” Oddry pointed at the nest on the ledge.

Will was dumb struck. He looked at the nest, then at Oddry, and then at her parents—and it slowly dawned on him. *I'm being held captive by none other than the world-famous Bird Girl. I've seen drawings of her on the Internet. That's her.* He suddenly had a million questions. He tried to speak but could only stammer. “Uh...uh...uh...” Then he saw Oddry's propeller handable and stared at it.

Oddry noticed, so she stuck it right in his face and asked, “You lookin' at this?”

“I...well...no...um...” As Will fumbled for words, Oddry pulled off her handable and revealed her stump.

“I make these things out of junk. They're fun.”

“Oh,” Will marveled. “Is that what you used to fly out of the bathroom?”

“Yep. And thank goodness your parents didn't see me.”

Will rolled his eyes. “No, they think I made you up.”

“Good. Let's keep it that way. My name's Oddry.”

“I'm Will.”

“I know. Why is your mom so mean?”

Will corrected her. “Stepmom.”

Oddry was confused. “Stepmom? What's a stepmom? A mom you step on?”

Will snorted. “I wish.”

“Where's your real mom?”

Will suddenly looked sad. “She, uh...”

As Will fumbled for the right words, his eyes welled with tears, and Oddry sensed that perhaps the worst had happened. “Oh...did she die?”

Will nodded, and a tear rolled down his right cheek. “She was murdered.”

“Oh, no.” Oddry was horrified. “That's awful. How did it happen? What was her name?”

“Her name is Nora— I mean, it *was* Nora. And we don't know what happened. They never caught the person who did it.”

Lila eyed Will closely. He recoiled. “Are they going to hurt me?”

“No. They're not.” Oddry squawked to her parents, and they returned to their nest. Will's mind was blown.

“You can communicate with them?”

“Well, yeah. They're my parents. I've known them my whole life. You're the first human being I've ever talked to.”

“Ever?” Will asked. “Wow. Well, then, how do you know English?”

“From watching TV through apartment windows. I listen. I learn. I watch *Sesame Street*.”

“Oh.” That made sense to Will, and he thought it was really cool. “So, like, where are you from? How did you get here? I mean, how long have you been living here?”

“Pfft. I don’t know,” Oddry said, shrugging.

“What was that thing you blinded me with?”

“Oh, that was just my old Polaroid camera.” Oddry pointed to it, sitting on the bar. “It’s an antique. I found it in the park. Would you like me to untie you now?” she asked politely.

“No, I’d prefer you leave me this way all night,” Will said sarcastically.

“Suit yourself,” Oddry said as she turned and walked away. Will was shocked. But then Oddry turned back, and Will knew she was kidding. The two chuckled, and the tension between them began to melt.

CHAPTER  
7

Oddry felt for Will as she listened intently to his life story. It was one of privilege and pain. His dad was a billionaire who didn’t have to work a normal job. His time was spent managing their vast wealth. He could afford to buy anything. He just couldn’t buy Will happiness. “I was six when my mom died. Then two years later, my dad married Cheryl. The troll.”

“Why is she so mean to you?” asked Oddry.

“Well, she was nice at first. Really nice. Until about a year ago, when my dad told her that most of his money would go to me when he dies, instead of her, and then she started hitting me and pinching and shoving me all the time. Slapping me. But only when he’s not looking.”

“Yikes,” said Oddry in disgust. “Have you told your dad?”

“No,” sighed Will. “Not yet. How can I? She’s always watching me, and she never lets me go anywhere or do anything. I’m not even allowed to go to school. Instead I have to study through a stupid online homeschooling course. Then I was torn from San Francisco and moved to a new place in a new city where I have zero friends. I don’t mean to complain, but—”

“No,” Oddry interrupted. “It’s interesting. I’m the one who grew up in a nest, but you’re the one with a weird home.”

Will agreed. “Being around humans isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, Oddry.”

She hopped up. “You know what you need?”

“Antidepressants?” joked Will.

“I don’t know what that is, but no. You just need a little adventure!”

“Right now?” Will was surprised. He looked at his watch. “But it’s after midnight.”

“Exactly, it’s the beginning of a new day. I’ll show you around the city. Come on!”

Will scoffed, “What kind of adventure can you have in the middle of the night?”

“Well, here, let me show you, silly.” Oddry laughed as she kicked open the giant heater grate in the ball-room floor.

Will peered into a seemingly bottomless vertical shaft that was so large it howled with its own wind. “Is that the main heater shaft for the whole building?”

“Leads straight down,” Oddry said, switching to a new handable that looked like a metal artichoke. “Instant elevator.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Will. “It looks kind of—”

Before Will could finish, Oddry grabbed him and yelled “Jump!” causing them both to jump feetfirst into the shaft. They dropped like a pair of conjoined bowling balls straight down the massive heater duct. Will clung to Oddry’s side with his eyes closed, screaming at the top of his lungs.

Oddry confidently raised her right arm over her head and activated her handable. It expanded and sprouted rubber wheels that instantly gripped the inner walls of the metal tube, like roller-coaster brakes. *Errrrt!* Now they were traveling down the shaft in a controlled manner, passing other ducts that led to apartments.

Will opened his eyes and looked around. “Oh, good, we’re alive.”

“You have a good scream,” Oddry told him, and somehow he knew she meant that as a true compliment.

“Thanks,” he said.

Will noticed he could hear people talking inside some of the apartments through their vents, and he instantly felt like a superspy on a mission to take out a band of terrorists. He imagined him and Oddry bravely infiltrating the enemy’s headquarters and defeating them with his karate skills and her handables. For the first time in a long time, Will felt powerful.

Oddry pretended to be an elevator operator as they descended. “Twelfth floor. Dr. Mitroff lives in 12-J. 11-B: Amy and Gary Uyemura. 10-F: the Wegner family. Oh, and 9-H,” Oddry said in an especially loving tone. “None other than Miss DiGloria Cain.”

“Who?”

“Shhh.” Oddry crept quietly past the vent so they could listen. Fortunately Miss DiGloria was up, singing an old hymn. It echoed through the heater shaft like in a concert hall.

Oddry swooned. “Isn’t that the prettiest voice you’ve ever heard?”

“Yeah, actually, it is. Almost like a—”

“Bird?” Oddry interrupted.

“Totally,” Will agreed. “Why is she up so late?”

“She’s not,” replied Oddry. “She’s actually up early. She’s a schoolteacher who’s getting her master’s degree, so she hardly ever sleeps.”

Then Oddry retracted her brakes, and the two of them fell down the heater shaft. Will yelled all the way down, while Oddry switched to her propeller handable and turned it on.



Several people in the building, including Miss DiGloria, heard Will’s yell coming from their heater vents. But, by the time they went to their vents for a closer listen, the mysterious yelling had stopped.



CHAPTER

8

In the alley, Will and Oddry came shooting out of the grate on the wall behind the garbage cans. They were about to crash into them when Oddry angled her propeller handable, and they shot straight up into the air, zooming five stories, and then ten, and then twenty.

“Don’t look down,” Oddry told Will.

He did anyway. The view of the alley dropping away and growing smaller made him feel a little queasy, yet giddy, with excitement. *Whoa. This is unbelievable. I’ve been wishing I could fly away from Cheryl, and here I go. But is this real? Am I imagining this?* A bug flew into his mouth, and he spit it out. “Pffft. Yuck.” *Yep, it’s real all right.*

He called out to Oddry, "I sure hope you know how to fly that thing!"

Oddry smiled proudly. "Hello? I was raised by hawks, remember?"

By the light of the full moon, they flew up and over the building and then across the street toward Central Park.

"This is totally unreal." Will noticed the lanes of traffic below. "I can't believe nobody sees us up here."

Oddry agreed, "Yeah, it's weirdo, huh? Thanks to cell phones, people don't look up anymore."

Oddry caused them to descend over the Ramble into a secluded wilderness area of the park where humans never went. They traveled down through the tall trees, passing giant boulders and skimming the tops of billowy bushes. There was a clearing in the brush. Oddry aimed for it and brought them in for a perfect landing. They touched down like a helicopter, her propeller kicking up dust and leaves.

"Nice landing." Will was impressed.

"Why, thank you." Oddry blushed.

But when Will realized that they were in a completely rural area of the park where he could no longer see the city, he began to panic. This wild setting was completely foreign to him. Will had never been outside

a city before, and suddenly being dropped into the wild was really frightening for the first timer.

"Where are we? How do I get home from here?" His feet shuffled through dry, crunchy leaves as he jerked his eyes to various views of the spooky forest. "What are we doing here? This is crazy!"

Oddry could tell he was about to freak out. "Here, put your hand on this big tree." Will was practically paralyzed with fear, so Oddry placed his right palm on the tree for him. "Ask the tree to take your fear."

"But..."

"Just do it. Say 'Dear tree, please take my fear down into the dirt, through your roots, and put it deep into the earth.'"

Will looked confused. He'd never heard anything like this before.

"Say it," Oddry demanded. "Say 'Let the earth take my fear down to its fiery core and burn it up.' Do it. Say it!"

Will was in such a state of shock that he went ahead and did as he was told. And strangely enough, as he muttered the words Oddry fed him, he actually felt the tree pulling his fear out of him. It felt so good his mouth split into a crooked smile.

"Whoa," Will said in amazement. "Oh my God. I feel...lighter."

Oddry snickered. “You *look* lighter.”

Will couldn’t believe it. He ran his hand over the tree’s bark, which felt bumpy, like Braille. “This is so weird.”

“No, it’s not,” Oddry chirped. “Trees do that. And this is the *oldest* one in the park.” Oddry hugged it. “Besides my nest, this is my favorite place in the world to hang out.”

Will laughed. “You know, Oddry, if I had a dime for every time I’ve heard someone say that, I’d have ten cents.”

Oddry laughed. “Do you know how many dimes I have?”

Will instantly realized that Oddry would be the type of person who picked up every spare piece of change she ever saw in the city. “How many dimes *do* you have?” he asked.

“One hundred twenty thousand three hundred six.”

“What?” Will did the math in his head. “That’s over ten thousand dollars!”

“And that’s just the dimes,” Oddry said modestly. “I have twice as many quarters. I love quarters. They’re just so...quarterly.”

Just then, Will heard a mysterious noise coming from somewhere deep in the forest. “Are...those...drums I hear?”

“Yep!” Oddry replied excitedly. “Wanna go to a potty?”

Will looked confused. “Do you mean a party?”

Oddry chuckled. “Yeah. I always get those two confused. After all, English is not my *first* language.”

Will laughed. “You mean English. I get it. So, what do you call your first language?”

Oddry answered by letting out a savage, deafening shriek that hurt Will’s ears. Once the shriek finally ended, Will simply said, “Of course.”



CHAPTER  
9

Will was blown away to find himself in the middle of an awesome, wild dance party where the dancers were raccoons and coyotes and birds and rats and deer and tons of other wild critters. This was an animal jamboree—a furry fiesta—and it was happening in an area of the park that most humans didn't even know existed.

The full moon lit the party. Raccoons played drums made from hollow logs while various fruits and nuts from the park's trees were served at a sprawling buffet on a big, flat rock. Will was impressed. *Now, these are what I call party animals.*

“Come on! Let's grub,” Oddry said as she led Will to the feast of fresh produce. He was naturally a little nervous, being surrounded by so many wild animals. But Oddry assured him that they were all his friends now

because he was with her. She greeted a raccoon family in their native language, and they said hey back—in Raccoon, of course.

Will couldn't understand a word they were saying, but he was amazed. "You speak Raccoon, too?"

Oddry smiled and looked him right in the eye. "Oh, please. I speak Raccoon and Chipmunk and Opossum and a little bit of everything. But Rat's the hardest one."

"Why?" Will really wanted to know. He genuinely found this very interesting.

"Well, Rat is...just so...squeaky and nasal. It's hard to explain, but I'm working on it."

Just then a surly rat named Parson approached and greeted Oddry in his language. Oddry squeaked out a nice compliment as he passed by.

"What did you say to him?" Will asked excitedly.

"Oh, I just told him he had a nice tail. Rats love their tails," Oddry said, rolling her eyes.

Will was pumped. "Whoa. Dude. That's just...amazeballs! Will you teach me how to speak Rat?"

"Sure," Oddry said nonchalantly. "If you'll teach *me* what amazeballs means." Then she shoved a bunch of wild blackberries from the buffet into her mouth. Oddry may have been a girl, but she ate like an animal, letting the berry juice drip down her chin.

"Yummmmmmmmyyyyyy. Here, try one of these." Oddry shoved an apple into Will's mouth. He took a bite.

"Wow. That's the most delicious apple I've ever tasted," he said, gobbling it down.

"Well, wait until you taste the wild pears. Oh, and the walnuts, too! They're superlicious."

"Aha. So *this* is how you eat," Will said. "I wondered because hawks eat pigeons and stuff like that, right?"

"Oh, yeah," Oddry replied. "They eat meat. But I don't. I prefer plants."

"So you're a vegetarian?" Will asked.

Oddry stared at him blankly. "Vege...what? What is that—an alien?"

Will laughed. "No. A vegetarian is someone who eats only plants."

"Vegetarian. Vegetarian," Oddry repeated. "Wow, that's fun to say. Come on. Let's dance!" Oddry busted a move and then spun around and did a little number that fit right in with all the animal dances. She arched her back like a rat, bobbed her head like a bird, and moved her hands like a raccoon. Will, on the other hand, stood stiff as a statue.

"Come on! Join us!" pleaded Oddry.

“Oh, uh, no. I don’t know how to dance. Really. It’s OK. You go ahead.”

“Don’t know how to dance?” Oddry couldn’t believe it. “But that’s impossible! Everybody knows how to dance. Even the clouds and the trees know how to dance in the wind. Just do what I do.” Oddry dipped, swayed, and moved so smoothly it was as if she was made of water.

Will’s eyes darted around nervously. He felt very self-conscious. But then he realized that *all* the animals were dancing, even Parson, the surly rat, was doing something that looked like the robot. Will was the only one at the party standing still, so he decided to give it a try. He started tapping his left foot on the ground. Then his right hand started keeping time with the beat, and he began to loosen up a bit. Before he knew it, he was actually dancing, or something like it. At least he was trying anyway.

“That’s nice,” said Oddry. “See? I knew you had it in you. You’ve just got to let it out.” And Will did. He turned into a dancing fool. He flapped his arms and wiggled his hips, and he began feeling really good—better than he had in a long time.

“This is awesome!” Will was swinging, twirling, and jamming to the beat when suddenly his watch beeped, and he stopped dancing and gawked at the time. “Oh my gosh, it’s three in the morning! I should get back! Cheryl might get up and notice I’m gone. She watches me like a hawk, you know.”

Oddry snickered. “Yeah, my parents do, too.” Oddry and Will laughed like crazy. “Come on,” said Oddry. “I’ll get you home. Don’t worry.”

As they hiked back through the forest, Oddry and Will talked about life and traded more secrets. She wanted to know all about growing up human, and he wanted her to teach him how to speak Rat. She taught him the basics, like “hello” and “thank you.”



When they got back to the ballroom, Oddry led Will down the secret stairs. She unlocked the bookcase and led him into the library. “No way,” whispered Will, as he felt the carved wood on the bookcase with his hand. “This is unbelievable. I never would have known that this was a door. Not in a million years.”

“Amazionic, isn’t it?” Oddry asked.

“If amazionic means cool, then yeah. It’s just like in a movie or something.” Will loved all the cool secrets Oddry was entrusting him with. “I’ll tell you what, Oddry. Let’s keep this bookcase closed, and I’ll just use the dumbwaiter. That way my dad and Cheryl won’t know about it. OK?”

Oddry agreed. “That sounds beautiful.”

Will could tell that beautiful meant beautiful or something like it. “Let’s shake on it,” he said, offering



Oddry his right hand for a handshake. But Oddry didn't take his hand. She just shook her whole body instead.

*Huh, she obviously doesn't know about the human custom of shaking hands,* Will thought. To be polite and seal the deal, he shook his whole body, too. Oddry said good night and closed the bookcase, leaving Will alone in the dark library. He stood there for a moment, letting the night sink in. Then he chuckled. *Wow, I actually had a good time.* "Unbelievable," he said to himself.

"What's unbelievable?" asked Cheryl, standing at the door, half asleep, wearing leopard-print pajamas.

Will was startled. "What are you doing up?" he asked.

"I'm going to the kitchen for a drink of water," Cheryl snapped. "What are you doing up, besides talking to yourself like a crazy person?"

"Nothing," answered Will. "Can't I stand here in the dark if I want to?"

"Watch your sarcastic mouth, or I'll slap it off. You hear me?" Cheryl scoffed.

Will exploded. "I hate you, Cheryl!" Then he ran over and slapped her across the face, really hard. "How do you like it?" he asked angrily. Cheryl recoiled from the blow, tripped, and fell down. Will loomed over her and then started kicking her like a madman. "Who's the cockroach now, Cheryl? Huh? Is it you?"

"No!" Cheryl begged. "Please stop!"

Will kept kicking her, harder and harder, until he realized that he was just imagining it. Cheryl had already left. She was in the kitchen now.

Shaking with anger, Will tried to take a deep breath and then went to his bedroom.

CHAPTER

10

Weeks went by, and Will and Oddry had cool adventures throughout the city practically every night—secret adventures, of course. They went to more animal jamborees, where Will learned more animal languages. They explored the entire city, everything from old, abandoned theme parks and the inside of the Empire State Building to the basement of the Natural History Museum and the top of the Statue of Liberty. Thanks to Oddry’s amazing handables, they could get into any building anytime they wanted. She knew the city like the back of her hand—her left hand, that is.

One morning at breakfast, Will was eating while still dressed in his jeans and hoodie from the previous night’s adventure with Oddry. He was very hungry, stuffing his face with everything he could get his hands on. His dad

was reading the morning newspaper, and Cheryl was staring off into space with a depressed look on her face, when suddenly the doorbell rang.

“I’ll get it!” Will excitedly hopped up, but Cheryl jerked him back to the table by his hoodie.

“Oh, no, you don’t! I’ll get it,” she said. “You sit down and practice being a good little boy.”

“Hey,” said Victor, noticing Cheryl’s treatment of Will. “Was that necessary?”

“Oh,” said Cheryl kindly, acting her way out of the situation. “I just didn’t want Will to have to get up. He’s obviously enjoying his breakfast, and I want him to relax. That’s all.” She pinched his cheek. “Anything for Will.” She pinched a little too hard, and Will pulled away.

*Ding-dong.* The doorbell rang again. *Saved by the bell,* thought Cheryl as she sauntered out.

Victor went back to reading the financial section, and Will kept eating. He thought about telling his dad how evil Cheryl had been, but by the time he got up enough nerve, Cheryl had returned with Miss DiGloria Cain from 9-H. She was in her midthirties, and she was effortlessly pretty. Her smile was so bright and her skin so fresh that she seemed to glow like a fairy-tale princess.

“W...w...welcome,” stammered Victor. “Would you please...um...join us for some coffee?”

“Thank you, but I can’t,” said Miss DiGloria. “I just came to tell you about a meeting taking place in the building’s auditorium this afternoon at two.”

*Wow.* Will thought. *Her speaking voice is just as sweet and beautiful as her singing voice.*

“It’s regarding the hawks’ nest on the building and whether or not to have it removed.”

Will gasped so hard he almost choked on his orange juice.

“There’s a hawks’ nest on *our* building?” spouted Cheryl.

“Well, yes,” said Miss DiGloria. “It’s actually on the ledge right outside your—”

“Oh, how vile!” Cheryl interrupted Miss DiGloria just as she was about to mention the ballroom, and Will was about to have a heart attack.

“Vile? Oh, I don’t think so. Not at all,” replied Miss DiGloria.

Will felt a deep sense of courage building up inside him, like lava inside a volcano that was about to blow. He shot up out of his chair and exclaimed, “That nest is someone’s home, and it should never be touched! Don’t even think about it!” And this time he wasn’t imagining it. He really did say that.

Cheryl snarled at him condescendingly. “The adults will decide, Will. Not you.”

Miss DiGloria shook Will's hand. "Your name is Will? Nice to meet you. I'm on *your* team. I think we should save the nest, too."

"Awesome." Will liked having Miss DiGloria on his team. As he gazed into her pretty, golden-brown eyes, he sensed she was a true animal lover.


Miss DiGloria smiled and excused herself. "Well, I must be going now. I still have several apartments to visit." She bid Cheryl adieu and then Victor. "Hopefully we'll see you at the meeting this afternoon."

"Oh, yes, we will definitely be there," offered Victor, stumbling over himself. "Yes, indeed. This sounds like a very important issue."


Cheryl pursed her lips. "So sorry you have to go."

As Cheryl and Victor showed Miss DiGloria out, Will went straight for the dumbwaiter. He made sure no one was looking as he hopped in and pulled the doors closed.


Well, almost closed.



CHAPTER



11



As soon as Will got to the ballroom, he saw Oddry pacing the dance floor. "I heard everything," she said.

"You did? How?" Will asked.

"I was eavesdropping inside the heater vent in the dining room."

"Don't worry, Oddry. I won't let them take your nest down. I'll do whatever it takes to stop it. Even if I have to strap myself to the side of the building."

Oddry found Will's heartfelt dedication to her and her family so moving she almost cried. But then a screech came from the open window as Ryden and Lila landed in the nest. "Are you going to tell them?" Will asked.

Oddry gazed upon her parents as they lovingly lined their nest with new sticks they'd brought in from Central Park. "Yes. Yes, they need to know."

"Do you want me to stay?" Will asked.

"No, that's OK." Oddry sighed. "Why don't you go back down and see if you can get more info on that two o'clock meeting."

"Good thinking." Will ran to the dumbwaiter, hopped in, shut the door, and started jerking the chain in an effort to lower himself down to the apartment as quickly as possible.

As he traveled down the dark chute inside the wall, dark thoughts filled his mind. His anger was building as he imagined Cheryl and other people ripping apart the nest. He wished he had the power to make Cheryl and people like her disappear into another dimension with a wave of his hand.

As he grew more upset, he pulled harder on the chain. And harder. Until—*kerklunk*—the dumbwaiter jerked to a stop.

"Huh?" He pulled on the chain really hard, but the old dumbwaiter wouldn't budge. "Oh, come on." Frustrated, he tried the chain again and again, but he didn't move an inch. *Great. I'm stuck. What now?* "ODDRY!" he yelled. "Can you hear me?" No reply came. "Oddry! Hello? Can you hear me?" He waited. And, again, there was no response. Until...

"Hello?" Oddry's voice reached him like a rescue line.

"Oddry! Thank goodness you can hear me. I...I'm stuck in the dumbwaiter."

"The whole world can hear you," Oddry said into the dumbwaiter chute. All she saw was the chain that held the little elevator, dangling down into a pit of darkness. "You must be pretty far down. I can't see anything. Hold on!" Oddry searched the chute with her flashlight handle. She followed the chain down to where she spotted the roof of the wooden box in which Will was sitting. "Oh, I see where you're at. Wow, you're way down there. Almost to the apartment."

"Can you get me out, Oddry? This thing's jammed. Can you see anything?"

"Oh yeah." Oddry could see the problem. "Looks like the chain slipped off the pulley. Stay there; I think I have just the thing."

"I'm not going anywhere, Oddry. But hurry."

Holding her flashlight handle in her left hand, Oddry switched to her battery-powered, fishing-reel handle and, controlling its line, lowered herself down the chute like a spider on a strand of web.

The chute was dusty and stale inside. It was, after all, inside the wall, and the farther Oddry descended, the darker it got. When she finally touched down on the roof of the tiny elevator, she kicked up even more dust and made herself sneeze.

“Is that you, Oddry?”

“No, it’s the dumbwaiter repairman. Of course it’s me. You OK?” she asked, examining the chain that had, indeed, slipped off the pulley, just like a bike chain that had slipped off its sprocket.

“Can you get me out of here? I can’t breathe very well.”

“Yeah. If I can just lift you back up the tunnel a little bit, I think I can get the chain back on the track. Sit tight.”

“I *am* sitting tight. Very tight.”

Holding her flashlight in her mouth, Oddry got a good grip on the elevator’s frame with her left hand. Then she switched her fishing-reel handable into reverse, and it slowly began to pull her up the tunnel, pulling the dumbwaiter along beneath her.

It wasn’t as easy as she’d thought. Her handable was only designed to lift her weight. The extra weight was putting a real strain on the device, as well as her chest muscles. Oddry started to feel as if she was being pulled in half.

“I’m going to give this all I’ve got,” Oddry grunted, feeling like something was about to break. Suddenly, the chain slipped back onto the pulley with a *ch-klank*. “Mission accomplished,” Oddry said, relieved. But then her fishing line snapped, and she dropped and landed on top of the dumbwaiter. Her right foot broke through

the old wooden roof and ended up next to Will’s face. “Ow!” she exclaimed.

He flinched and sputtered as dirt and splinters rained down on him. “Oddry, are you OK?”

“No. It hurts,” she said. She tried pulling her foot out, but it was stuck, and the jagged wood dug into her ankle. “Ow!” Oddry yelled, wincing in pain. “What did I ever do to you, dumbwaiter? You’re the dumbest dumbwaiter I ever met!”

“Oddry, relax!” Will had started to take her shoe off when they both heard the dumbwaiter door opening in the kitchen below. They froze.

“Will?” Victor called from below. “Son, are you in there?”

“Dad?” Will said innocently, trying to lessen the severity of the situation. “It’s OK. Well, maybe it’s not OK exactly, but—”

Before Will could finish his sentence, Victor pulled the dumbwaiter down—and Oddry along with it. She felt like an animal caught in a trap, frantically trying to free her foot before she reached the kitchen.



CHAPTER  
12

The dumbwaiter stopped, and Victor pulled the sweaty and frightened Will from the box.

“Thank you,” Will said, trying to act positive and not make a big deal out of it.

Victor hugged him. “Oh my God, are you OK? What were you doing in there? You could have been killed.”

“Yeah,” added Cheryl. “Thank goodness you’re all right,” she said, while secretly thinking, *if he’d just gotten stuck in there and died, then I’d inherit all the money. Oh well.*

Victor asked, “Where does this thing go, son?”

“Well—” Before Will could respond the sounds of panting and rattling came from inside the dumbwaiter

chute. It sounded like a cat stuck in a cardboard box. Victor stared toward the puzzling sound, while Will tried to act casual.

Cheryl shone a flashlight into the dark dumbwaiter. “My goodness!” she exclaimed when she saw Oddry’s foot sticking through the dumbwaiter’s ceiling.

Oddry jerked her foot frantically back and forth. She desperately wanted to be back in the ballroom, climbing out the window into her nest and flying free, but the dumbwaiter just wouldn’t let her go.

Victor lowered the dumbwaiter on its track past the kitchen, and, with each tug of the chain, more of Oddry appeared. First her stuck foot and then her skinny legs and then her worn-out dress and, finally, her scared, blue eyes.

Victor and Cheryl looked at Oddry in astonishment. Oddry looked first at them and then at Will. The room fell so silent they could have heard a pin drop. But the quiet of the room didn’t last long. Oddry began flailing in fear, screeching her brains out. She had never been this close to so many humans all at once, and they were all staring at her. Two words went through her mind: *Must. Escape.*

Will felt her desperation and immediately went to her aid. “It’s OK, Oddry,” he said in a comforting voice. “Nobody’s going to hurt you. I promise.”

Oddry kept pulling on her foot and scraping her leg, her eyes darting from person to person as if they were going to attack her.

“Calm down,” Will said, placing his hand on hers. “Trust me. It’s OK. Think of the tree.”

Their eyes locked, and Oddry suddenly felt in her core that perhaps she *could* trust him. *Maybe I should believe him*, she thought. *He is, after all, my one true human friend in the whole wide world.*

Then, like letting go of a balloon, the fear inside Oddry drifted up and away into the darkness of the dumbwaiter chute. “I’m OK, Will. Thank you.”

Will got her foot unstuck and pulled her out onto the counter top.

Victor was so blown away by Oddry that he just scratched his head.

Cheryl was so awestruck by Oddry that she, for once, didn’t say anything.

“Dad,” Will said with pride, “this is my friend, Oddry. I was coming down from her ballroom when I got stuck.”

“Oh. OK,” said Victor nonchalantly, until he realized what Will had said, and then he twitched in surprise. “Ballroom? What ballroom?”



Twenty minutes later, the bookcase in the library was wide open.

Up in the ballroom, Victor and Cheryl stood with their mouths agape. They couldn't believe what they were seeing. Or hearing.

"Oddry lives in this nest with her hawk parents," Will told them. "And she makes these contraptions called handables. Nobody knows she's up here except us, and we have to keep her a total secret. OK?" Will and Oddry exchanged knowing smiles.

Will was divulging a lot of information, but, of course, he didn't tell them about everything (like the animal parties and midnight expeditions). He figured the fact that the legendary Bird Girl had been living in a secret room in their new home was probably enough information for one day.

As Victor marveled at the magnificent architecture of the ballroom and Cheryl examined Oddry's unique handables, Oddry crawled into the nest to see if she could spot her parents flying over the park. But they were nowhere to be seen.

"They're probably really scared," she said to Will.

He agreed. "I would be, too. But they don't need to be." Will turned to Victor and passionately stated, "Dad, we have to make sure this nest is not disturbed, no matter what. OK? Please?"

Victor was so caught up in the fact that his apartment had a second floor that he wasn't really listening. But Cheryl was.

"We'll do whatever it takes, Will," she vowed. "Nobody will touch that nest as long as I'm around."

"Huh? What?" Will was astonished. "But at breakfast you said—"

"I know what I said at breakfast. But that was before I met this fascinating girl." Cheryl knelt down in front of Oddry, gently taking her little hand and asking, "Would you like some cookies and milk, dear?"

Oddry, who had always wanted to try cookies, forgot what she had known of Cheryl's cruelty and simply said, "Yes, please."

Cheryl led her to the kitchen. "Come on. Maybe later we'll get you a new dress. And how about a bath? Would you like that?"

Oddry smiled hesitantly. "Well, sure, as long as it's a birdbath."

Cheryl giggled. "Oh, you're so funny. Maybe we'll have a birdbath put in just for you."

Will was so blown away by what he saw that he actually had to sit down for a minute.

CHAPTER  
13

By 2:11 p.m., the big, important meeting about the nest was in full swing. It took place in the building's grand auditorium, just off the lobby. Built in the 1930s, and hardly ever used, the grand auditorium looked like the inside of a very old movie palace.

The place was packed—standing room only. *Wow, this is obviously a hot topic*, thought Will, who was seated in the front row between Cheryl and his dad. He squirmed a little. *Ugh, this old wooden seat's going to break my tailbone.*

Miss DiGloria stood near the stage as bitter, old Ms. Suzuki from 10-C led the meeting from behind an antique podium, where her annoying voice caused feedback through the antique microphone. “We are all very fortunate to live at such a prestigious address. Yet,

when I step out onto my balcony to admire our lovely park, I find it covered in rat carcasses and pigeon parts that have rained down from that disgusting nest.”

Will hated her for calling the nest disgusting. *Ryden and Lila can't help it. They're just eating, and this is their home, too.* He was struck with a bright idea. *Hey, maybe we can install a net under the nest and catch their leftovers.* Will imagined grabbing the microphone and sharing his great idea, but he didn't.

Ms. Suzuki droned on. “And I, for one, am sick and tired of it. I hereby demand that we take the necessary steps to have that hideous nest removed immediately.”

Many of the other tenants felt the same and chanted, “Hear, hear.” They didn't like the hawk droppings either. Most wanted the nest removed. Only a few wanted to save it.

Will noticed that Miss DiGloria seemed very nervous and fidgety. *She's probably just worried about the nest, too. I like her. She's cool. But why isn't she doing anything? We need to get this old lady off the stage and convince everybody to save the nest.*

The tenants were about to take a vote, and Will was sure that the nest would be removed.

That is, until Cheryl stood up and took over the whole meeting. “Not so fast! There are others in this room who disagree, and our opinions need to be heard as well.” She had everyone's attention.

She reached for the microphone. “May I?” she asked, grabbing it before Ms. Suzuki could even respond. “Thank you,” she said, nudging Ms. Suzuki aside as she took center stage. “Long before our building was built, these innocent creatures lived here. This is their native habitat. We are the ones who moved in and took *their* home. Not the other way around,” she proclaimed, sneering at old Ms. Suzuki.

Will was impressed with her talent. *Huh. She's good.* He sat up and listened as she continued.

“We need to unite in finding a way to live in harmony with nature, because it's the right thing to do!” Cheryl's acting experience came in handy as she took command of the audience. “And might I remind you all that my husband and I own the ballroom and the ledge on which the nest sits, and I will take swift legal action against anyone who even dares to touch that nest!”

And, since her husband was a billionaire, everyone listened. A vote was taken, and—guess what?—they won. The nest would stay. *Wow, I never thought I'd say this, but I'm really proud of Cheryl,* Will thought. Victor was, too. Miss DiGloria was so thrilled with the outcome that she led a round of applause for Cheryl. Everyone joined in. Even people who didn't agree with Cheryl liked her speech. And since applause was Cheryl's favorite thing in the world, she stood at the podium, beaming with pride, and took a bow.



Meanwhile, Oddry cuddled with her parents in the nest. Her mother stroked her forehead with a wing tip, while her father looked out over the park.

*What a beautiful day, thought Oddry. This feels just like old times. But we can't do the old days anymore, can we? Everything's different now, and I honestly don't know what to do.*

Then Ryden said something that would change Oddry's life forever.

"You know what, Oddry?"

"What, Dad?"

"In light of everything that's happened, I really think that the human world is where you belong."

Oddry couldn't believe her ears.

"And now it's time for you to find your place in it," Ryden continued.

"But, Dad, you hate humans. What's going on?"

"It's time, dear," added Lila. "I always knew this day would come; I just didn't expect it to be so painful."

"Oh, no," Oddry said. "You're pushing me out of the nest, aren't you?"

"Yes, my sweet," continued her father. "It's time for you to learn how to fly on your own now."

Oddry knew this was a big deal in the bird world. Being pushed out of the nest was a rite of passage for young birds, like getting a driver's license was for humans. It was just something that birds did.

Even so, Oddry was rattled. She didn't expect it. Not today. But she also knew they were right. She needed to experience the human world, and she knew exactly where to begin—Will. "Why do I feel so scared?" she asked. "This is bizarrio. My head says no, but my heart says yes."

"We're not going to leave you, chick," cooed her mom. "We'll always be here for you if you need us. As long as we're alive."

Oddry gave her mom a frown-smile. She was so grateful for her parents' unconditional love that she broke down and wept. "I love you guys." Adoring their daughter more than ever, Ryden and Lila took her under their wings and cried right along with her.



CHAPTER  
14

That night, the dining room was ablaze with candles as Oddry, Will, Cheryl, and Victor sat at a table laden with mashed potatoes, stuffing, cranberry sauce, candied yams, and pumpkin pie. The room smelled of cinnamon and sage. This was Oddry's first human sit-down dinner. She marveled at the candles, the flames reflecting in her big, blue eyes, and she wondered what was under the large silver dome in the middle of the table.

Will simply marveled at the fact that they were having a traditional American Thanksgiving feast, and it wasn't even Halloween yet.

Cheryl cleared her throat. "I'd like everyone to join hands and bow their heads in prayer, please."

Oddry had no idea what this meant. *OK*, she thought. *I'll just follow along and do what Will does.* He rolled his eyes, so she did, too. It was quite a long table, so they really had to stretch to hold hands with each other.

Cheryl prayed. "Dear Lord, we thank you for this marvelous apartment, where all we anticipated was creating a new home for ourselves. Little did we know that you had much, much grander plans for us."

With that, Cheryl squeezed Oddry's left hand, and Oddry looked at her. She liked the feminine touch. It was so soft and warm. Victor held Oddry's knork handle, being very careful not to cut himself on it. A knork was a combination of a knife and a fork, and Oddry sometimes used it for eating.

Cheryl continued, "Lord, we had no idea you were sending us the makings of a new family, and we thank you for this tremendous blessing. In Jesus's name. Amen."

Everyone raised their heads. Victor cleared his throat. "Sweetheart, I am absolutely thrilled with this feast, but—"

"But' is a negation of everything that precedes it," said Cheryl as she scooped a mountain of potatoes onto Oddry's plate.

"I know, but it's September, and this is a holiday feast," continued Victor. "While it is quite lovely, you've never actually cooked for us before."

"Ever," Will added.

Cheryl replied without even looking at them. "True to both. I'm just *thankful*. That's all. I wanted to have a Thanksgiving now. I dusted off my old cooking skills and threw it all together at the last minute. Is that so wrong?"

*What's wrong is the fact that you're lying*, thought Will. *I saw all the delivery containers from the catering company in the service porch.*

"And now for the main course," said Cheryl as she lifted the silver dome, revealing a large cooked turkey.

Oddry screeched at the sight of it. She stood up on her chair, squawking in disgust and waving her hands in front of her face.

Will was afraid she was losing her mind, so he grabbed her, held her, and told her it was OK. *Wow, I can feel her heart beating like crazy*, he thought.

"How could you do this to Oddry?" Will yelled at Cheryl. "She's a vegetarian!"

"What do you mean?" Cheryl said with a calm smile. "It's not a real bird. It's made of tofu!"

"It is?" Will asked sheepishly, poking at it with his finger.

"Yes," responded Cheryl. "And don't touch it. How dare you suggest I would traumatize Oddry!"

"The boy didn't know," offered Victor. "I thought it was a turkey, too."

Will started to feel kind of stupid as Cheryl pulled Oddry into her arms, patted her head, and gently rocked her back and forth. “There, there, dear,” she purred. “Don’t worry. I’ve got you now.”

“What is tofu?” Oddry asked, calming down.

Cheryl answered in the world’s most child-friendly voice. “It’s made from soybeans. It’s vegetarian. It’s good for you.” She beamed at Oddry as she carved the tofu turkey.

“Oh, I love beans,” Oddry cooed. “And I recently learned what ‘vegetarian’ means.”

“Shall I put some on your plate, angel?”

“Oh, that’s OK, Cheryl; I can—”

“Oh no, no, no, no, no! Call me ‘Mommy.’ Please. Because that’s who I am now. Your loving mommy, from now on. OK?” With that Cheryl proceeded to serve Oddry a small portion of tofu turkey.

Oddry smelled it. “Well, it smells good.” She took a bite. “*Squwak*,” screeched Oddry, chewing the tofu turkey with her mouth open. “It’s delishunt!” Everyone was happy that she liked it, and they knew she meant “delicious.” Then Oddry asked, “What’s trau...trau...trau—”

“Traumatized, sweetheart?” said Cheryl as she gently pushed Oddry’s hair back and fixed it. “It’s when somebody hurts you so bad you might never heal from it.”

“I’m not trau...trau...trau...” Oddry struggled with the big, unfamiliar word.

“And you’re never going to be, if I have anything to do with it,” said Cheryl, taking Oddry in her arms and cradling her protectively. “Never.”

*This is bizarrio*, thought Oddry. *I’ve seen how mean this woman can be, and Will has told me plenty of horror stories about her, but there is something so beautiful about this feeling and so comforting about her touch.* Oddry felt confused and conflicted. In her mind she knew not to trust Cheryl. But there was something really special about being taken into a woman’s arms and pressed against her cloud-like bosom that gave Oddry a sense of well-being. She couldn’t explain it.

*Maybe this is a human thing*, Oddry thought. *I am, after all, human. And for all I know, this woman could be my actual mother. I have no idea. Oh, this is all making me so sweepy. I just want to rest.*

Victor’s cell phone rang. He looked at the number and twitched in surprise. It was the police detective in charge of investigating his wife’s murder. He hadn’t heard anything from the detective in quite some time. “Uh, excuse me. I have to take this.” Victor exited into the hallway and answered his phone.

Will followed his dad and secretly listened in on Victor’s end of the call. It was not good news. There was no new evidence in the search for Nora’s murderer, and the case was being closed. Will gasped at the bad news. His

dad noticed him standing there then he ended the call. “Come here, son.” Victor hugged Will and they both shed a tear. “We’ll be OK. Don’t worry,” said Victor. They both wanted to find the murderer, and both were extremely disappointed.

CHAPTER  
15

Later that night, a very sleepy Oddry lay in a big, fluffy bed in one of the grand guest rooms. *What a nice room, she thought. This could probably be my bedroom, if I want it to be.* She adjusted her satchel on the nightstand next to her.

A little, red night-light, which looked like the planet Mars, cast a warm glow throughout the room, and Oddry nestled in for sleep. But there was something different about this bedroom, and she tried to remember what it was. *I’ve explored this penthouse a bunch over the years, but, for the life of me, I can’t remember what it is.* She yawned, looking around at the beautiful antiques. *Maybe I’m just extra tired... Oh, well, I’m sure I’ll remember in the morning,* she thought as she nodded off to sleep. In no time, Oddry started to snore. Her snore

was really cute. When she breathed in, she snorted. But when she breathed out, she whistled a birdcall.

Will was asleep in his bed, too, but he tossed and turned. Something about the tofu turkey hadn't agreed with his gurgling stomach.

Alone in the master bedroom, Victor slept like a hibernating bear. Cheryl had crept out earlier and could now be found in the library. She was on her laptop, doing some online research...research about Oddry.

She did a search for "Bird Girl," and it didn't take long for Cheryl's mind to boggle. Thousands of articles in multiple languages appeared, and her eyes began to sparkle as she saw just how famous Bird Girl was. *Oh my stars*, she thought. *This is about as big as finding Bigfoot.* Then Cheryl pondered how famous *she* could become for discovering Bird Girl.

She imagined herself on international stages before standing room only audiences that applauded wildly and chanted her name—"Cher-yl, Cher-yl, Cher-yl"—with the legendary Bird Girl by her side. On a leash, of course.

They would both star in the story of their lives, which would undoubtedly be made into a blockbuster family film. The thought of a bidding war by all of the major movie studios made her lips start to quiver. She reached beside her and grabbed an extra-absorbent tissue to wipe the trail of saliva that was running into the cleft of her prominent chin. Not only would she finally be famous,

she would also be revered for her charitable deed in rescuing Oddry from her savage life. Superhumanitarian mother-of-the-year luncheons would be held in her honor, and they'd be televised.

She leaned back in her chair, closed her eyes, and tasted sweet, succulent success. She knew exactly what to do in planning this major media event. "First thing in the morning, I'll call my old agent, Bootsy Jigglebottom. She'll know what to do."

Bootsy was still the biggest agent in show biz, and even though Cheryl had never made it as an actress, the two of them were still cordial because Cheryl had gotten rich when she married Victor, and agents were attracted to money like rats to cheese. Cheryl knew that Oddry was a little gold mine and that Bootsy would be all over this.

Cheryl's eyes shot open when she heard the hardwood floor creak behind her. Standing there was Will, staring at her computer screen—which displayed a drawing of Oddry.

"What's that?" Will asked.

Cheryl quickly closed the computer. "Will?"

"Why do you have Oddry's picture on your—" But before he could finish his sentence, Cheryl was out of her chair and across the room. She took Will's face in the palm of her hand and squeezed it tight. Her face was inches from his. His face flushed. "Ow, that hurts."

She let go and wrapped Will in a warm, tender, and—as incredible as it sounds—motherly embrace.

“Oddry’s made me see how selfish I’ve been,” she whispered feverishly into his ear. “I’ve been punishing you because”—she pressed her wet cheek to his—“I was afraid you resented me for taking your mother’s place. That you hated me. I should’ve tried to understand how sad and scared you were. I’m so sorry.”

*Uh, yeah, thought Will. No. Not going to happen. First off, you could never take my mother’s place. And secondly, I don’t accept your apology. In fact, I spit it back in your face. You are the meanest person I have ever known, and I will never forgive you. You’re so hideous and disgusting that I have nightmares about you every night. I hate you, and I wish you would die. But as long as you’re protecting Oddry’s nest, I’ll play along with your little game. Yeah, that I’ll do.*

Cheryl pulled away from him and looked deep into his eyes. “You do believe me, don’t you?”

“What’s going on?” asked a small, sweet voice.

Will and Cheryl looked toward the door and saw Oddry, who was watching them with big, innocent eyes.

Cheryl opened her arms wide enough to accommodate another small body. “Come here, sweetie.”

Oddry approached the two of them and allowed herself to be enfolded in Cheryl’s arms. A part of Oddry felt guilty at what she believed was a betrayal of Lila. But having a human mom had been her dream for so

long that she quieted the squawking in her head and nestled in.

“We’re a family now,” cooed Cheryl as she tightened her grip. “And we’re going to be the happiest family this world has ever seen.”

Cheryl’s words may have been sweet, but her expression, which Oddry and Will could not see, was quite sinister.



CHAPTER  
16

The next morning, Oddry awoke in her big, new bed. It was much softer and roomier than the nest, but just thinking about the nest caused Oddry to miss Ryden and Lila in a big way. “I’m going up to see them right now,” she said to the bedroom as she sat up. *You’re such a nice bedroom. Having you here and having my nest upstairs is totally neatimus. It’s like having two homes.*

Oddry reached for her satchel on the nightstand and was utterly shocked to find it missing. “Bagoock!” She shuddered. “Where’s my satchel?” *OK, Oddry. Stay calm. You did put it on the nightstand, didn’t you? Yes, I’m sure I did. Maybe somebody moved it. Let’s search the room. I’m sure it’s here somewhere. Right?* She searched frantically for it—behind the nightstand, under the nightstand,

under the blankets, under the bed, in the closet—but she could not find it anywhere.

*OK, this is truly weirdo. She became anxious. Where is my satchel? Did somebody take it?*

On the verge of panic, she raced for the door and jerked on the knob, only to learn that it was locked from the outside. “Oh my screech!” Her anxiety boiled over into raw fury as she banged on the door with all her might.

“Hello?!” she yelled. “Can anyone hear me? I’m locked inside the room!” She listened desperately for a response...but no one answered. The silence was deafening.

*OK. That’s it. I have got to get the screech out of here.*

Bent on escape, Oddry ran over to the window, threw back the expensive curtains, and was aghast to find the window covered in security bars. Her heart sank. “Oh, my golly, that’s right. This is the one room in the apartment that has bars. Of all the rooms in the whole giant place, why did Cheryl put me in this one? Unless... she did it on purpose.” Oddry opened the window and yanked violently on the bars, but they didn’t budge. Then she tried to squeeze through them but couldn’t fit, and her head almost got stuck. She looked at Central Park and the vast city beyond the bars and gasped, “Oh, no. I’m trapped like a bird in a cage.”

That’s when she heard Cheryl’s voice through the door, speaking softly and hypnotically. “Oddry?”

Oddry ran to the door.

“Can you hear me?” Cheryl cooed.

“Yes,” Oddry said, breathing heavily and quivering. “Why have you locked me in here, and where’s Will? I want to talk to Will!”

“Calm down, Oddry. I’ve locked you in your room for your own protection. There were some people here from the city, from Child Protective Services, and they wanted to know if I’d seen an orphan girl on the roof.” Oddry was puzzled as Cheryl continued. “Of course, I told them I knew nothing of it. But they’re still in the building, snooping around. So sit tight, and I’ll let you out in a little bit. OK? I love you, Oddry. Do you love Mommy?”

“Where’s my satchel?” Oddry demanded. “That’s all I want to know. Why did you take it?” *Oh, I knew I shouldn’t have trusted her. What was I thinking? Well, yeah, I wasn’t thinking, was I? I was hoping...but, boy, was I wrong.*

“Well now, Oddry, I took your satchel so I could wash it. That way it will be nice and clean for you. It’s in the service porch as we speak. I’ve hung it up to dry. I didn’t want to put it in the dryer because I was afraid it might shrink, and I knew you wouldn’t want that.”

Oddry wasn’t buying it. She knew Cheryl was lying. What she didn’t know was that Cheryl had been on the phone with Bootsy Jigglebottom all morning, developing a new reality show starring Cheryl and Oddry,

called *Nest Time*. Bootsy was on her way over with a big, fat contract. That was the real reason why Cheryl took Oddry's satchel and locked her in. She couldn't risk Oddry using her handables to escape. Oddry was a prisoner of Cheryl's mad desire for fame.



Meanwhile, Will and his dad approached the local gourmet grocery store. Cheryl had sent them there to purchase some nibbles for Bootsy's arrival. She hadn't given them any details about her plan; she just made them go. As they walked, Will and his dad had some time to talk, just the two of them. It was something they hadn't done in a long time.

First, they talked about Oddry, of course, but then Will actually got up the nerve to ask Victor a question he'd been dying to ask. *OK. Here goes nothing*, he thought. He took a deep breath, swallowed his fear, and let it fly.

"Dad?"

"Yes, son?"

"Why did you marry Cheryl?"

Victor was taken aback. He stopped and fumbled for the right response. "Well, to be honest with you, son, sometimes I wish I *hadn't* married her." Will was surprised by his dad's honesty. "But when we lost your

mom, I was a complete wreck, and I thought that perhaps finding new love was the answer. And Cheryl, who had worked with your mom on a project, was just so... there for me. She really helped me through the grieving process. We genuinely connected – at first anyway – until we got married. Then she slowly started to change."

This was what Will had hoped to hear for a long time. *Oh my God, this is amazing. He hates her, too. Well, maybe not as much as I do, but—*

Before he could finish his thought and tell his dad that Cheryl had become physically abusive, Miss DiGloria exited the grocery store and ran right into them. Literally. "Whoa." The contents of her grocery bag flew this way and that, and Victor immediately began helping her retrieve her flowers and pomegranates, which rolled down the sidewalk.

Will snickered because it was funny seeing his dad waddle like a duck down the sidewalk while fetching fruit.

As Victor and Miss DiGloria struggled to reach the last pomegranate, their hands touched. Then their eyes locked. And in their minds, time stopped. Miss DiGloria smiled a radiant smile. "Thank you so much."

"My pleasure," replied Victor breathlessly. "Pomegranates are my favorite."

“Well then, here you go.” Miss DiGloria gave him one, and Will instantly recognized the sparks between them. It wasn’t hard. Sparks that bright could be seen from the moon.

CHAPTER  
17

A golden Rolls-Royce carried Bootsy Jigglebottom, the big-time agent, to her meeting with Cheryl. Pushy and obnoxious times a million squared, Bootsy was a painfully skinny woman with cartoonishly large hips. She looked like a designer snake that had swallowed a watermelon sideways. And with her pinched, overly made-up, surgically pulled and puckered face, Bootsy Jigglebottom was the poster child for cosmetic overkill. She was wearing an unflattering floral designer frock, a pillbox hat, and oddly sensible shoes. She had to wear them. She had trouble with her feet. All of her toes were twisted and crooked, and they ached something fierce.

As her driver carried her across town, she read the contract that she had prepared especially for Cheryl, regarding Oddry, the legendary Bird Girl. It included

rights for TV, film, publishing, stage plays...everything. Bootsy knew that finding the Bird Girl was worth a fortune. She could practically taste the money, like fine champagne swirling on her extralong tongue. She hadn't been this excited about a deal since she'd found the Jackson brat.

She barked at her driver, "Step on it! What is this, a kiddy ride?" Then she was struck with an idea. "Ooh. Kiddy rides."

Bootsy made a note in the contract, securing the rights to create theme-park rides based on Oddry. Bootsy was, after all, the best in the biz.

Meanwhile, Oddry was on a different kind of roller-coaster ride—an emotional one, to be precise. She was undergoing a transformation that carried her from the depths of despair to the peaks of anger. She ransacked the bedroom. "There's got to be a screwdriver or *something* I can use to pry open the security bars," she said as she dug through the junk-filled boxes in the closet. She found some old wire hangers, a magnifying glass, a hand mirror, and a quarter. She pocketed the quarter. *I'll add that to my savings, if I ever get out of here.* The magnifying glass gave her an idea.

*Hmmm, I wonder...*

She ran over to the window and angled the magnifying glass at the sun. *Maybe what we need here is a little solar power.* The magnifying glass concentrated the

sunlight into a tiny heat beam, which she focused on one of the bars. The bar started to smoke a little as the heat beam burned through the paint...but that was about it. *Oh, screech, it's not strong enough. Note to self: create a powerful laser handable when you get out of here. And I will get out of here, no matter what.*

She dropped the magnifying glass and picked up a wire hanger. *Maybe I can use this wire like a saw blade and cut through the bars,* she thought, bending the wire into a loop. She slipped it around one of the bars and began to pull on it, back and forth. *Scrape. Scrape. Scrape.* And she was right. The wire was beginning to make a dent in the bar, but— *Ugh, this is going to take forever. I'll be a hundred years old by the time I cut through.*

She stepped back from the window and tripped on the edge of the Persian rug that hugged the old wooden floor. She fell down on her back, landing on something really hard under the rug. "Ow! What was that?"

She rolled over and pulled back the rug to find out. There it was, shining back at her—the answer to her problem: the heater vent. *"Squawk-a-doodle-do. Am I happy to see you!"*

She pulled on the vent, but it wouldn't budge. "Ooh, it's screwed down super tight."

This was the point when most people would give up, but not Oddry. She was struck with a brilliant idea. She pulled the quarter from her pocket and tried it in the groove in the top of a screw. It fit the screw perfectly.

She had started unscrewing the vent when she heard some very disturbing yet familiar screeches coming from outside the window. *Oh, no, it's my parents, and it's coming from the nest.*

She ran over to the window and craned her neck, desperate to see what was happening on the ledge above. The bars were in the way. "Mom! Dad!" she yelled. "What's wrong?" On the verge of panic, Oddry grabbed the bars and shook them. "Stupid bars. I can't see. I can't see!"

She thought quickly and pulled out the little mirror she'd found in the closet. She reached her hand through the bars and held the mirror out. In it, she could see the nest, and what she witnessed was awful. Her parents, trapped inside a dirty, old net, were being hoisted into the ballroom by a mysterious pair of gloved hands.

CHAPTER  
18

As Victor and Miss DiGloria chatted and laughed, Will imagined her as his new mom, and it felt right. Will loved seeing his dad happy. He couldn't remember the last time he'd seen him laugh so much.

And then Miss DiGloria dropped a bomb—not a real bomb but a piece of information that felt like it exploded in Will's face.

"So," she said, "I saw Cheryl in the building this morning, and she told me about your new school."

Will was confused. "What new school?"

"The boarding school in England. You're starting next week, right?"



Will looked at his dad in absolute dismay. Victor frowned in total confusion. It suddenly became clear to Miss DiGloria that neither Will nor Victor had been told of Cheryl's plan to send Will away. "Oh, I'm so sorry. I really shouldn't have—"

"No," said Victor. "It's perfectly fine. Thank you. Now, if you'll please excuse me, I have something to which I must attend."

Victor made an about-face and marched for home. He was mad, and he was going home to have a talk with Cheryl. Will had never been more proud of his dad than he was just then.

Will said, "Thanks for the heads up, Miss DiGloria."

"Oh, you're welcome, honey. I hate to see you leave. I'd love to get to know you better."

"Same here."

He thought about hugging her, and kind of leaned in to do that, but decided to shake her hand instead. It was a bit awkward. Then he ran after his dad.



Up in the ballroom, something dreadful was going down.

Poor Ryden and Lila wiggled and struggled against the bonds that had been strapped around their ankles

and the leather hoods that had been placed over their beautiful, cinnamon-colored heads. They had been stuffed into a cramped, little cage. Next to it stood Kyle Pettibon, the number one animal trainer in television. Cheryl, who was all dressed up, was with him.

"I want these two raptors properly trained until they are perfectly docile," she commanded. "We're shooting a reality show called *Nest Time*, and I need them to be as pliable as little plush puppets. Got it?"

Kyle placed the cage on a dolly. "Give me a week with these two," he said. "I'll break their spirits and get the wild out of 'em like that." He snapped his fingers. "They'll be as tame as roadkill by the time I'm done with 'em." He laughed like a pirate.

As he wheeled the dolly downstairs to his flatbed truck, which was waiting in the alley, Ryden and Lila struggled to escape, flopping and flipping in the cage like fish on dry land.

Feathers drifted through the air as Cheryl grinned wickedly. She was so pleased with herself and her plans for stardom that she squealed like a little pig. Not once did she stop to consider how fame would affect Oddry. Oddry's secret life of play and adventure would vanish forever, and her spirited parents would be reduced to brain-dead house pets. Oddry was about to lose everything she loved most.

Once Kyle left, Cheryl retreated to the vanity in her bedroom. She sanitized her hands with antibacterial gel

and then proceeded to apply fresh coats of lipstick and hair spray.

*Ding-dong.* The doorbell rang. She gasped, “It’s Bootsy!” She looked at the clock. “She’s early. Oh, she must want this deal *so* badly.” Then Cheryl wondered aloud, “Where are Victor and Will with those darn groceries? Oh well, I’ll just have to wing it without the hors d’oeuvres.” She chuckled to herself. “Wing it? Get it? Bird Girl? I’ll have to use that in the show. Oh, Cheryl, you’re such a genius.”

Then she shifted into power-player mode and looked herself in the eye in the mirror. “This is your big moment, Cheryl—the big break you’ve been waiting for your whole life.” She was psyching herself up so intensely it was as if she were hypnotizing herself. “This time you are in the driver’s seat, and nobody can get in your way, so just go in there and claim what is so rightfully yours.”

*Ding-dong.* The doorbell rang again. Cheryl twitched, snapped out of her trance, and headed for the front door in her expensive high heels. Smoothing her fancy dress as she entered the foyer, she approached the front door and opened it wide, welcoming Bootsy with a great big, fake, show-biz air kiss.

“Bootsy Jigglebottom, as I live and breathe!”

Bootsy chimed back, “Darling, it’s been ages. But, my oh my, look at you. You haven’t aged a bit.”

But before Cheryl could even respond to Bootsy’s flattery, Bootsy poked her nose into the apartment and asked, “So where’s the gold mine—I mean, Bird Girl?”

CHAPTER  
19

Cheryl led Bootsy into the parlor, a bright, sunny room decorated with beautiful antiques. Bootsy took in the massive window overlooking Central Park. “My, what an impressive view. You certainly have done well for yourself.”

“Yes,” Cheryl agreed with false humility. “I figure we’ll shoot a lot of the show in this room and throughout the apartment, with a lot of close-ups of me. I have the whole show in my head. Did you bring the contract?”

Bootsy whipped out a thick one and handed it to Cheryl. “Just sign on the dotted line, and we’re off to the races.” But Cheryl insisted on reading it first, and Bootsy applauded her business skills. “Good girl. But I don’t have all day.”

Cheryl snarked back, “Oh, you’ll have all the time in the world once I show you the Bird Girl. Don’t you worry, Bootsy. Just have a seat.” Cheryl directed her to an extralarge, supercushy throne of a chair near the window. “I think you’ll fit in this one.”

Bootsy scowled.

“I mean, I think this one is fitting.” Cheryl coughed up a nervous laugh.



Will tried catching up with his dad but couldn’t. He stopped at a busy intersection to catch his breath, and that was when he heard familiar voices. Actually they were screeches: Ryden’s and Lila’s screeches. He looked up and scanned the sky to see if they were flying overhead, but they weren’t. Then he heard them again, and he followed their sounds, which led his eyes straight to the cage on Kyle Pettibon’s flatbed truck – which was sitting in New York traffic, across from Central Park. Will jerked in astonishment.

*Ryden? Lila? Oh my God. What in the world is going on? Then it dawned on him. Ohhhh, wait a minute... this situation reeks of Cheryl. I’ll bet a million dollars she’s behind this. Who else would do something so completely messed up?*

His heart sank, and then his blood pressure rose. He thought quickly and found a nearby police officer.

“Um, sir? Excuse me. But do you see those two hawks on that truck right there?”

“Yeah,” grunted the cop.

“Well, they’re my friends...um...I mean...”

“Your friends?” quizzed the officer, looking at Will sideways.

“Oh, well, I know it sounds crazy, but they live on my building,” Will explained, pointing at the art-deco building. “I...I don’t know what’s going on, but, please, you have to help me set them free. Please!”

The officer scratched his head and said gruffly, “Uh, yeah, kid, that kind of thing’s handled by animal services. You can find their phone number online.” Then the officer abandoned Will for a nearby donut shop.

*Seriously?* thought Will, scoffing at the officer’s insensitive attitude toward this dire situation. *OK. Looks like I’m going to have to take matters into my own hands.* Traffic began to move slowly, and the truck was starting to get away. Will darted into traffic and was nearly hit by a taxi as he ran alongside the truck. He saw Ryden and Lila inside the cage. Ryden, who had managed to loosen the hood on his head, looked Will right in the eye, as if begging, “Do something. Please.” Will began banging on the flatbed with his hand, bellowing for it to stop. But the truck’s brake lights didn’t flash, not even once.

Up in the cab, Kyle was listening to opera music cranked up so loud that he didn’t even notice Will. By

this point, Will's adrenaline was pumping like mad, so he did something that was at once heroic *and* stupid. Refusing to see Oddry's parents taken away, Will sprinted faster than he ever thought he could, so fast that he actually passed the truck and then threw himself in front of it and waved his arms.

"Stop!" he demanded.

Kyle saw him, yelled some bad words, and slammed on his brakes. The truck slid and fishtailed, leaving stinky, snakelike skid marks on the pavement. Will watched as the truck skidded toward him. He cringed, stopped breathing, and hoped the truck would stop just inches from his nose, like in the movies.

But the big truck didn't have very good brakes, and unfortunately it struck Will's body like a giant, metal linebacker. Will felt his rib cage compress from the impact, and then the opposing force hurled him into the air.

Will's world turned upside down as he tumbled skyward and then fell toward the sidewalk. He was coming down, and he was coming down hard and fast. Mere seconds before impact with the merciless curb, Will remembered how Oddry had taught him to tuck and roll when coming in for a crash landing. He got his bearings about him, tucked his head, and rolled like a ball across the sidewalk, disappearing into a thicket of bushes, where he bowled over an unsuspecting family of raccoons.

CHAPTER  
20

Cheryl signed the contract with a new gold pen and then handed the contract back to Bootsy. "There we are. Signed in blood."

"I hope you don't have any diseases," snipped Bootsy, examining the signature.

"Well, aren't you going to sign it?" Cheryl asked, eager to close the deal.

"Not until I see the Bird Girl," Bootsy replied. "I never buy a freak show without first examining the merchandise."

Cheryl smirked, trying to hide her frustration. "OK, Bootsy. I'll go get her. You stay put."

Cheryl rolled her eyes, exited the parlor, and hurried anxiously down the hall to Oddry's room. Arriving at the door, Cheryl pulled out her key and slipped it into the lock. "Oddry? It's Mommy. I'm coming in. The people from the city are gone. It's safe to come out now." She peeked in. "Oddry?" She entered the room and looked around, but Oddry was nowhere to be seen. "Where are you, Oddry? Are you playing hide-and-seek with Mommy?" She tried to stay calm as she looked under the bed.

Cheryl slowly began to panic, and her face flushed red. She threw open the closet doors but didn't see Oddry there either, so she started rifling through the closet's contents, thinking that maybe Oddry had burrowed herself among all of the bags of excess clothes, like an animal. She dug through the closet like a madwoman, tossing clothes and stuff over her head.

"Where are you, you disgusting, little creature?"

Cheryl flung herself from the closet and was so irritated that the little blood vessels on her temples swelled up and throbbed. She was breathing heavily, like a snarling honey badger. As she backed away from the closet, she felt dizzy. The room began to spin. She backed up, accidentally stepping into the open heater vent in the floor, and her right leg got stuck in its metal mouth. "Owww!" she screamed. She tried pulling her leg out, but it was stuck. And then it dawned on her. She knew exactly what had happened. *Oddry's escaped, and she's taken my ticket to the big time with her.* As Cheryl struggled to free herself, she heard noises from the ceiling: the

pitter-patter of little footsteps running across the dance floor's creaky wooden planks. *Aha, she's in the ballroom. I can't let her get away.*

Knowing that Oddry was still within her grasp gave Cheryl the strength to pull herself from the vent.



Outside their building, a traffic jam had snarled the city to a halt. People were out of their cars, looking for the boy who'd been hit and tossed into the bushes.

"I didn't even see him!" Kyle cried to the police officer from the donut shop. "He jumped right out in front of me!"

Meanwhile, inside the thicket and hidden from the public, Will examined his scrapes and bruises. "Ouch," he whispered to himself. "It kinda hurts when I breathe." He lifted his shirt and saw a big bruise across his right set of ribs. "Oh great, I hope I didn't break anything."

"*Braaak!*" A screech from Ryden grabbed Will's attention. He peeked through the bushes and saw the goings-on in the street. People were running everywhere, and the air was thick with nervous energy. Will spotted Ryden and Lila in the cage as downy feathers floated from it.

*All right. That's it. I've got to set them free. But how? If I run out there right now, everyone will see me.*



The raccoon family that Will had bumped into started chattering at him. They were mad at him for rolling over them, and Will knew it. *Hey, I can actually understand bits and pieces of what they're saying! Oh, and it's not very nice.* Summoning his best Raccoon dialect, Will apologized profusely to the whole family. *Wait a minute; I recognize these raccoons from the animal jamborees.* Will got excited and pointed to Ryden and Lila in the cage.

The raccoons knew Ryden and Lila and were quite upset by what they saw. "That's alarming," said the father raccoon.

"I know. Will you slap me free them?" asked Will. The raccoons were confused by Will's gibberish. "I mean, will you *help* me free them?" asked Will, correcting himself. "I'm sorry, my Raccoon is not that great."

"You can say that again," remarked the mother raccoon.

"I need to create a – oh gosh, how do you say? – a distortion?" Will continued.

"You mean a distraction?" asked the father raccoon.

"Yes. That's it," replied Will. "A distraction. But we have to act fat. I mean fast."

The father raccoon growled in agreement.

CHAPTER  
21

Victor burst into the apartment with sweat dripping down his face and back. He was furious with Cheryl and was ready to unleash years' worth of pent-up anger on her when he encountered Bootsy in the foyer. She had been snooping through their coat closet when Victor charged in and startled her.

"Who are you?" Victor demanded.

Bootsy shot back, "Oh, you must be Cheryl's husband, Vinnie, Vance—"

"It's Victor. Where is Cheryl?"

Bootsy shrugged.

Victor pushed past her into the apartment. He was just about to call out for Cheryl when Bootsy said, “You must be so proud of her new business venture.”

He stopped in his tracks. “Business venture?”

“Yes,” Bootsy chirped. “The new show? About the Bird Girl? I’m anxious to meet her.”

Victor looked puzzled. “What new show?” he asked.

Bootsy tried to wiggle out of the awkwardness of the moment, but Victor demanded she reply. “I insist you tell me what’s going on.”

Up in the ballroom, Oddry was appalled at the number of feathers left behind by her bird-napped parents. “This is horridous. It’s like a crime scene,” Oddry said as she gathered up all the large feathers and held them close to her heart. “Dear feathers, please lead me to my parents. Please.” Oddry believed that red-tailed hawk feathers brought good luck. *I need some help. I need something.*

Oddry looked around. “Where is my propeller handable?” she asked the room, searching frantically through the piles of junk she’d collected. “I know I made a backup. It’s got to be here somewhere.” Unfortunately, it was missing, along with all of her other handables.

“Oh, *screech!* Cheryl’s probably hidden them along with my satchel.”

She hopped into the nest and scanned the city for her parents. “Oh, where are they?” she asked the air in desperation. “Please. I just want to see them so I know they’re alive.”

The luck of the feathers must have been with Oddry that day, because she spotted her folks in a cage on the back of a truck down in the street. She gasped in horror. “Oh my screech!” she exclaimed. “I wish I could fly down and save them, but I can’t. I don’t have a flying handable or even a gliding handable. I’m completely grounded.”

“Looking for this?” Cheryl asked, stepping from the shadows and dangling Oddry’s satchel like a carrot.

Oddry froze, and her head filled with steaming anger. She slowly turned to look the wicked woman in the eye, growling like a wild dog as she pivoted. *What have you done to my parents?* she thought. She clenched her fist and prepared to attack Cheryl, but at the very last second, she was struck with an even better idea.

“No. You can keep my satchel, Mommy. It’s OK,” Oddry said in her best innocent voice.

Cheryl flinched in surprise. “What?” *Could this be easier than I thought? Is the little brat going to cooperate?* Cheryl wanted so badly to believe that her grand plan for stardom was still intact that she did believe Oddry.

“I don’t want the people from the city to take me away, Mommy. Will you protect me?”

“Oh, of course, dear,” Cheryl lied graciously. “That’s what Mommy’s here for. Now, please come out of that filthy, old nest. I’ll make you some cookies and tofu turkey.”

“I can’t, Mommy. My dress is stuck on one of the sticks. See?” Oddry had purposely gotten her dress snagged. She acted like a victim, struggling to break free. “Stupid nest. I hate this dirty, old thing,” she whined. “I want to come live with you, Mommy.”

Cheryl was overjoyed. *Oh good, I have the situation completely under control*, she thought. “Here, let me help you,” she purred. Cheryl limped over to the window on her sore leg, leaned her torso into the nest, and began tugging on Oddry’s dress with her left hand. She was still clutching Oddry’s satchel in her right hand.

“My poor dress,” Oddry said as she began to cry. “Evil nest. What did I ever do to you?”

Cheryl fell for Oddry’s theatrics. Oddry was outacting the actress.

“Ohhh, don’t you worry, Oddry. We’ll get you a *new* dress, hundreds of them if you want. You’re going to be working really hard for the rest of your life, so you’re going to need a lot of new dresses.”

“Oh, that sounds perfect. Thank you, Mommy. Just what I always wanted.”

Oddry watched carefully as Cheryl let down her guard and laid the satchel in the nest. She had to. She

needed both hands in order to deal with Oddry’s wardrobe malfunction.

“My pleasure, pumpkin. You can have whatever you want, as long as you do everything Mommy tells you.”

Oddry put on a big, fake smile. “Thank you. You’re the best mommy ever.”

“I know,” Cheryl said as she freed Oddry’s dress. “There we go.”

With that, Oddry slammed the window down onto Cheryl’s lower back and trapped her. Cheryl screamed as Oddry grabbed the satchel and hopped out onto the ledge.

“You horrible, little freak! You tricked me!” screamed Cheryl. Pinned halfway in and halfway out the window, Cheryl reached for Oddry but couldn’t reach her.

Oddry scooted carefully along the wall and looked down. It was a fifty-story drop, and she wasn’t wearing a handable. She had to be *really* careful. One wrong move, and bye-bye Bird Girl.

CHAPTER

22

Like a worm on a fishing hook, Cheryl wiggled and struggled to lift the window sash off her back so she could nab Oddry off the ledge.

As Oddry frantically dug through her satchel in search of her propeller handable, a strange clatter arose from Central Park. She looked down to see what the matter was and ended up witnessing something that had never happened before in the entire history of New York City.

In a tsunami of fur, teeth, and claws, every single wild animal in Central Park flooded the streets all at once. Thousands of raccoons, rats, coyotes, and deer ran screeching toward the flatbed truck where Ryden and Lila were imprisoned. It was a wall of animals, a charging brigade of wild critters.

Thanks to the raccoon family and all their friends, Will had the distraction he needed. Every New Yorker on the street, including Kyle and the cops, fled the animal onslaught while screaming bloody murder, allowing Will to hop onto the truck and pry open the cage door.

Oddry was overjoyed by Will's heroics as she dug furiously through her satchel. As Will set about freeing Oddry's parents, she found her propeller handable. She popped it on, activated it, and flew off the ledge like a bumblebee. She was buzzing down to help but was suddenly jerked to a halt.

"Not so fast!" Cheryl grunted. She had grabbed the hem of Oddry's dress with the precision of a Chinese master catching a fly with chopsticks. Cheryl had freed herself and was now standing on the ledge in her high heels. "You've kept Bootsy waiting long enough," Cheryl said, reeling Oddry in.

"Let her go!" demanded Victor.

Cheryl turned to see Victor leaning out the window. "Get out of here, Victor. You have no idea what's going on!"

Seeing Cheryl's distraction as an opportunity, Oddry turned and *thwacked* Cheryl's hand with the spinning blade of her propeller handable. Cheryl screamed and clutched her injured hand, releasing Oddry. "You did that on purpose!" Cheryl snarled at the girl.

"Well...you deserved it. You're mean," replied Oddry innocently.

"Fly away, Oddry!" demanded Victor, leaning out the window.

"*You shut up!*" Cheryl backhanded Victor so hard she broke his nose. He couldn't see anything as his eyes filled with tears.

Oddry's instinct was to help Victor, but she couldn't risk getting too close to Cheryl. Instead she turned and set her sights on her parents, whom Will had freed.

Ryden and Lila stood on the flatbed, shaking off the effects of their bondage, stretching their wings and necks.

She could just hear Will hollering, "Go! Fly! Now!" Ryden and Lila gave Will a look of genuine appreciation, and then...they took flight. Slowly ascending, they signaled to the marauding animals to return to the safety of the park's wilderness. Their screeching calls sounded like teakettles boiling.

Oddry set out to meet them in midair...until Cheryl knocked off Oddry's handable. She had pulled a large stick from the nest and flung it through the air, hitting the handable just right. It fell, and so did Oddry, shrieking as she tumbled down.

Cheryl reached for her. Naturally, she didn't want to lose her claim to fame, but she *did* end up losing her balance. Cheryl fell off the ledge.

"Cheryl!" called Victor.

As fate would have it, Cheryl managed to grab on to the ledge. She was dangling from it now, although she was quickly losing her grip.

She felt her fingers slipping. "Help me!" she begged Victor. The granite ledge scraped like sandpaper against her fingertips.

Victor leaned out the window, stretching to reach her hand so he could save her, but the disturbing sight of Oddry somersaulting toward the sidewalk distracted him. Victor's heart broke. Oddry was Will's true friend, and now all was lost.



Oddry could see the sidewalk zooming toward her. She was about to go splat when Lila swooped in and snatched Oddry's collar in her beak, breaking her fall. Then Ryden, by his mate's side, clamped Oddry's dress in his strong claws, helping to support her weight.

Both birds of prey screeched in agony as every muscle in their flapping wings strained desperately to save their precious chick. But they did it. They lifted her and headed into the park.



Cheryl pleaded with Victor, staring pathetically into his kind eyes. "Please. Help me, my darling."

Victor struggled, leaning out the window, trying to reach his wife's hand. His face throbbed with pain from his broken nose. Even though Cheryl had been so awful to him, he stretched his body so far he could almost grab her wrist.

"Just a little farther, and I've got you." He grunted under the strain.

Victor's feet were all that clung to the inside of the window frame, and they began to slip. Unfortunately, Victor was faced with a sudden realization. *If I stretch the one millimeter necessary to grab Cheryl by the wrist, her weight will pull me out the window, and we'll both fall.*

Resigned to this reality, Victor looked Cheryl in the eye and said the only thing he could say to her: "I'm sorry."

Cheryl spit in his face. "I never loved you," she growled. "I only married you for your money."

Victor was sickened, even though on some level he'd always known it.

Cheryl's fingers slipped; knowing she was about to die, she used her last breath to make an appalling confession. "I killed Nora," she said, smiling deviously at Victor. He was so hurt by this revelation he almost threw up.

With that, Cheryl lost her grip and fell, screeching like the evil banshee she was. She fell past the large picture window in the parlor, and a horrified Boots took



this as her cue to exit the apartment as quietly as possible rather than getting caught up in what would surely be a huge public scandal. She grabbed the contract and waddled away.

Out on the street, Will watched Cheryl fall, swaying through the air like a rag doll, this way and that. She fell past the twenty-ninth floor and then the fifteenth and then the fifth. Crowds of citizens, police officers, and firemen watched in horror. Everyone winced and turned away so they wouldn't see the splat.

Suddenly, Oddry swooped in from out of nowhere and released a special rescue net from a very clever handable. *Sproing*. The net popped open, expanded, and miraculously caught Cheryl, like a bug in a web. The crowd gasped. Hundreds of people ran over to Cheryl to see if she was OK...and guess what? She was. Naturally, she was quite shaken from the fall, but she didn't have any injuries.

*Oh my God, I'm alive!*

The burly fire chief leaned in and asked, "Are you OK, ma'am?"

"Well, yes, thanks to you," she said in a shaky voice. "Without your fire net, I'd be a goner."

"That's not our net," he confessed. "We didn't have time to set ours up. Some little girl did this."

Cheryl was totally surprised, until she examined the net and realized it reminded her of someone. *Ah, yes,*

*this definitely looks like something Oddry made.* "A little girl, you say?"

"Yep. In fact, where'd she go? I'd like to thank her." The fire chief looked around for Oddry, but she'd vanished.

"Oh, you'll never find her," Cheryl assured him. "Not in a million years."

"What makes you say that?" he asked, looking bewildered.

"Because this net belongs to none other than the world-famous Bird Girl."

"Ha!" laughed the fire chief. "The Bird Girl? She's not even real. Are you sure you didn't hit your head on the way down? Maybe we should take you to the hospital for an X ray."

"No, thank you," snipped Cheryl as she got to her feet. "I'm perfectly fine, and I certainly don't need to have my head examined."

"OK, lady. Have it your way. But do me a favor."

"What's that?" Cheryl asked.

"Move to the ground floor." Cheryl scoffed as the fire chief turned to the massive crowd that had gathered. "All right, folks! Let's clear the streets! There's nothing to see here!"

Cheryl patted her hair, straightened her dress, and then looked up at Victor in the ballroom window. Even

though he was far away, she could feel him glaring at her in disgust. Then she got really mad at herself and thought, *Oh, great. What have I done? Why did I have to go and confess?*

“Excuse me, Mr. Fire Chief,” called Will from the crowd as he bravely approached Cheryl.

“Yes,” replied the chief.

“I’d like to report this woman as someone who is abusive to children,” stated Will.

Cheryl was horrified. She scoffed and looked busted as Will continued.

“Well, she is to me anyway. She’s my stepmother, and she hurts me all the time. She pinches me and punches me and pulls my hair and makes me feel bad. I’d like to press charges against her, please.”

“You’re nothing but a little liar,” snapped Cheryl as she raised her hand to slap Will.

“That’ll be enough!” demanded the fire chief as he blocked Cheryl’s hand.

The chief looked down on Cheryl and told her, “I’ll need you to come with me, ma’am.”

As the chief led Cheryl away, she looked at Will as if she wanted to murder him, too, but he was no longer afraid of her. Will felt a massive weight lift from his

soul. He felt like a flower that had been trying to grow out from under a boulder and the boulder was suddenly rolled away. He was finally free to accomplish anything he wanted in life, and it felt good.

CHAPTER  
23

Six months later...

Will, Victor, and Oddry were busy working in the ballroom, turning it into a real laboratory. They were installing all the latest technology and a big workbench where Oddry could invent amazing new *handables*.

“Bagock!” Oddry said excitedly. “Now I have everything I need to create that laser handable I dreamed of.”

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll come up with tons of new things,” Will mused. “Who knows, maybe you’ll even build a spaceship and go to the moon.”

“Ooh,” said Oddry. “I like that. Will you go with me?”

Will pretended to be a rocket. “Whooooosh. Ready for blastoff!”

Oddry laughed.

“Can I come, too?” pleaded Victor playfully.

“Can you come?” repeated Oddry. “Shoot, you’re the captain!” They all laughed. It did not hurt Will to laugh anymore. His bruised ribs had healed up nicely. Even so, he had made a promise to himself to never again jump in front of a moving vehicle, especially a big truck with bad brakes.

“Lunch, anyone?” chimed Miss DiGloria as she entered the ballroom carrying a big picnic basket.

“Yeah,” said everyone at the same time. Victor, Will, and Oddry had decided to let Miss DiGloria in on Oddry’s secret, and she kept it close to her heart.

Cheryl, on the other hand, was missing out on all of the fun. That was because she was in prison, serving a twenty-five-year sentence for the murder of Will’s mom. Victor had divorced her, and he hoped he’d never see her again. Will felt exactly the same way about Cheryl, but Oddry didn’t. In fact, she brought her up as they ate lunch.

“I sure hope that someday Cheryl can be happy,” Oddry said. Everyone stopped chewing and looked at her, somewhat stunned by her remark. “It takes a truly miserable person to do all the horrendous things she did. And for that I feel like she deserves a little sympathy.”

Victor and Miss DiGloria looked at each other, smiled, and shook their heads in disbelief. Both were pleasantly surprised at Oddry’s empathy and kindness.

“You know, Oddry,” said Will. “You’re right. And the fact that you feel that way makes me love you even more. I’m happy to call you my sister.”

“Hear, hear,” said Victor, raising his glass for a toast.

He had already started adoption proceedings to make Oddry a legal member of the family. He and Will had come up with the story they would share with people when people asked all the inevitable questions about who Oddry was and how she’d come to live with them. They had decided to say that Oddry was the child of a close relative who’d recently passed and she’d been left in Victor’s care. And people believed it.

“*Braaaak*,” came a screech from the nest. It was Ryden and Lila.

“Oh, goody.” Oddry picked up a piece of chicken from the picnic basket and took it over to them. “Here you go, my darlings,” she squawked.

“Oh, thank you, daughter,” replied Lila graciously as she took a bite. Will joined Oddry at the window, and her parents welcomed him with an affectionate squawk. They admired Will now. Since he had so bravely rescued them and taken such great care of Oddry, they genuinely considered Will to be a true friend.

“We have a surprise for you, Oddry,” said Ryden. Will and Oddry looked at each other in anticipation.

With that, Lila proudly stood up and showed Oddry three beautiful, spotted eggs that she had laid that morning. Oddry gasped in pure delight. “Oh my golly. This is amazionic.”

“Whoa,” said Will, marveling at the eggs. “It looks like our family is getting bigger by the minute. Dad, come check this out.”

Victor did not respond, so Will turned to find out why. His dad and Miss DiGloria were engaged in a loving kiss.

“Yes,” said Will, pumping his fists in full-on approval.

“What are you ‘yessing’ about?” asked Oddry as she turned and saw the kiss for herself. “Squawk!” shouted Oddry gleefully. She jumped up and down, flapping her arms like a bird, and said, “Yep. Looks like our family *is* getting bigger by the minute.”

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THE END  
— — — — —



*A new Oddry book is coming soon. Be sure to join Oddry on her next adventure as she discovers her true identity and Will uncovers the mystery of why his grandparents closed up the apartment and left it sitting vacant for all those years.*

*[www.oddry.com](http://www.oddry.com)*



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