

## A Costly Crown

By Ashley Vogler

One winter morning as dry leaves danced and the sun rose like cold fire over the barren tree tops, the birds of the forest gathered for a meeting.

“It’s time we chose a bird to rule us,” Blue Jay said as he perched atop the meeting stump.

“I think it should be Owl,” Robin suggested, “She’s the wisest.” Many feathered heads bobbed their agreement.

“Oh no, no,” Owl said, “I have no desire to be queen. That’s a young bird’s job. I only wish to serve.”

“Shouldn’t the cleverest bird be king?” Wren asked.

“Perhaps,” said Blue Jay, “But the king or queen should also be *trustworthy*.” He gave a pointed look at Wren. Only the day before, Wren had swapped one of his acorns with a rock. Blue Jay stretched his sore beak irritably.

The dozens of victims of Wren’s mischief and thievery nodded their assent.

“Well there’s nothing more trustworthy than a strong wing,” Eagle said, “Shouldn’t our ruler be the one who flies highest?”

The other birds began to protest. But Eagle scratched a deep furrow into the bark of the meeting stump with a talon and gave them a menacing glare.

So reluctantly, they agreed.

The strongest of the flyers made a line along the bow of the large old oak that stood alone in the center of a clearing. And at Owl’s signal, they took flight.

To no one’s surprise, Eagle soon outstripped the others. He flapped his massive wings and reached the peak of his flight.

“I am your king!” Eagle bellowed.

“Don’t be so sure,” A little voice said. And with that, Wren leaped from his perch on Eagle’s back and flitted above him.

Eagle fought to fly higher, but he had already exhausted his strength.

When the birds returned to the ground, they all began squawking at once.

“That was a dirty trick!” Said Blue Jay.

“You cheated!” Shouted Eagle. And for once, the other birds (willingly) agreed.

“Now, now. Don’t be too hasty,” said Owl.

“You really want that trickster to be King?” Robin asked.

“I don’t see why not.” Owl said. “With a humble servant to carry out his orders, I think that Wren will make a wonderful king.”

Wren puffed up proudly and missed the wink that passed between Owl and the others.

At Owl’s suggestion, the birds gathered their shiniest trinkets, and Woodpecker hammered them into a crown. Owl placed it a top Wren’s temples, and all the birds of the forest bowed before him.

“Now you must retreat to your kingly abode,” Owl said, gesturing to the large old oak tree.

“All the way over there?” Wren asked, “By myself?”

“Of course!” Owl said, “With a crown as precious as yours, you’ll want to keep your distance. You wouldn’t want anyone to take it, would you?”

“Of course not!” Said Wren.

Wren made his palace in the the large old oak. Each morning, Owl would visit to collect his commands and deliver food and gifts from his loyal subjects. And throughout the day, Wren heard the cheerful sounds of the other birds at work and play. And though in his more honest moments of reflection he longed to join them, he never left the safety of his palace.

And why should he? As Owl reminded him, a king should never mix with his subjects, especially when they might try to steal from him.

And so Wren spent his days deep in the hollow of his palace, polishing his costly crown.