



BUFF THE POWERFUL OWL

The Secret of the Golden Dragon – Book 1

THE BEGINNING

Powerful Owls lived long ago in great blackbutt trees which grew beside the river in a place called Wallumetta, now the Country of the Wallumedegal people. Owls were wise and respected by the river dwellers even before people came. Here today lives Buff – the Powerful Owl and her friends.

In The Beginning

Long before there were houses, roads and ferries, great blackbutt trees grew beside the river in a place called Wallumetta, Country of the Wallumedegal people.

One of those trees was enormous. Its branches stretched towards the river and its roots disappeared deep beneath the sandstone. Long ago, two Powerful Owls made this place their home, living alongside the Wallumedegal people. Many great birds hunted along the river we now call the Parramatta River. White-bellied Sea-Eagles soared above the water, while other birds of prey searched the river and bushland for food. But when darkness fell, the Powerful Owls ruled the night skies of Wallumetta. They lived and raised their families in the hollows of the old trees along the river shore.



As the years passed, houses, roads and buildings spread across the landscape. Many old trees and nesting hollows disappeared, and some of the great hunting birds became much harder to find.

But a few Powerful Owls remain. And this is the story of one very unusual young owl, born in the hollow of an ancient gum tree beside the Parramatta River.

On the shore of the beautiful river, beside a quiet creek at Gladesville, lived Buff, a teenage Powerful Owl. She had hatched in the hollow of a huge old gum tree in a little patch of bush beside the river. She had soft brown-and-grey feathers on her back, fluffy white feathers on her belly, and the biggest, brightest golden-yellow eyes.



Her home was the same deep hollow where Mum and Dad had made their nest and where Buff had hatched. It was warm, safe and filled with the gentle hoots of her family. Now that she was learning to fly, Buff spent much of her time perched high on a branch, looking out across the bushland and sparkling river.

But Buff was not like other Powerful Owls. For one, she had decided to become a vegetarian. While her mother insisted that Ringtail Possums were the tastiest treat in the bush, Buff refused. "Penelope is my friend," she would say, fluffing up her feathers. "I can't eat my friends!"

Buff loved making friends in the bush, and she tried to protect them whenever she could.

Penelope the Ringtail Possum was one of Buff's best friends. Penelope sometimes arrived clinging to her mum's back. Buff's other great friends were Mitch the Magpie and Carol the Kookaburra. They spent their nights playing hide-and-seek among the trees, telling stories under the silver moon and sharing tasty snacks like wattle seeds, berries and the occasional juicy grub - which Buff tried very hard to enjoy.



But Buff had another secret, one even stranger than her vegetarian ways. Whenever she became very sad, frightened or angry, something extraordinary happened: Buff turned into a fire-breathing dragon! Not a nasty dragon. Buff became a huge, shimmering golden dragon, with wings as dark as storm clouds and fire that glowed warm and bright like a campfire. Being a dragon made her feel strong and safe.

Buff tried to explain it to Mum, but Mum didn't understand. "Don't be silly, Buff. Owls don't breathe fire," she said, shaking her head. "And Powerful Owls certainly don't live on leaves and berries. You'll have to grow up and look after yourself soon."

Buff knew she was different, and she was proud of it.

The Trouble with Noisy Miners

Every day, when the sun was high, Buff stayed home to learn. Her mother taught her all the important owl things: how to fly silently, how to listen for rustling leaves and how to spot the tiniest movement in the dark. But there was a problem.

The Noisy Miner birds!

They were small but loud, and they loved nothing more than bothering Buff and her friends. They swooped, chirped and chased Buff whenever she came out of her tree to play.

"Go away, owl!" the birds would screech.
"You don't belong here in the daytime!"

Buff and her friends tried to ignore them, but it was hard to have fun when a dozen tiny birds were shouting in Buff's ears. One afternoon, after a particularly annoying lesson when the Noisy Miners simply would not leave her alone, Buff lost her temper.



With a sudden **whoosh**, she transformed. Feathers became golden scales, her wings stretched wide, and her beak turned into a dragon's snout. With a deep breath, she let out a **warm, gentle flame** that rolled through the branches like a glowing breeze.



The Noisy Miners fell silent. They blinked, screeching in confusion, and then flapped away, deciding that maybe this owl wasn't worth bothering after all.

Buff giggled and shrank back into her owl form. "Well, that worked!" she hooted.

The Humans – the Strangest Beings in the Bush

Buff loved meeting new friends, but there was one thing that terrified her: humans. Mum and Dad had warned her never to go near the strange animals that lived in the strange boxes nearby.

Humans lived all around Buff's little patch of bushland. She sometimes flew past their homes late at night when they were asleep. She had seen them carrying strange glowing screens, making lots of noise and sometimes even looking up at her tree.

"They're dangerous," her mother warned. "Stay away from them."

But one evening Buff noticed something unusual. A small human - a little girl - was sitting alone in the yard of a nearby house. She was making the strangest sniffing sound. She was not much bigger than Buff, and nothing like the older, bigger, noisier humans.

Buff felt a twist in her heart. She fluffed her feathers, unsure. Should she stay hidden? Or should she help?

Carefully, she fluttered down to a lower branch. The child looked up and gasped.

"An owl!" she whispered, eyes wide.

Buff hesitated. Then she gave her biggest, friendliest hoot.

The little girl smiled. "You're beautiful."

Buff blinked. Beautiful? No one had ever called her that before.

The little girl wiped away her tears and sat quietly, just watching Buff. No scary machines. No shouting. Just a quiet moment between two creatures, both a little scared and both a little curious.

Maybe, Buff thought, not all humans were bad after all.

From that night on, Buff watched over the little girl, hooting softly from her tree whenever she sat outside. One night the girl was crying again. Buff had often tried to talk to her, but the girl could never understand what Buff was saying. This time Buff flew down beside her and gently wrapped one



wing around her shoulders. Something felt different. Buff gave a soft hoot. “What’s wrong? Can I help you? You sound very sad.”

The little girl stopped crying and stared wide-eyed at Buff. “I can understand you!” she whispered. “My name is Beth. Please don’t hurt me!”

“Hello, Beth,” said Buff. “I would never hurt you. My name is Buff, and I live in the big tree in the bush.”

Beth told Buff that her dad had died and that she now lived there with her mother. She loved her mum very much, but sometimes she still felt terribly sad.

Buff understood sadness too. Soon she would have to leave Mum and Dad, find a home of her own and learn to look after herself. The thought made her sad and a little frightened.

Buff and Beth became the best of friends. But Buff knew that soon she would have to leave her nest tree - the only home she had ever known - and set off on her own.

And that would be the beginning of Buff’s greatest adventure.

