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Amy Wild, Animal Talker: The Musical Mouse

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“I wish I could stay at home with you,” said Amy Wild, as she pushed her pencil case into her bag.

“Sorry – that’s not possible,” squawked the parrot perched in front of the TV. “Going to school is part of being human.”

“Plato’s right,” barked Hilton. The cairn terrier jumped up on the sofa and nuzzled Amy’s hand. “Don’t worry. You’ll be fine.”

Amy wasn’t surprised to hear the dog and the parrot speak. It was only a week since she had moved to Clamerkin Island, but she was already used to being the only human who could talk to animals – thanks to the magic necklace she’d been given. She was less relaxed about what the future held in store for her this morning. “It’s easy for you two. You haven’t got to go to a brand-new school where you don’t know anyone.”

“You know Einstein,” said Plato. “He’s promised to keep an eye on you and tell you where everything is.”

That made Amy feel better. Einstein was one of her new Island friends. He was also the school cat.

Suddenly, she heard Mum calling. “Are you ready, sweetheart? It’s time to go.”

Amy ran out into the hall, with Hilton trotting at her heels. Then she stepped through the swing door that separated the private part of her new home from the public area.

The Primrose Tea Room wasn’t open for business at the moment. The counters, tables and chairs were covered with dust sheets, and Dad was hard at work painting the ceiling. When he saw Amy, he put down his roller and waved. “Let’s have a look at you,” he called from the top of the stepladder.

Amy spun round to show off her school clothes. The white shirt and grey skirt felt stiff with newness. But the blue sweatshirt didn’t. It was soft and comfortable.

“Very smart,” said Dad.

Mum nodded approvingly, too. Then she frowned and pointed at the chain

of golden paws hanging around Amy’s neck. “You shouldn’t wear jewellery to school.”

“But Granty gave it to me,” argued Amy.

“That was very kind of your great-aunt,” said Mum. “But it doesn’t change the situation. You’ll have to take the necklace off.”

Amy definitely didn’t want to do that. But she knew she would never persuade Mum to change her mind. “I’ll put it in my room,” she called, as she raced upstairs.

Hilton ran beside her. “You can’t leave it behind. You need it.”

“I know,” said Amy. The necklace of paws was magic. It gave her the power to talk to animals, but only when she was wearing it. If she took it off, she wouldn’t be able to understand anything Einstein said to her at school.

She stopped in front of the mirror on the landing and tucked the necklace carefully inside her shirt. Then she crouched down in front of Hilton and asked, “Can you see it?”

“Not a glimmer,” replied the terrier, wagging his tail.

Mum didn’t spot it either. “Good girl,” she said, when she saw Amy’s apparently bare neck. “Now we’d better hurry or you’ll be late.”

“Good luck,” Dad called from the stepladder. “I’m sure you’ll love it.”

Amy felt less confident as she followed Mum out of the front door and down the cobbled street. Tomorrow she would walk to school on her

own like the other children of her age. But Mum had insisted on going with her on her first day.

A Siamese cat trotted over to them from the post office. “Don’t worry,” she mewed. “Einstein’s waiting for you.”

Amy crouched down and stroked the cat’s head. “Thanks, Willow,” she whispered quietly so that only the cat could hear.

“Stop dawdling,” said Mum. “I don’t know what’s got into you since we came to the Island. You seem to spend more time with animals than you do with people.”

Amy knew the reason, but she couldn’t tell Mum. As she ran to catch up, she put her hand to her throat and felt the necklace safe in its hiding place. She knew its magic powers had to stay secret. Granty had told her so. If they didn’t, someone might try to misuse them.

Amy and Mum turned right into a narrow, twisty lane and heard the school before they saw it. The sound of children playing was unmistakable. Then a bell rang out and the chattering voices died away.

“We’re only just in time,” said Mum, as they rounded the last bend and saw the school in front of them. It was built of the same honey-coloured stone as all the other buildings on the Island. So was the wall

that surrounded it. A large oak tree stood in the middle of the playground, and the children were lining up beside it, ready to go into class.

Amy’s stomach knotted with fear. She tried to swallow, but her mouth had gone dry. If only she was somewhere else – anywhere but this strange place full of strange faces.