

## An Enigma is Born (Revision)

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a Pumpkin in the Forest short story

The final breeze of the season blew through her feathers—she shivered, readjusting to make sure that her lone egg remained warm. The night sky above felt shallow as she imagined all the depth of the world inside the egg beneath her. *Any moment, now*—she thought to herself—*this egg should burst to life.*

“Harold,” she hooted. “Harold!”

A large figure swooped down next to her, leaning in as she stepped back, revealing the egg atop their sturdy nest.

“It’s happening,” she said. “It’s finally happening.”

The two watched over as the egg tumbled and twitched. After a while, a crack formed and a beak emerged. The two patiently waited, trying to determine what kind of owlet they’d soon encounter. Would it be a strong owl? Efficient, maybe? Would it be the kind of owl the forest needed? Would it be able to keep the forest safe? That was their main concern, as the owls grew older and the forests’ safety rested under their watchful eyes.

The head of the owlet peeked out, the parents cooing proudly. The egg fell over as the fragile, featherless creature emerged, its beak already open, begging for its first meal.

“The crows down at the patch were talking about how absurd this was—”

“Don’t listen to them, Harold. The crows are such clowns.”

“No, no—it’s not that this time. I was just going to say—an enigma, they called it. Us only having the one egg... the crows said they lay 3 or more, and then some owls a forest over said the same.”

“That doesn’t mean anything.”

“No, I know. Let me finish, Cheryl. I was going to say... enigma. I think a mysterious force is just about what our forest needs.”

“Where are you going with this?”

“We need a name for the fella, don’t we?”

\* {3 Years Later} \*

The trees were beginning to bud out, lining the horizon. A green blanket speckled with hints of pink and red. Beneath the leaves, animals frolicked, ran, hid—deer, squirrels, birds of all kinds—the atmosphere was full of joy and new life.

As night approached, many of the animals fled to their homes. Deep within the forest—the night critters began to emerge, playing tag in the darkness and keeping balance in the active energy of the forest. A figure emerged from within one of the tallest trees. The large, dark silhouette stretched out in the evening moon to reveal an intimidating wingspan that could keep any small critter of the forest in check. After the stretch, it took off into the dark, hidden skyline—above the trees, peering down onto its domain.

“Enigma,” a voice called from below. “Come down here!”

The figure lowered itself down into the forest. There, it was confronted by a much smaller beast—one with four legs and a sleek, shimmering-in-the-moonlight gray coat.

“What’s the plan for today!”

“The same as any other,” Enigma said.

“Will you have some time to play?”

“I’m sure I could spare some time.”

The moon loomed over the two as they ran, flew—chased—through the forest.

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Elsewhere in the forest, near the entrance, a black smog was building. Hidden in the night, flames began to highlight the smoke and devour the nearby plants and trees. A prominent nest fell to the flames as a branch was scorched—all the foliage below destroyed, only ashes remaining.

Suspended in the air, Cheryl looked down upon the wreckage—their home, gone.

“Harold?” she called out. She was met with the sizzling of the very forest she protected being burnt. “Enigma!”

After a few more moments and Cheryl’s calling, Enigma arrived, swooping in from high above.

“You need to get out of this smoke, mom,” he said.

“Yes, but I haven’t seen your father.”

“I am sure he’s already out there helping other animals escape.”

“He said he’d be at the nest.”

“There isn’t one anymore. We need to go.”

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The owls congregated on the ground, away from the burning trees and foliage.

“I helped Rapture out—I led him and some other critters to the forest’s edge, near where the people homes start,” Enigma said.

“Good, that’s the least we can do for now,” Cheryl said.

Smog blocked view of the horizon as the owls searched—the two assisted as many animals as they could, asking each if they’d by chance seen Harold. No luck.

At long last, the two arrived near a clearing where many animals were already gathered. In a circle, peering in.

“Is he alright?” one voice asked.

“He landed pretty hard—no, I think he fell.”

“He was carrying this little leaf.”

“I think something’s in it.”

The voices carried as Enigma and Cheryl flew down, realizing what had happened.

“Check the leaf,” a turtle said.

A small bat approached the leaf, softly pushing it back with its wing.

“A rodent,” the bat said. “Like me! But no wings.”

“WHAT HAPPENED HERE?!” Cheryl interrupted.

“He fell,” a fox said. “He hasn’t said anything since—he just had this leaf.”

Cheryl stepped into the circle, noticing the fallen entity.

“Harold?” she cried. “Please tell me you’re okay.”

Silence.

She stepped toward the leaf.

“Is this because of you?!”

The rodent lay in a similar manner to Harold, motionless. The bat stepped forward slightly, shielding the rodent from Cheryl’s gaze. Cheryl retreated to Harold’s body as the onlooking critters began to disperse.

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“How’d it start?” a voice asked.

“No one seems sure, but it’s mostly subsided now.”

After some time, the large red vehicle that had been parked near the forest left.

Cheryl watched from a distance, soon leaving to alert the critters of the fire’s end.

“The humans put it out,” she said. “We’re safe now.”

The animals all solemnly cheered—their homes had all mostly been destroyed, but for the most part, everyone was okay.

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During the chaos of flames being put out, Enigma flew off into the night. Nothing was said and no one tried to follow. Each critter went about their own way of grieving and coping—in one part of the forest, Cheryl helped relocate the raccoon population. In another part, a bat tried to wake up a still-breathing hamster that had fallen from the sky wrapped in a leaf.

Despite Winter being over and the lingering heat and smoke, the forest felt cold.

In the depths of the forest, where the flames had not touched, Enigma stood tall in a tree—his eyes shallow.