It was early in the morning, on a bright day in July during Mary Lennox's second summer at Misselthwaite Manor, when the owls flew into the garden.

Mary saw them first, because she had seen the robin suddenly fly away and stood up to look where he had gone, and so she saw what had flighted him. Two great owls were gliding silently in to perch, in a flapping of great wings, one pair tawny, one snowy white, atop the garden's wall. She looked round for Colin and Dickon, already sure that these owls must be friends of Dickon's, like every other animal who came to the garden behaving more tamely than they could be expected to.

Colin was just getting to his feet, the book he'd been showing Dickon forgotten. He looked fascinated by the owls. He turned to Dickon and said, just as though Dickon had already told them the owls' names and that they were great friends, for surely they must be, "But how did you ever persuade them to come out in the morning like this? Owls are nocturnal."

Dickon was standing up more slowly. He didn't look surprised by the owls, but there was a very strange expression on his face, as though he didn't know whether to be happy or sad. He looked as though he were happy and sad all at once, and just as fascinated as Colin.

"It's not me they've come for," Dickon said, in a voice as soft and wondering as it had ever been when the garden was still a secret, and they had to keep quiet for fear of being discovered. He
took a step forward, and gestured from the owls to Mary and Colin. "Come on then, do what you've come to do. I guess I can tell them as much as anyone can about what it means."

Both owls sprang up from the wall, then, gliding over the garden on wide, silent wings, and when the tawny one passed directly over Mary's head, something fell from one clawed foot. She caught it automatically, and looked over to see that the other owl had dropped something to Colin as well, and he was looking back at her in astonishment. She knew her own eyes must be just as wide, and her own mouth hanging open in just the same way, and then they both looked toward Dickon.

He smiled, happiness or at least amusement winning out over the sadness on his face. "Read them, then. You're the great ones for reading."

Mary looked down at what she held: a letter, sealed with red wax. It was addressed to Miss Mary Lennox, The Garden, Misselthwaite Manor, Yorkshire, England.

But who would write to her--and who would think to send such a letter to the garden?

"How did the owls know which of us was which?" Colin asked, which was a question Mary would have thought to ask after a great many others. She walked over to stand next to Colin, and saw that the address on the front of his letter was the same as hers except for the name.

"And how did they know which garden is the garden?" Colin went on. "And why are they flying by day?"

"The owls aren't ordinary owls," Dickon said, his smile widening a bit. "And for the rest of it, you still haven't read your letter."

Colin tore the letter open in a quick, impatient motion, while Mary carefully unsealed the flap from the wax.

"School of Witchcraft and Wizardry," Colin half-shouted, while Mary stared at her own letter: Dear Miss Lennox, We are pleased to inform you that you have a place at the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

"There's Magic in the owls," Dickon said. "And Magic in you--both of you. That's why you've got places at Hogwarts. You can go to school now to learn proper Magic, with wands and spells and all."

"Proper magic?" Colin demanded, at the same time Mary said, "School?"

Colin frowned down at his letter, "Yes, where is this school located? How far should we have to--" he looked at the next sheet of his letter and fell silent.

Mary looked at hers, too, and saw that the supplies required included uniforms. This was a boarding school, then, and Colin had already flatly refused to be sent away to one of those. Mary had not been offered any, only a governess to take over when Colin went away and there were no more tutors for her to share with him. This school, in addition to being Magic, accepted girls and boys together.

"It's in Scotland," Dickon explained. "Before the trains, folk used to go by magical carriage, or even by carpets, but there's a train now from London. And the best magic shops are in London, so you go down and buy all your things, and then you take the train up to Hogwarts."

"Scotland," Colin replied, sounding affronted. "At least those other schools Father wanted to send me to were English."
"But you want to go to India," Mary pointed out, at the same time Dickon said, "But it's Hogwarts."

Colin tilted his head and said, "Dickon, how do you know so much about Hogwarts? And Magic? All this time we've talked about Magic and you acted as if you didn't know anything about it--and now you know all about this school, and wands and spells and magical owls."

Dickon blew out a breath. "It's a secret from folk who aren't Magic--properly really Magic, like this--so I kept it, just as I keep secrets for the creatures, and for you. There's some of this kind of Magic in my family, and I've got a bit more than most, so my Uncle Rob who went to Hogwarts, he sat me down and told me about it and how to keep it secret, back when I was no more than knee high. Lennoxes are Magic, too, mostly, but there's always folk without Magic being born into Magic families--and folk with it being born into families without, which causes just as much fuss."

"You really can talk to animals, can't you?" Mary asked. "Not just in an ordinary way. By Magic."

Dickon smiled and looked around, and chirped softly in the direction the robin had gone. A moment later the robin returned, landing on a branch quite near where Dickon stood, and Dickon went on taking to him in his queer little chirps and whistles until the robin seemed quite at ease.

"It seems ordinary to me," Dickon said. "I just listen to 'em and I talk to 'em in the way that I think they'll understand--same as I do with you creatures," for in the last year Dickon had begun to sound much less Yorkshire when he spoke to Colin and Mary, unless he was doing it on purpose to let them practice sounding like a Yorkshire girl and boy. "And I speak to plants the same way, but I once made a whole vine of beans grow up in a night over Mother's cottage, and that's when she sent for Uncle Rob. Didn't you ever do anything like that when you were small? The Magic shows one way or another, most times, even before you get your letter and know for sure."

Mary suddenly remembered a time when she had been very small, perhaps only two or three years old, and flew into a furious passion in her nursery. She had flung toys and clothes and even the nursery furniture about--but all without touching a single object. Her Ayah had been frightened, but another servant had come from elsewhere in the house and looked down at Mary with frank, fearless interest. No matter how wildly things flew about the room, they did not touch that servant--nor Mary's Ayah, once she had come in. When Mary subsided, feeling more frightened than cross--for she had had no idea she could do such things and her Ayah was wailing in the corner--the other servant had said, "The Sahib will like to see this."

Mary had decided right then that Captain Lennox should never see it, that the coolly interested servant should never have another reason to look at her in such an impudent and unruffled way, and no matter how angry she got she had never done anything like it again. If that was Magic, Mary wasn't at all sure she wanted to learn how to do more of it--and from the look on Colin's face, she thought he was remembering something quite similar.

"But you're quite, quite Magic, then," Mary said, realizing what Dickon had said. "Why--"

She stopped short, for she thought the answer to the question Why haven't you gone to school? was obvious somehow, and would be a cruel thing to ask. The sadness in Dickon's face made sense now.

"I never had a letter," Dickon said simply. "I'm not really the school sort, anyway--I can scarce write at all, only print, and either of you is a faster reader even with the practice you've given me this year. And I shouldn't like to go all the way to Scotland and be away from the moors and Mother and everyone for seven years."
Mary remembered the way Dickon had said, "But it's Hogwarts," as though no one could possibly want not to go there, and she knew he was being brave.

"But I shouldn't like to go all that way either," Colin said decidedly. "For seven years! No, I shall have Father hire me a tutor--if there is a school of Magic, there must be tutors of Magic. That way we can all learn together and stay in Yorkshire."

"But you must go," Dickon insisted. "And you'll be together, both of you--the best teachers are at Hogwarts, and a great magical library, full of books. You could learn things there you can't learn anywhere else."

Mary could see Colin wavering, for his eagerness to know all about Magic had never waned, and now he was finding out how much had already been discovered for him to study.

"But we would have to go away from you," Mary said stoutly. "It's no good two of us being together without the other. If you can't go to Hogwarts, nor shall we."

Colin's resolve firmed immediately. "Yes, Mary is quite right, Dickon. It isn't fair that you shouldn't be allowed to go to Hogwarts--you're more Magic than either of us, and I daresay your Magic is better--more useful. It's quite unjust that you should be excluded only because you need to work more on your reading and writing. There must be Magic for that in a school."

There might be Magic, Mary thought, but perhaps not money--there were such a lot of supplies and uniforms to buy, and train tickets, and much else that the Sowerbys likely couldn't afford. No one had ever suggested that Dickon should go to one of those boarding schools Colin refused, after all, any more than Mary could have. But that was all the more reason to stay, and learn about magic from a tutor who would teach Dickon as well.

"You must be more Magic than me," Dickon argued. "You've got your letters right there in your hands. I think you have done bits of Magic, both of you, round the garden. You just haven't known it. You've only asked the plants to do things they were going to do anyway. But if you asked one to do something a bit special, you'd see."

"Show us," Colin demanded. "You've done nice Magic like that before and known what it was--show us how."

Dickon looked back and forth between them, and then he nodded and turned away, going to kneel down by one of the standard rose bushes. There was a cut branch there, where the day before he'd snipped off a blossom, making a bouquet for Mother. Mary and Colin came and knelt beside him and watched as he took that branch in hand and made a little coaxing gesture over it, murmuring under his breath in very thick Yorkshire. Mary's eyes went wide and round as she saw a new bud appear before her eyes, swelling in a moment to a new red bloom.

"There," Dickon said aloud. "You just have to coax a bit, and ask the rose if it will bloom for you. At school you'll learn special spells for doing things, but I just talk to things and they listen. You just talk to them in the way that seems right--all the roses here know you. They won't mind if you don't use just the right words."

Mary looked over at Colin, and she knew that he was as excited as she was, and as frightened. She had only ever done violent, angry Magic before, and now she knew that ever since then she had been careful not to let her Magic out. What if she tore roses from the ground or shattered the stems? What if her magic didn't know how to be kind and gentle like Dickon's?

"We must try," Colin said, and she nodded. He stood and went to the tree at the heart of the garden, with its sprays of trailing roses, and picked up a branch with no flower at the end. Mary
picked up another, and they both looked to Dickon for instruction.

"Just ask," Dickon repeated patiently. "Find the right way to ask. There's Magic in you, and I'll warrant there's plenty of Mrs. Craven's Magic still here in the garden; if you ask it to do something for you, it will try."

Mary touched her fingers gently to the green stem she held, and as she thought rather desperately *Oh, please, please bloom for me, please,* she found herself humming softly, and then chanting bits of one of the Hindustani songs her Ayah had sung sometimes. This one, she thought, was not for going to sleep, but for waking up.

She heard Colin murmuring beside her. She could not make out the words, but she rather thought that he was reasoning with the rose, telling it all the reasons it really ought to bloom for him. Mary tried to focus on her own branch and her own Magic, and then she thought she felt something stirring inside herself and inside the rose, and a tiny green bud appeared, startling her so that she gave a little startled cry.

Colin made a quite similar noise beside her, and she saw a new green leaf resting in his hand where none had been before. He was smiling, his eyes shining with a new kind of brightness.

"We did it," Mary said, her voice hushed, and Colin only nodded back, his eyes fixed on her as hers were on him.

"There," Dickon said softly. "You see? You've the Magic in you. You munnot waste it. You'll go to Hogwarts and learn all about it."

Colin didn't take his eyes from Mary, but he tilted his head a little in silent question, and Mary gave a tiny nod, knowing they were in agreement.

"No," Colin said, turning his head to look at Dickon, and Mary followed his gaze to see Dickon looking pink-cheeked and flummoxed. "We've got Magic in us--all three, and you more than any of us. We shan't go off to school and leave you behind. We won't have it. If that school doesn't want you, then we don't want it."

Dickon looked from Colin to Mary, who gave a definite nod. There was Magic enough in the garden to be going on with, and Colin and Dickon were here. She didn't need any more than that.

"But you got your letters," Dickon insisted, now in a small, uncertain voice such as Mary had never heard from him. "A lad or a lass as gets a letter--it's a thing you wait for. I waited for mine and it never came, and here you've each got one. You can't throw that away."

"We," Mary began, and then stopped at the sound of rushing wings. "Dickon, look."

Another owl was descending into the garden--smaller than the ones who had come for Mary and Colin, a mottled gray-brown.

The owl had a letter held in its claws, and it flew straight over Dickon's head, dropping it to him. Dickon caught the letter as it fell, and his blue eyes were very round as he looked down at it.

"Am I," Dickon said, and he looked up at them again and turned it toward them. "Am I readin' it right?"

"Dickon Sowerby," Mary read out in a firm voice. "Crowded Cottage, Missel Moor, Yorkshire, England. There, you see, it tried to find you at the cottage first, and then had to come here."

"But it always comes when you're eleven," Dickon said, looking down at the letter again, turning
it over to run his fingers across the wax seal. "Always. It didn't come by midsummer, two year ago, and I knew then that it wouldn't."

Colin stepped closer and Mary did too, so that the three of them stood shoulder to shoulder together with Dickon's letter held between them.

"How do they know to send the letter?" Colin asked. "How do they know when, and to whom?"

"Magic," Dickon said helplessly. "The Magic knows when a Magic child is born, and when he's--or she's--old enough, the letter comes."

"Well, then," Colin said. "The Magic knew about all three of us, didn't it? The Magic knew that Mary and I would need you--for if you hadn't been here last spring but off in Scotland, what should we have done? How would we have learned to take care of the garden, and wake it up? And wake ourselves up--and our Magic too?"

Dickon looked up from his letter to both of them, his blue eyes bright and shining. "My letter came. I can go to Hogwarts--if you'll both come with me?"

"Of course we will," Colin said, as though he hadn't just been insisting that nothing could make him go.

Mary laughed, knowing that Colin would already be composing lists of questions to ask when they got to Hogwarts. Dickon laughed too, and Colin laughed with them, and then they were all jumping up and down and dancing about, shouting and singing. "We have Magic! We're going to Hogwarts!"

They stumbled together, breathless with happiness, all three with their arms about each other, holding on tight. They would all learn Magic together, just as the Magic had wanted them to, and Mary knew they couldn't have done it any other way.

Works inspired by this one: [Owls in the Garden by Dira Sudis [Podfic] by Rhea314 (Rhea)]

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