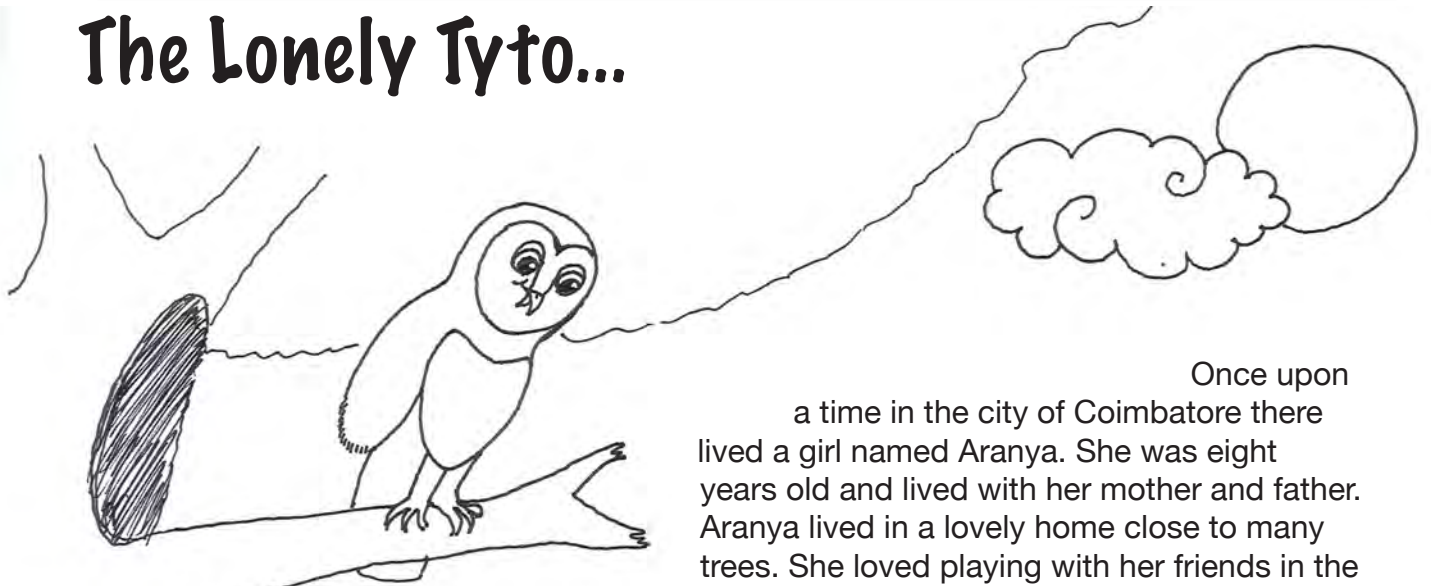


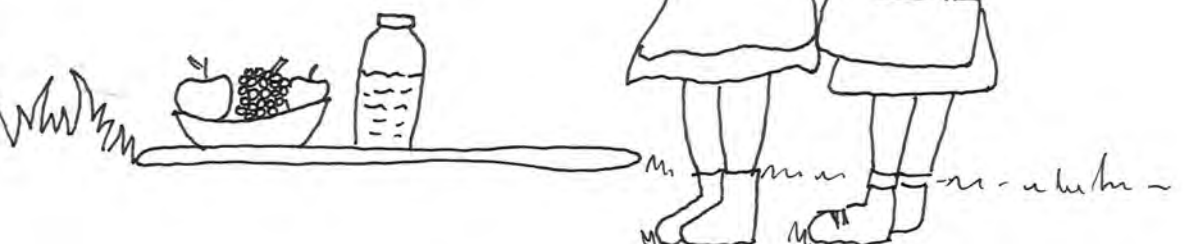
The Lonely Tyto...



Once upon a time in the city of Coimbatore there lived a girl named Aranya. She was eight years old and lived with her mother and father. Aranya lived in a lovely home close to many trees. She loved playing with her friends in the shade of the trees. One evening Aranya and her friend were having a picnic dinner under the trees. All of a sudden they heard a screeching sound. They were both confused and looked around to see what made the unfamiliar sound.

Aranya used her torch and spotted a white bird with black eyes sitting on the tree above. It was making the screeching sound. Aranya's friend recognised it to be a Owl and got frightened. But Aranya was enamoured by the lovely white bird with a heart-shaped face and beautiful black eyes. As she looked up at the owl, the owl looked back at her. It slowly blinked its eyes. Aranya kept looking at the owl and she spoke, "Hello my dear owl, you have a lovely face and very pretty large eyes. I am Aranya and this is my friend". Now as Aranya's frightened friend looked on, something magical happened. The owl spoke! It said, "Hello Aranya, I am Tyto and I am a Barn Owl and this tree is my home. Please don't be frightened of me. I do not mean any harm".

Both the little girls were thrilled and excited. Aranya continued, "Your home is beautiful Tyto. I often play with my friends under this tree but I have never seen you before. Why is that?". Tyto almost smiled and replied, "I have seen you and your friends at times. But I sleep during the day and wake up only after sunset." Aranya was full of questions about this strange and pretty bird.





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She asked, "But I thought birds went to sleep at night like us. If you sleep during the day and are awake at night, how can you see? It is so dark."

Tyto explained chuckling to himself, "My dear, let me tell you about us owls. Most birds are asleep at night but we owls sleep during the day and wake up after sunset. We have special eyes so we only need star-light or moon light to see. Even now, I do not need the light to see you."

The more she spoke to the owl the more Aranya was interested. She started to speak again when Tyto stopped her and looked into the distance. Tyto took off into the darkness. They waited and in a few minutes Tyto came back with a mouse. Aranya spoke again when Tyto looked at her, "How did you catch that in the dark?" Tyto responded placing the mouse between his claws, "I heard its squeaks with my special ears and caught it" Aranya was amazed. This bird has so many super powers. Then she thought for a moment and said, "You fly so silently and you are so white. I bet you scare a lot of people like my friend here!"

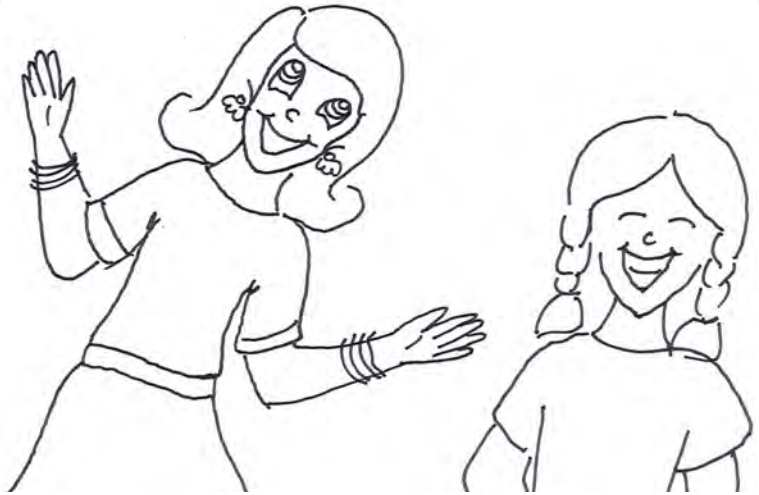
Tyto opened his wings and explained, "My feather have rough edges. This makes me a silent flier so I can catch mice. And yes. Many people are afraid of me. But I don't mean any harm. In fact, I don't have many friends and I would like to make some."

Aranya and even her friend felt sad for lonely Tyto and silently thought for a while. Then they whispered to each other and both of them nodded together. They said, “Dear Tyto we would like to be your friends. Would you like that?”

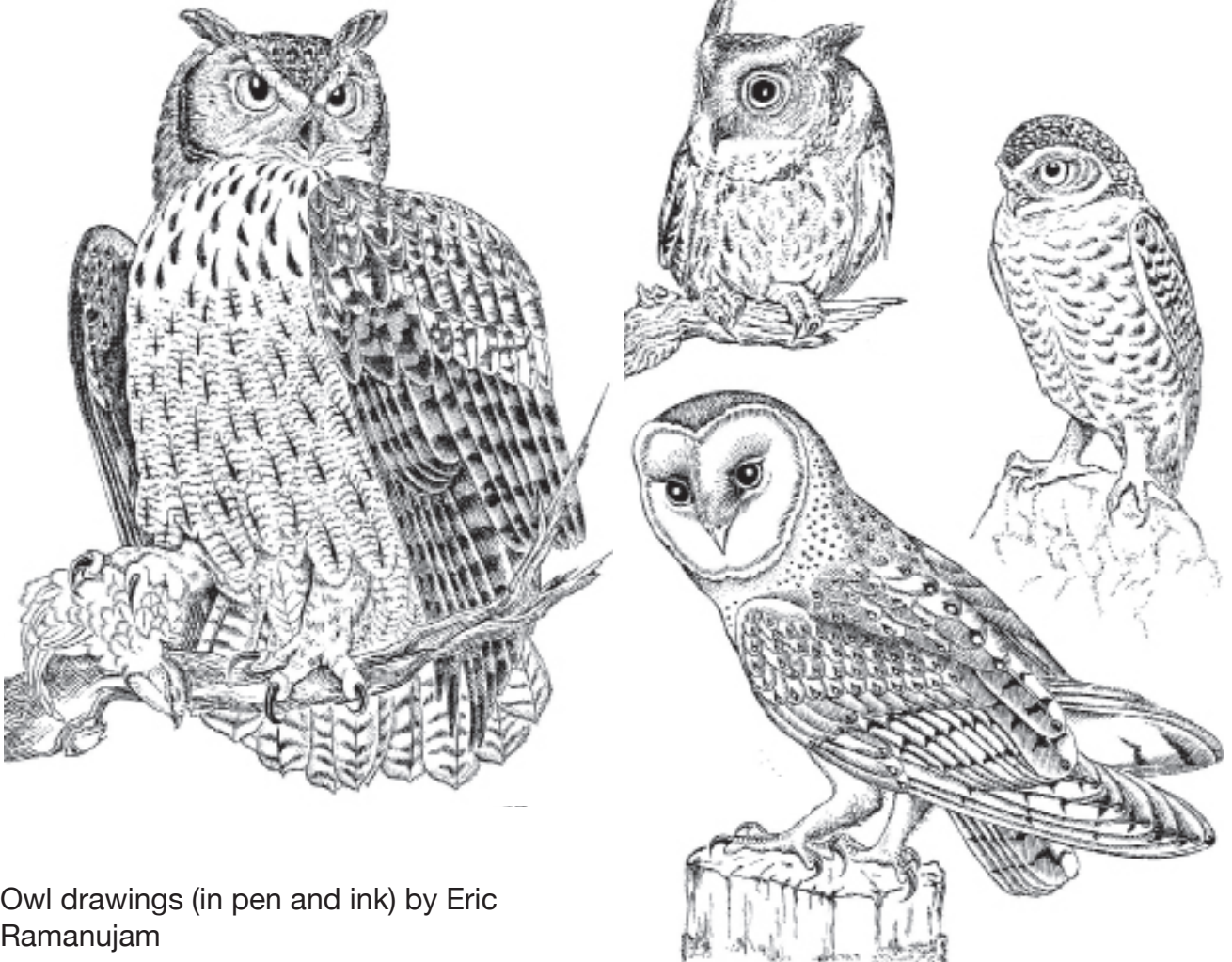
Tyto was very happy. He said, “Thank you! I would like that very much!! Screech screeecchh!!!”

“Thank you for all the time you spent with us Tyto. We learnt a lot today.

May be we can have another picnic like this together. Hee hee...” giggled both the girls. “I am happy to hear that. Good bye for now Aranya! Until we meet again. Screeech screech!” Saying so, he gobbled up the mouse whole and flew out into the darkness. Aranya and her friend went home and told their parents all about their adventure and all that they had learnt about owls. Since that night, Aranya looked forward to hear Tyto’s screeches every night as she went to bed.



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Owl drawings (in pen and ink) by Eric Ramanujam

Indian Eagle Owl *Bubo bengalensis*, drawing in pen and ink by Eric Ramanujam

