

Hedwig's Tale

Dobby asked me to tell my story so his children would know all the tales of Harry Potter and those closest to him. Goodness me, I'm no writer — I deliver mail! But Harry loves Dobby and if Dobby wants something, Harry does his best to provide it. And I do love Dobby and Winky's children. They're such sweet little things, and it's such fun to watch them play. So, all things considered, I'll have a go and see what happens.

I don't quite know where to begin. Let's see. I suppose you don't want to know what it's like to be inside an egg (crowded) or to have to break out of its shell on your own (don't ask — what an undignified way to enter the world!).

I doubt that many owls will read my story — we can read, of course, or we wouldn't be post-owls, but most of us have more interesting things on our minds than reading. However, my master is a fascinating man, and I think his tale should be told. And, since I've been with him ever since he entered the magical world, his tale and mine are rather intertwined.

He named me "Hedwig," a name he found in some book. I later learned that Hedwig is the patron saint of orphans. Merlin knows that poor boy needed a patron saint of some kind while he was growing up, but all he had was me. I have always done my best to be a good companion to him as well as a good post-owl. My mother taught me that such would be my duty in life, but I had no idea that my duty could be such a joy — and such a sorrow at times.

My master is a good man, and he was a good, if mischievous, boy. The times we've had, oh, I could tell you such tales! Oh, right, that's why I'm here — to tell you the tales.

Well, you've read most of our story in those books Hermione Granger Weasley wrote under that assumed name, J.K. something-or-other. I've heard my mistress and Hermione read those stories aloud to the children, so I know Hermione didn't miss much. But Hermione didn't know the many times poor Harry poured his heart out to me, the only one who was always there for him, the only one who would always listen to him. Poor boy, so alone in that horrible house of Muggles!

Summers were the worst sort of torture for both of us. Imagine locking a perfectly well-behaved Snowy Owl in her cage for days — and nights! — on end! I wasn't the only one locked up, of course. They treated my poor master like a wild animal, locking him in and shoving food through a flap in the door. He shared what little food he was given with me even if it left him hungry, as it usually did.

Sometimes he'd tell me what was bothering him. Other times, he'd bottle everything up inside, as tense as a mouse that sees an owl swooping down on it. I'd try to tell him that keeping those feelings inside wasn't good for him, but he didn't listen to me very often. He had such terrible burdens to bear when he was a boy, with that awful Voldemort after him and everyone telling such lies about him. Children shouldn't have to bear such burdens. It just isn't right. But he did bear them, and he won out in the end, didn't he? He's such a wonder, my master.

One time during his first year at Hogwarts, Harry and I sat by the lake, just the two of us. He poured his heart out to me. He couldn't understand why his parents had to die and leave him with those awful relatives or why he survived Voldemort's curse when no one else had. Most of the children at Hogwarts stared at him and whispered about him rather than trying to be friends with him. They were more interested in his scar and the stories about him than in getting to know the sweet boy he was. And Professor Snape was so awful to him in those early years. Harry had done nothing to deserve that man's spiteful behavior. I wanted to bite Snape's nose off many times, but my training forbade me from attacking a human beyond a nip on the fingers unless my master told me to hurt them, as he did one time a few years later when he wanted some information from Ron and Hermione. I nipped them repeatedly, but they kept saying they didn't know anything to tell him. I stayed at the Grimmauld Place house, nipping Ron and Hermione's fingers regularly as Harry had instructed, until my master showed up.

Harry was so terribly lonely, especially in those early years, and treated badly by so many people, and none of it was his fault. Why would anyone treat a child like that? I couldn't answer his questions or explain why people behaved the way they did toward him. All I could do was listen to him and let him stroke my feathers. I wished he was small enough that I could nestle him under my feathers like an owlet. I would have protected him from everything if only he'd fit under there. But he's a man, not an owl, and even when he was a child, I couldn't protect him that way.

Let's see, what other tales did Hermione miss in her books? Oh, I remember one.

During Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts, there was a nasty professor there who did horrible things to many people, but especially to Harry. She made him write lines with a foul quill that cut into his hand so he was writing in his own blood. She took his Firebolt away, as well. But worst of all as far as I'm concerned, she had me attacked while I was doing my job!

I'll never forget it. I was flying back to Hogwarts with a letter for my master when a bedraggled-looking wizard flew his broom close to me. That happens from time to time. Some people like to race post-owls, as if we had time to play! They don't seem to understand that we're professionals doing our job as well as we can, and don't need such distractions. But this man flew up near me and pulled his wand on me! I'm not used to such treatment. Post-owls are rarely attacked by wizards, because we serve such a useful function in their world, but this man pointed his wand at me and hit me with a spell before I could escape! He injured my wing, then flew off laughing as I plummeted toward the ground. With tremendous effort, I managed to slow down enough to land in a tree. I sat there and rested for a while, hoping to regain my strength. I had no way to let Harry know

where I was. He couldn't rescue me. I'd just have to make it back on my own.

After resting a bit, I dropped down from the tree branch and caught enough air in my wings to get going again. Oh, it was so hard, and so painful! I've never been through anything like it, and hope never to experience such a thing again! After that, I understood how much pain my master must have been in all those times when he was injured after battling Voldemort or when he was hurt playing Quidditch. My poor master.

I got to Hogwarts long past the normal time for mail delivery. I can always find my master, though, so I tapped on the window of his classroom. When he brought me inside, I can't tell you how relieved I was! He made some excuse and left his class, taking me to be healed. I was looking forward to Hagrid taking my pain away. Other owls who'd had various injuries or ailments told me he's very gentle and kind, but instead of Hagrid, Harry handed me over to Professor Grubbly-Plank. She was smoking a smelly old pipe, yuck. I couldn't believe he gave me to her and then just left! I glared at him when he abandoned me there, but it turned out that he was right to give me to her. She had me fixed up in a short time, then gave me to Dobby to return me to my master. It was a happy night when I saw Harry again, let me tell you!

Harry is such a sweet man. I nibble his hair and his fingers to let him know how much I care about him, as I always have. He could have been like Pig's nasty boy, that Ron Weasley, and call me names, but no, he has always treated me kindly and with respect. Well, nearly always, at any rate. I like kindness in a master.

I consider myself most fortunate in the master I serve. His wife is a charming woman as well, if not as patient with me at times as he is. Those redheads do have tempers, and their children, especially the children of the oldest twins, Fred and George, are terrors! When they come to visit, I go into the rafters and won't come down until they leave. My master's children are sweet and funny, if a bit rowdy at times, but they're always kind to me. They give me frequent treats, keep my cage clean and my perch sanded and stroke my feathers nicely.

Earlier this year, my master's son, Dan, came up with an idea that pleased me very much. He asked Harry why he'd never found me a mate. My ears perked up at this, let me tell you! A mate for me? Do you have any idea how few post-owls are allowed to mate? Most of us live a lonely existence. When Dan asked his father this, I flew down and sat on my master's shoulder and nibbled his ear to let him know I was interested. He laughed and took me from his shoulder, looked me in the eye and said, "Do you want a mate?" DID I? He didn't have to ask twice!

A few days later, my master, my mistress and the children went to Diagon Alley, where we visited Eeylop's Owl Emporium. My master let me fly from cage to perch to swing, checking each owl there. None of them suited me. I returned to him and sat on his shoulder quietly, looking at all the owls there in disappointment.

"Don't see the right one, girl?" Harry asked me. I nuzzled his hair in reply. "We'll find another supplier, then."

Just as we started to leave the shop, the owner came out of the back bearing a cage with a handsome male Snowy Owl in it. He set it on the counter and told us this one had just arrived.

I flew over, settled beside his cage and looked at him. He came to the bars and clacked his beak at me, hooting softly. I hooted back, but I couldn't reach him through the bars. I looked at my master, hoping he'd understand what I wanted. Well, of course he did. He's Harry Potter, after all, isn't he?

"Can we take him out?" Harry said. The owner opened the cage and the other owl stepped out with great dignity. We walked around each other, sizing each other up, introducing ourselves with soft hoots and some mutual grooming. I liked him, and he seemed to like me. I looked up at my master and blinked, letting him know this was the one. Soon we were on our way, the children all chattering merrily, my new mate riding on my mistress's shoulder while I rode on Harry's. We chattered and clacked our beaks, joking in the way of owls, getting to know each other, flirting a bit. I was as giddy as a young owlet, let me tell you!

"What shall we call him?" Ginny said as she stroked my mate's handsome plumage.

"I don't know," Harry replied. "What do you think, kids?"

"How about Sinbad?" Brian, one of the younger twins, suggested.

"Sinbad?" Harry said, a thoughtful look on his face. He turned to me. "What do you think, girl?"

I ruffled my feathers and let him know that name didn't suit my new mate at all. He turned to my mate and saw an equally ruffled set of feathers there.

Harry smiled and looked at the child who'd spoken. "They don't like that one. What else can you think of?"

"How about Icarus?" Jamie suggested.

"Or Icabod?" Siri, his twin, added. It was easy to see they'd been doing their summer reading, which was good, of course, but those names simply wouldn't do.

Soon all the children were offering name suggestions, most of which were awful, some of which were simply not right for a handsome, dignified owl like my Archibald.

Harry looked at me suddenly, a frown on his face. "Archibald?"

I twittered and fluttered my wings excitedly. He understands me so well sometimes.

"Archibald?" he said again. I clacked my beak approvingly. He turned to my beloved and said, "May we call you Archibald?" My handsome mate ruffled his feathers importantly, letting my master know he'd chosen the perfect name.

Archibald it is, then,” Harry said, reaching out to stroke my mate’s feathers gently.

And so it was that Archie and I set up nest-keeping together. My master built a huge nest box for us with all the privacy we could want. No children could poke their fingers inside our haven, nor could they peep in and disturb us. Harry himself cleaned the box so we’d be disturbed as little as possible. We settled in there, Archie and I, happy as two lovebirds.

Before long, eggs began to arrive. Archie and I looked after them as well as possible, keeping them warm, turning them, packing soft down plucked from our own chests around them to ensure their comfort.

At last, the big day came! As the first egg began rocking, Archie flew to get our master and his wife, so they could share our joy. Small taps could be heard coming from inside the eggs now, and cracks began to appear on the surfaces. We held our breath as the first tiny beak broke through. Oh, how I wanted to help them into the world, but no, they had to do it themselves. It was for their own good to get that exercise as they took their first steps into the world.

As they broke free of their shells and tottered about in the nest, those great redheaded lumps showed up at our home. Harry’s children, of course, shared the glad tidings that Archie and I were new parents, but those rowdy boys pushed and shoved, trying to see our precious little ones. I gathered the babies to my breast and covered them in my plumage. No noisy boys were going to disturb their first day of life!

My master saw my distress and told the Weasley boys to quiet down, but their fathers were just as rowdy as they were and poked their matching ugly faces into the entrance to our box. Archie flew at them, nipping one of them on the nose.

“Damn, Harry, that new bird’s a monster!” Fred said.

Harry and his wife were laughing. “You got what you deserved for poking your nose in there before they were ready to show off the babies,” my master told them. Did I mention how wise he is? He could be an owl if he wanted to.

After Archie and I fed the babies and tidied the nest, I moved aside so my master could see our little ones.

“Well done, girl,” Harry said, smiling at me. “You too, Archie.” He gave me a bit of bacon, and then offered Archie another piece. He checked our water trays and put extra owl treats in the box for us. He takes such good care of us, my master.

I knew he’d be proud. My babies were the most beautiful Snowy Owlets ever born! Well, Archie and I thought so, anyway.

One by one, my master lifted his offspring so they could peep in and see our babies. Then Harry told those noisy Weasleys to be quiet so they wouldn’t disturb the little ones, and he’d let them see us. Finally, one redheaded boy after another was lifted so he could see into the box. They were all so identical, you’d think it was the same boy being lifted time after time, but there are four of them.

Finally, show time was over and we settled down to a well-deserved rest.

Babies grow so quickly. In what seemed like no time, our babies had feathers rapidly replacing the down they were born with. They preened and moved about the nest proudly stretching their little wings — at least, they did when their bellies were full. Archie and I were so proud of them.

One day, all those redheads came to visit our home. Those four they call the Quads were up to something that day, I could tell. They came in the house for some reason when everyone else was outside, and headed straight for our nest box. They shoved their ugly red faces in the opening and then one of them reached in and grabbed one of my babies!

Archie and I are well-mannered birds, but this was just too much! I screamed and Archie flew out to chase the boy, but they shut the door on our nest box, shutting us in! I kept the other babies covered while Archie flew at the door, screaming and clawing for all he was worth.

I kept my ears tuned to my baby, out there with the nasty boys.

“It looks ready to fly,” said the monster who’d removed him from his nest.

“Nah, it’s still too little. Put it back,” one of the others said. I never could keep those redheads straight.

“Come on, little guy. If you fly well, I’ll ask Uncle Harry if I can have you,” the first boy said.

I found out later that my baby was hanging on to the nasty boy’s finger as tightly as he could. The boy pried him off his finger and threw him in the air. Something inside him must have broken when the boy tried to get him off his finger. I suppose the nasty boy squeezed him too hard. Normally, a fall when learning to fly won’t kill a baby bird, but instead of flying, he just . . . fell. I knew when his heart stopped beating. I felt as if my own stopped with it.

After what seemed a lifetime, I heard the sound of my master’s running footsteps and Merlin’s distressed cries.

“Why are the owls screaming?” Harry said. “Oh no. What have you done? Where are Hedwig and Archie?”

Those boys didn’t say a word. Archie stepped back but kept screeching, waiting for our master to open the door to our nest box.

“Hedwig, Archie, are you all right? How are the other babies?” Harry said as he opened the door. He gently lifted Archie out of the box so he could see me and my babies. I hooted mournfully, knowing without seeing the tiny bundle in his hand that my baby was dead.

When Harry took Archie out of the nest box so he could see me, Archie flew off, attacking the baby-killer with raucous screams. Very protective, my Archie is. He could smell our baby’s delicate scent on that horrible boy’s hands, so he knew which one to attack. The little monster screamed and

beat at Archie, but Archie wouldn't be put off. He finally relented when Harry called him.

"Archie! Archie, I know you're upset, but attacking him won't bring your baby back. Come here, lad. That's a good boy. Hedwig needs you now. Get back in the box, OK?"

Ever so gently, my master put Archie back in the box. Archie and I nuzzled each other and then I left him to watch the children while I went out to confer with my master. I flew out and sat on his shoulder, nibbling his hair and hooting, trying to tell him how much it hurt to lose our baby.

"I'm sorry, old girl. We'll find a way to make this right," Harry promised.

Merlin, Harry's phoenix, circled overhead, then dropped a lovely big splat of crap on that nasty boy's head. I gave Merlin a grateful look. My master looked up at him and gave him a little smile, but said nothing about Merlin's bad manners. As I said, my master is a wise man. He'd be an excellent owl.

My master's children and the fathers of the quads came in, drawn by the noise, I suppose. One of the quad's fathers looked at the one who'd killed my baby. The nasty boy's face and hands were bloody, thanks to my Archie's sharp beak and talons, and covered in bird crap now, thanks to Merlin.

"What happened to Tim?" Fred said.

"Archie attacked me!" that awful boy said. "And Merlin crapped on me!"

Once my master's children saw the dead owlet in their father's hand, they were simply furious with the quads. Jamie glared at the one who'd hurt my baby, then stepped up to his uncle and said, "We have good owls, Uncle Fred. They wouldn't have attacked him unless he deserved it."

"Somebody tell me what happened," Harry said, trying to keep things calm, which was a difficult thing since his children were now grieving, standing on tiptoes to see my little one lying in their father's hand.

I flew down to Harry's arm and crooned to my baby lying there in his hand. Poor little thing, he didn't even have a name yet. Harry wanted to get to know my babies before naming them. Harry stroked my feathers, trying to comfort me. I could see my beautiful owlet stiffening in his hand.

Harry sighed as he looked from me to his children, then at all those redheads. I sensed it when he changed from grief to anger. "I asked a question. What happened? How did this owl die?"

"Harry, that bloody bird needs to be locked up," Fred said as he fussed over his child's wounds.

"You can't keep an owl that attacks, mate," his twin added. "You'd best put it down."

Archie! No, they can't mean to harm my Archie after killing my baby! No! I fluttered up to my master's shoulder and chattered nervously, hoping Harry understood what I was trying to tell him.

Harry put a calming hand on me, but I was still terrified about what might happen to Archie. "He had a reason to attack," Harry said, holding my poor baby's body up for the others to see. "Somebody took this owlet out of the nest and killed it. Archie had a right to defend his family."

Nobody stands up to the man who defeated Voldemort for long. One look from my master can put anyone in his place. He stared those nasty boys down until the monster finally admitted taking my baby out of the box and trying to get him to fly.

"And what made you think you had the right to do that, Tim?" my master said, his voice stern and angry. "They're our owls, and your Aunt Ginny and I rarely touch the babies ourselves, much less let children touch them. You found out how fragile owlets are the hard way, didn't you?"

The boy nodded, but wouldn't meet my master's gaze.

Harry put a hand under Tim's chin and lifted his face until the boy raised his eyes to Harry's. "What are you going to do about this? You killed an owl and disturbed the peace in our household. You upset Hedwig and Archie and their babies. Archie was protecting his family, and I can't blame him for it. I would've done the same thing myself, or worse."

"I'm sorry, Uncle Harry," Tim said. "What do you want me to do?"

Harry stood staring at the boy for a long time. I suppose he didn't know what a fit punishment was for such an offense. I wanted the boy beheaded or eviscerated. Archie and I would both be happy to handle that kind of punishment, if they'd only let us at him, but nobody listened to me. I suppose if they'd done that, the family might have had a falling out. They all get along so well, and that's something Harry cherishes, since he grew up with no family love at all. If I hadn't gone through his early years with him, I might not have been so understanding when he didn't let Archie at least scratch that boy's eyes out. But for all that little monster's faults, my master loves him, and that boy loves Harry, as well.

I think Harry and I were thinking these things at the same time. I nuzzled his hair to let him know I trusted him to make the right choice.

"Archie will not be locked up," Harry said, turning and opening the door to our nest. Archie came to the doorway and watched the proceedings, but refused to leave our babies even when our mistress tried to coax him out of the nest with owl treats. "You, Tim, will clean the barn and the tray under the owls' nest box every day for a month, with no magic. You will also apologize to both Hedwig and Archie for what you did, and to my family as well. And you will attend the funeral of this little owl. You will behave properly whenever you're on my land, or you will not be welcome here again, no matter how much we love your family."

I watched the little monster's face while Harry was speaking. When Harry said he wouldn't be welcome anymore, the boy's face seemed to cave in.

“Yes, Uncle Harry,” he said. His voice was quiet, his shoulders sagging. I think my master finally got through that stupid boy’s thick head how badly he’d hurt the Potter family.

My master and mistress held a lovely funeral for my baby that afternoon. All the family attended, and everyone said something nice about Archie and me, since they didn’t know our baby well enough to speak about him. They wished him well and buried him in a pretty box my mistress took from her own dressing table. She said it was only appropriate for such a beautiful baby to be buried in a beautiful box. All those redheads were there, including their redheaded mothers. The monster’s father kept boxing the monster’s ear throughout the service. I decided I liked the father quite well after that. Ron and Hermione’s son wouldn’t even stand near the Quads during the funeral, he was so upset with them. He’s a nice boy most of the time, not a wild thing like those Quads.

Since then, Archie and I have continued our quiet lives, watching our two remaining owlets grow to maturity and teaching them to fly. I still have a few good egg-bearing years left in me, so we’ll have more babies as time goes by. And we now have protective shields around our nest box as well as protective cushions on the floor around the box, in case any of the babies fall out of the nest. Not that Archie or I would ever let that happen, but with little ones, you just never know.

My master has Merlin to carry his mail now, so Archie and I work for our mistress. She sees her family enough that we don’t have to work very much. We enjoy watching Harry’s little ones grow. I think my two owlets may become Jamie’s and Siri’s when they go to Hogwarts in a few years. My babies will be ready for that kind of work by then.

Well, that’s the story of my life with Harry Potter so far. I hope you’ve enjoyed it. And when a post owl delivers your mail, please remember to give it an owl treat or a piece of bacon as well as payment for the service. We all work quite hard, flying in all kinds of weather to deliver your mail on time. Your showing appreciation for what we do makes it all worthwhile.