



H A R P E R • T R O P H Y

JEAN CRAIGHEAD GEORGE

There's an
OWL
in the
SHOWER



Illustrated by Christine Herman Merrill

1

A Good Owl

Borden Watson braked his bike and jumped off. He wheeled it across the narrow logging road and into the dark forest. Leaning it against a tree, he took his rifle from its carrier and put a bullet in the chamber.

A cool green silence wrapped around him. He breathed deeply, then stepped onto the needle-carpeted ground and walked a soundless distance. Ankle deep in ferns and wildflowers, he stopped in a grove of trees. The trees were so enormous that one alone, standing in the middle of a logging road, could block trucks in two directions.

Borden was in the old-growth forest of the Pacific Coast in northern California, a land

blessed with abundant rain and sun, a temperate climate, and deep soils.

He did not see this wild wealth. He was in the old-growth forest for one purpose: to shoot owls—spotted owls.

He hated them.

His eyes cruised up the trunk of an enormous Douglas fir. They peered past the large low branches, up past a floral burst of limbs where a pine siskin cheeped, and on up to a cluster of needles two hundred feet above the forest floor. Just below the needle spray was a large nest of sticks. He grinned.

“You,” he said aloud. “You owl, in that nest. You’re dead, the minute you stick your head up.”

It was almost twilight, and the owl, Borden reasoned, should be awake and ready to go out hunting. He thought about his father and cried out, “My dad doesn’t have a job because of you. He can’t cut any more big trees because of you.”

Shouting seemed to help the pain Borden

had felt since his father had lost his job with the lumber company. His father had told him that a judge had stopped all sale of the trees on public lands in the Northwest until the United States Forest Service could come up with a plan to save the spotted owl. It lived in the old-growth forests, and the forests were being cut down for lumber. The gentle owl was on the brink of extinction.

The government, it seemed to Borden, liked owls better than people.

Borden thought about this and grew angrier. "He's the best tree cutter from here north through Canada to Alaska," he shouted to the bird in the nest hole.

"He can put a giant tree right down on the earth without hitting a single tree around it. He can do that." He lifted his rifle. He had more to say.

"He's the best of the cutters, and the cutters are the most important people in the whole lumber business. And their work is very, very dangerous. Limbs and trees can fall



IT'S PEOPLE *vs.* OWLS!

When Borden's father finds out that there's an owl in his house, he's pretty angry. Mr. Watson is a logger, and spotted owls spell big trouble for the logging industry. Then the little owl imprints on the gruff Mr. Watson. And the lives—and views—of one logging family are changed forever.

In this novel for young middle grade readers, award-winning author and naturalist Jean Craighead George tells a heartwarming story about an owl that made his way into one family's home—and their hearts.

“Engaging and informative. A good choice for classes studying owls or endangered species.”

—*Booklist*

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in the Field of Social Studies, 1996**

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