

Readers' Theater Poppy  
Chapter 12, (pp. 100-106)  
By Avi

Poppy: (chattering teeth)	Don't stab me! Don't kill me!
Ereth:	What?
Narrator:	Poppy staggered forward, fell to her knees, held up her paws, and bowed her head.
Poppy: (imploring)	Don't eat me!
Ereth: (bewildered)	What the lice lips are you talking about?
Poppy: (tearfully)	If you're going to kill me, do it quickly. Just don't torture me, please!
Ereth:	Why would I want to torture you?
Poppy:	Because that's what porcupines do when you catch mice. You torture them and eat them.
Ereth: (exclaiming)	Eat mice! Hit the puke switch and duck! Meat disgusts me. Nauseates me. Revolts me. I'm a vegetarian, Jerk. I eat bark.
Poppy:	Bark?
Ereth: (roaring)	You saying I'm a liar?
Poppy:	Well, no, except----
Ereth:	Except nothing. I'm kind. I'm gentle. I'm old. And all I want is to be left alone.
Poppy:	You won't eat me?
Ereth: (bellowing)	I don't eat meat!

**Appendix 12b1**

Narrator:	Poppy gulped. She was beginning to feel very foolish.
Poppy: (lame)	Well, everybody thinks you do.
Ereth:	Well, then everybody eats grasshopper gas.
Poppy:	They do?
Ereth: (screaming)	How many times do I have to tell you, I DON'T EAT MEAT!
Poppy: (stammering)	But—but didn't you just eat that fox?
Ereth:	Are you crazy or something? All I did was swat him with my tail, which is what I do when creatures get fresh with me.
Poppy:	What about shooting your quills? Or—or stabbing with them?
Ereth:	Where'd you hear this bat bilge?
Poppy:	I—I was taught.
Ereth:	Poppy—that's your name, right?—quills are hair. Barbed hair. I can't shoot my quills, though they fall out easy enough. The only way a quill gets into you is because I slap you. Which I'll do if you mess with me. Mind, when a quill gets into you, it swells. Flex your muscles to get it out, and the barbs draw it in deeper. Hurts like the red-hots. Want to see for yourself?
Poppy:	No, please! Please! I believe you, I just didn't know that. Really. I'm sorry.
Ereth: (grumbling in a softer tone)	Probably isn't your fault. I suppose you get taught that garbage in school.
Poppy:	We go to school at home, lectures and tests.

## Appendix 12b2

Ereth:	Who's the world-class idiot who told you that porcupines eat mice?
Narrator:	Poppy was about to say her parents when she suddenly realized something she hadn't thought of before. She began to speak, but, fearful of saying the name, she held back.
Ereth:	Well, who?
Poppy: (whispering)	Mr. Ocax.
Ereth: (yelping)	Ocax! The great horned owl? Him?
Poppy:	He told my parents and they told us.
Ereth: (laughing)	Ocax...
Poppy:	What's so funny?
Ereth:	Let me get this straight. Ocax told your folks that porcupines eat mice?
Poppy:	Well, see, Mr. Ocax protects us from porcupines. What's so funny about that?
Ereth: (laughing)	Poppy, he's the one who eats mice! And if there's one thing that jerk of an owl is frightened of, it's me.
Poppy: (astonished)	You?
Ereth:	Listen, Poppy, nobody messes with Erethizon Dorsatum. Nobody. Fool with me and I'll shove a quill up your snooter. The only thing that old owl wants is to protect himself. Why, he wouldn't get within a log's length of me. I may be old and fat, have a foul mouth, and smell, but I can shake my tail and put it in his face! Yours, too. Want to see?

### Appendix 12b3

Poppy:	No, I believe you Ereth. Really I do.
Ereth: (sneering)	Protects you from porcupines... Frog flip! But if you believed that, what the worm water are you doing here?
Poppy:	I was trying to get to New House. And honest, that fox did chase me.
Ereth: (snorting)	But you said Ocax told you to be scared of me, is that right?
Narrator:	Poppy nodded.
Ereth:	Poppy, running in here was smart.
Poppy:	It was?
Ereth:	Sure. The truth is, you could walk by the side of a lake, with no place to hide, if I were there. The jerk of an owl would do no more than look at you.
Poppy: (showing relief)	Really?
Ereth:	If there's one thing I like beside being fat, sassy, and prickly to the touch, it's going where no one wants me to go. Fact is, I'm one of the few creatures in Dimwood who can protect you. I bet that's the reason he says all that earwig juice about me. As for New House, don't talk to me about going. Just go. I never tell anyone what I do.
Poppy:	Don't you have any family?
Ereth:	Oh, I had parents. And a wife. For a while there we even had kids. Quite a nice bunch. They all wandered off. We all go our own ways. Prickly.
Poppy:	Don't you miss them?
Ereth:	I like being alone. If I see a tree I want to climb, I climb it, chew some bark, then get some sleep.

## Appendix 12b4

Poppy:	Isn't there anything in the world you love, really love?
Narrator:	At the word "love," the look on Ereth's face turned dreamy.
Ereth:	Yes, there is.
Poppy:	Who is it?
Ereth:	Not who, Poppy. Salt. I can't get enough of it. I'm mad for it. I'd die for it. It's because of my liver, someone told me. I don't care. I love it. Rock salt. Sea salt. Sweat salt. Any kind of salt.
Narrator:	He licked his lips.
Ereth:	Don't happen to have any on you, do you?
Poppy:	I'm sorry, I don't. You were talking about New House. You have any idea what's there? That's what I need to find out.
Ereth:	I'll tell you one thing that's there.
Poppy:	What?
Ereth:	A chunk of salt as big as me. Humans put it out for deer. Can you believe it, deer! But it's on a high steel pole, so I can't get it. What a waste. Oh, but I do dream about it. I do.
Narrator:	He closed his eyes.
Poppy:	I think Ragweed would have liked you
Narrator:	But even as she spoke, a great wave of exhaustion swept over her.
Poppy:	Please Ereth, would you mind very much if I took a nap?
Ereth:	Poppy, you can do what you want. But if I were you, I wouldn't sleep where you're standing. As I told you it's my toilet, and it's too stinky even for me.

**Appendix 12b5**