



The Secret

by Mary Sue Young

English & Speech, Sr.

A CHILL had settled over the forest. There was a rustling of leaves as the little animals scurried to the white stone in the center of the forest. They did not know who the new visitor was, only that he had settled in the hollow of the decaying oak tree on the edge of their homeland. The mole had suggested the stranger was a bat since he had flown in the night before, but the wiser little fox knew that he was an owl. It was the little fox who had called the meeting of his animal friends to discuss the stranger and to calm the frightened ones.

"Little friends," began the fox, "we are here to talk of the stranger in our homeland." The fox looked around at his neighbors and smiled to assure them.

Ah, how the other little animals depended upon the clever fox.

"The fox will help us," squeaked the frightened mouse half-burrowed in a pile of leaves.

The other animals nodded in affirmation.

"Little friends," continued the fox, "this stranger is an owl, for I remember my father talking of such plump birds with their large eyes and stiff looks." Truly the little fox was

intelligent. "And I know," he added, "that the stranger has filled you with fear, but that is only because he is a stranger."

"Yes, that is true," nodded the animals.

"To put you more at ease," offered the fox, "I will talk to our stranger the owl and discover why he is here."

"But, what if he will not tell you?" asked the squirrel.

"Or he may trick you and then surely we will be undone," added the mouse.

"Mr. Squirrel. Miss Mouse. We have a defense that none can overcome." The fox paused and then confidently told all, "Eyes cannot lie, my little friends. We shall know the owl's truth by looking into his eyes."

"Eyes cannot lie," softly echoed the animals and they marvelled at the fox's knowledge.

"I shall go to the owl now," said the fox.

"We will go with you," added the other animals one at a time.

"Thank you," said the fox.

Cautiously, the animals followed the sure steps of the fox over the leaves. As they came to the dying oak tree, the fox stepped out boldly into the clearing.

"Ahem. Ahem. Mr. Owl?" he asked.

The owl coldly looked down upon the fox as a tyrant would look upon his lowest subject. Seeing the firmness of the fox, he smiled thinly and said, "Yes, Mr. Fox." Looking around at all the animals peeping out of the forest shrubbery, he added, "I have been waiting to see *all* of you. So nice of you to come to me first."

"Can you see anything in his eyes yet?" whispered the squirrel to the fox.

"Be patient, Mr. Squirrel," said the fox. "Mr. Owl," repeated the fox, "we have come to ask why you are here."

The owl returned his eyes to the fox. "You have, have you," he gruffed. Then his tone changed as the thin smile returned to his face. "Ah, yes. Of course." He addressed the other animals, "I have come for a very special reason, but I cannot tell you this secret until nightfall." He eyed the little mouse. "Especially for you, Miss Mouse. Do you know that I like mice very much—more than any of the other animals? My secret shall be especially for you then. Can you wait until dark?"

The little mouse moved closer to the fox. "Why cannot

he talk plainly and say what he means? Why must he talk of secrets and riddles? Please, Mr. Fox, I am frightened.”

“Oh, little mouse, *I* am here to protect you. And remember, ‘eyes cannot lie.’ We will know his secret and its truth soon.”

The little mouse searched into the eyes of the owl but she could see nothing. She leaned closer to the fox and waited for him to find the answer to the owl’s secret.

All the animals watched the eyes of the owl and the strong face of the fox who studied the owl’s eyes most intensely. As the sun began setting and shadows fell around the clearing, the eyes of the animals became more strained.

The little mouse looked around her and gradually saw only the eyes of her friends glaring out of the falling darkness. She cautiously looked up at the owl whose eyes seemed even larger. They were becoming brighter and brighter.

As the mouse burrowed into the fur of the fox, the fox caught the meaning in the intensity of the owl’s eyes and shouted, “His eyes, they have a hungry look. Run, little friends, run quickly. The darker it becomes, the better he can see.”

The animals scurried excitedly to the safety of homes and hiding places.

The fox remembered the owl’s words, “I like mice very much—more than any of the other animals.”

“Miss Mouse,” cried the fox, “come quickly with me.”

Before the owl understood the fox’s perception of his secret, the fox had Miss Mouse and the other animals safely in their holes and hiding places.

Mr. Owl called out to them, “But, little animals, why do you run from me?”

“It is because we have a secret too,” answered the fox from his hiding place. “Eyes cannot lie, Mr. Owl. Your words may be riddles and your manner may be pleasing, but your eyes cannot lie. You have a hungry look in them.”

“Eyes cannot lie,” pondered the owl. “Then I am undone.” And he flew off to find a place where the animals did not possess such a powerful defense.

“Eyes cannot lie,” joyfully cried the animals. “You are right, Mr. Fox. We are saved by *your* secret. Eyes cannot lie.”