

## The White Gloves

One day Red Riding Hood woke up early to see that it was a fine morning. So, she decided to take a walk in the forest to pick flowers and talk to her friends the trees, the squirrels and the fawns. She was living at the edge of the magic forest and the village was not far from where her family house stood.

She had hardly picked a daffodil or two when she heard a voice from behind a tall bush. "Oh these long nails, how hard they are and hurt my hands and feet! I wish there was someone here to help me cut and trim my nails?" Now, you all know that Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother nearly lost their lives when the big bad wolf attacked them in granny's house. But that was three years earlier and Red Riding Hood is not little any more. She is very careful and much wiser now.

"I can help you, old lady," Red Riding Hood said popping out from behind the other side of the bush.

"Well, firstly, I'm not old. I'm only two hundred. Secondly, bless you my dear child. You are very kind."

Red Riding Hood didn't know exactly how to answer.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to ... well, I mean thank you."

"Ha, ha, ha," the old woman laughed and then asked, "And who might you be, my dear?"

"I'm Red Riding Hood, and you Madam?"

"I'm .... Oh, I've forgotten my name. I hope you don't mind. Please call me granny. I'd like that very much."

"Of course I don't mind and I'll be very happy to call you granny," Red Riding Hood replied.

"Can you really help me with these long nails?" asked the old woman wiggling her toes and showing her hands.

"I think I can but I'll have to run back home to get a few things. In the meantime you could prepare hot water and wait for me in your hut."

"That's easy. I always have the kettle on for tea. So, I'm never without hot water at home."

"Oh, and one more thing," Red Riding Hood said. "There's a big bad wolf in the forest and he might come knocking at your door. Please don't let him in or he will eat you up."

When the old woman heard this, she started to laugh so violently that her whole body was shaking. If she were not sitting on a tree stump, she would've rolled to the ground.

"Oh, dear!" she said, wiping tears from her eyes. "Thank you for making me laugh. I feel much younger now, and don't you worry! I can take care of myself."

What a strange woman, Red Riding Hood thought. She can't remember her name and she almost had a fit laughing on hearing about the wolf.

Red Riding Hood left and the old woman stood up with the help of a cane that rested across her lap, and wobbled slowly towards her hut.

On her way back home Red Riding Hood met the big bad wolf. He jumped out of a thicket of thorny bushes and blocked her way.

"Why are you in such a hurry, pretty girl?" asked the wolf.

"I'm going home to get a pair of scissors and liquid soap to cut and trim granny's long nails."

"Oh, that's very kind of you. Perhaps I could be of assistance."

"Oh, no! You stay away from granny. I know what you're up to."

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the big bad wolf. "I know what you think of me, dear."

But I assure you that my intentions are as pure as the daffodils in your basket."

"Well, firstly, these are yellow daffodils, wolf," replied Red Riding Hood, "and secondly, I don't believe a word you say."

"I am fully aware of the rumors concerning my person," the wolf continued in a stately tone. "The animals of the forest and people believe that I eat grannies and innocent little girls, but nothing could be further from the truth."

"I don't trust you," Red Riding Hood insisted. "So, you better stay away from granny; do you hear me?"

"Of course I do, dear," grinned the wolf. "By the way," he said, "I have a big and shiny kettle which I do not need. I bought it from the big store in the village and it would please me very much to send it to your granny."

"Oh, that's very kind of you," replied Red Riding Hood changing the tone of her voice to a friendlier one. "She's preparing hot water right now and I'm sure she'll appreciate a brand new kettle."

"Where should I send the kettle, then?" the wolf asked.

"You can send it to the hut that is under the biggest oak tree by the river."

"Where can I find the biggest oak tree, my dear?" the big bad wolf asked again.

"It's by the third log bridge down the water mill," Red Riding Hood replied. The eyes of the big bad wolf grew larger and gave Red Riding Hood a big

smile. "Thank you very much," he said and disappeared like the wind in the direction of the water mill. From there he would count the log bridges to find the hut where the old woman lived.

Red Riding Hood raised her shoulders. "You're welcome," she whispered. The old woman is not my granny but the wolf doesn't know it. I hope she likes the new kettle, she thought.

The big bad wolf found the old woman's hut very fast. He stood in front of the door and knocked three times.

Knock, knock, knock.

"Who is it?" a feeble voice said.

The wolf changed his voice pretending to be Red Riding Hood, "It's me, grandma. Please open up. I've brought a pair of scissors and liquid soap to cut and trim your nails."

"It's open, just lift the latch and push the door in."

The wolf lifted the latch, pushed the door and entered the hut. But instead of the old woman he saw a fluffy white ewe standing on its hind legs in the middle of the room.

What luck, he thought. I'll have juicy lamb chops for dinner, my favorite. The big bad wolf raised his hands to grab the ewe by its woolly coat. "Please don't eat me," begged the ewe falling on its knees.

"Just give me one good reason why I shouldn't," replied the wolf.

"I belong to Red Riding Hood's family, and they are so very poor!"

"I don't care," the wolf said. "I'll eat you anyway."

"Oh, no! You can't eat me," replied the ewe standing on her hind legs and crossing her forelegs along her woolly chest.

Surprised by the fearless answer of the ewe, the wolf asked, with hands still in the air, "Why not?"

"Because the family needs my milk. If you eat me Red Riding Hood will have no milk to drink. This will make her father, the woodcutter, very angry. He will find you, catch you, tie you up, put you in a cage and release you in the big city."

The ewe paused for a minute. The wolf's eyes grew larger; his jaw was hanging a little. Something was going on in his mind. The ewe could hear the wolf's brain rattle.

"Silly sheep, you forget that the family has a goat and she gives milk, too. So, they won't miss you at all," the big bad wolf replied with a grin on his face.

"Oops, you're right," said the ewe. "I forgot about the goat. You win. You can eat me now if you like."

The big bad wolf growled and lowered his hands to catch the ewe. "Oh, no! You can't eat me," the ewe said once more.

"Why not?" growled the wolf, a little frustrated this time.

"Because the family needs my wool. If you eat me, Red Riding Hood's mother will have no wool to make clothes for her daughter. This will make the woodcutter very angry. He will find you, catch you, tie you up, put you in a cage and release you in the big city."

"Oh, yeah? Perhaps you forget that the family owns a little cotton patch and a good stock of cotton balls for their woolies," the wolf replied and grinned from ear to ear but lowered his hands down to his knees.

"Oops, you're right. I forgot about the cotton patch and the cotton balls. OK, you win. You can eat me now," replied the ewe.

The big bad wolf growled louder this time and again raised his hands to catch the ewe.

"Stop!" the ewe shouted once more.

"What now?" snarled the big bad wolf, showing great anger and his sharp teeth.

"You can't eat me because Red Riding Hood will have no one to play with. You see, her family is so poor that they can't afford to buy her toys. So, if you eat me, her father the woodcutter will be very angry. He will find you, catch you, tie you up, put you in a cage and release you in the big city."

"Oh, I can't stand this any longer," whimpered the big bad wolf and lied down on his back crying like a baby, kicking his feet and banging his hands on the floor. "wouaaa wouaaa! Why am I so unlucky?" he cried. Then he jumped to his feet, wiped his tears and nose, and said, "Now, you stay where you are, sheep. I'll be back soon."

The big bad wolf ran to the village and went straight into the big store.

"Can I help you, sir?" the store owner asked the wolf.

"Yes, yes," replied the wolf out of breath. "I would like two cases of sheep's milk, seven pairs of wooly socks, seven red skirts and same number of white shirts, one short and one long red velvet cape with hood, and a pair of dolls for Red Riding Hood."

"Is that all, sir?" asked the store owner. "Yes, and hurry up. I haven't got all day."

The store owner prepared everything the wolf had ordered and made it into a very big package.

"It's rather heavy," the store owner said. "Shall I call a cab for you?"

"No time to waste," replied the wolf. "I'm strong enough to carry it myself." The wolf took the package in his huge hands, put it on his back and ran

out of the store. He didn't stop running until he came to Red Riding Hood's house. He placed the package on the porch and looked through an open window. The family was sitting at the kitchen table and mother was about to serve lunch.

The wolf grabbed the package, kicked the front door and went straight into the kitchen. The family was very annoyed by the strange visitor whose face was hidden behind a huge package.

The wolf placed the package on the kitchen table and stood back. The father jumped from his seat and went for the broom stick that was standing in a corner.

"No, father," Red Riding Hood said. "The wolf has something to say." "Why are you here, wolf?" shouted the father.

"Everything in this package is for your daughter: milk, clothes, toys and capes. Now, consider all these as fair exchange for your fluffy white sheep. I'm going back to the hut to eat it, and there's no way you can stop me; I'm much faster."

Before the family had time to understand what the wolf was talking about, he ran out of the door as fast as he could.

"What sheep was he talking about?" father asked.

"I don't know," Red Riding Hood replied.

"But we don't have a sheep, only a goat," mother noticed. "Yes, but the wolf doesn't know that," Red Riding Hood said.

When the wolf returned to the hut, he found the ewe sitting on the couch and knitting a pair of white gloves.

"What are you doing there?" the wolf asked.

"These gloves are for you," replied the ewe. "Winter is coming soon and I thought you might need a pair of warm gloves. I made them from my own wool and they smell nice."

"Can I try them for size?" the wolf asked.

"Please, do," the ewe replied.

The wolf put the gloves on and smiled. "Oh, they fit me perfectly!" Then he put the gloves closer to his nose, "and they smell so sweet!"

"You can keep them," the ewe said.

"That's very kind of you but I'm going to eat you anyway. I'm the wolf, you know."

The ewe was not in the least disappointed by the attitude of the wolf. She

thought it was so natural for the wolf to act the way he did.

"No, you can't eat me because ...," the ewe said once more in an effort to discourage the wolf.

"I know, I know," interrupted the wolf, raising his right hand to stop the ewe from talking. "The woodcutter will find me, catch me, tie me up, put me in a cage and release me in the big city."

"Right!" the ewe said.

"Well, before I eat you I should let you know that Red Riding Hood and her family will not miss you at all," the wolf said.

"Why not?"

"Because I went to the big store and bought her a lot of things which will keep her busy for a very long time."

"What did you buy?" the ewe asked.

"Oh, I bought milk, woolies, toys, and a couple of red velvet capes."

"Oh, thank you! You're so sweet," said the ewe and kissed the wolf on his big nose. She did this very quickly, which caught the wolf by surprise.

"Ick, ick," cried the wolf, obviously very unhappy with the unexpected kiss. "A sheep kissed me. That's disgusting!" and he wiped his nose with the back of his sleeve.

"Oh, a shy wolf!" said the ewe and smiled.

"A kiss won't save you, sheep," roared the wolf. "You are lamb chops to me. But before I take you to my lair I'm curious about the big city you mentioned so many times. Why should I be scared of it?"

"You don't know the story about the big city?" the ewe asked.

"No, I don't," the wolf said, "and get on with it because my patience is running thin."

"OK," the ewe said, "Come sit with me on the couch; it's more comfortable there."

The wolf did as the ewe asked and they sat comfortably next to each other.

The ewe turned on the TV and changed channels with a remote control to find one which was showing a tour of big city.

"Do you see these tall buildings, wolf?" the ewe asked.

"I do," replied the wolf, amazed by the height of the tall buildings.

"They are made from hard stone and iron, and they're so ugly," continued the ewe. "There are so many tall buildings in the big city as there are trees in our forest."

Next, the ewe drew the attention of the wolf to the cars and other vehicles on the long and wide avenues of the city.

"Do you see these shiny horseless carriages?"

"I do," replied the wolf, dazzled by the colors and speed of the vehicles. "Now, do you see the smoke that comes out from their tail?"

"I do," replied the wolf and blew his nose on his handkerchief. "These things smell awful," the ewe said.

"What a lot of people!" commented the wolf. "Oh, what's this?" he asked.

The ewe saw that the TV was now showing the interior of a large supermarket. The camera focused on the meats section and the wolf could read the labels: lamb chops, pork chops, chicken, turkeys.

"Oh, my God!" cried the wolf in amazement. "This is a goldmine, I mean a meatmine." Then he jumped to his feet with eyes riveted on the screen and salivating. "Oh, my, this meat is mine."

"Where are you going?" the ewe asked.

"I'm going to the big city to stay with my cousin. He was a jackal in this forest but it's been years since he left for the city. So, farewell silly sheep, you'll never see me again," said the wolf and ran out of the hut fast.

When the wolf was gone, the ewe said to herself "Well, this is the second good deed for today: firstly, I made the wolf buy presents for Red Riding Hood and, secondly, I made him leave this forest forever." She couldn't imagine that the last deed was a mistake.

Then she looked at the grandfather's clock on the other side of the room and thought: Red Riding Hood must be very busy with the presents of the wolf. She forgot all about the old woman with the long nails. Oh, well! Such things happen. Now it's the old woman's turn.

The ewe opened a chest that was lying under the table and took out a magic wand.

"You've been gathering dust for some time, dear," the ewe spoke to the wand and cleaned it gently with a dust rag. Then she blew on the wand's tip which started to glow and sparkle.

"Do your magic, magic wand!" the ewe said and touched her head with the wand's tip.

A poof sound was heard and in the place of the ewe now stood the old woman with the long nails.

"I think I'm not going to have a holiday this year," she said to herself feeling sad. "I'd better go to bed. I'm tired."

So, the old woman tucked herself in the bed covers and slept soundly all night through.

The following morning she woke up by a knock at her door.

Oh, my! She thought. I must have overslept. She looked at the grandfather's clock. It was nine.

Knock, knock, knock.

"I'm coming," the old woman said.

She got out of bed and opened the door. It was Red Riding Hood.

"Oh, dear," the old woman said, "I thought you had forgotten all about me."

"As a matter of fact I had," replied Red Riding Hood and her cheeks turned red. "But I dreamed of you. In my dream I saw the big bad wolf come here and you changed into a fluffy white sheep. I was so scared that he might eat you up."

"Oh, well. It was just a dream. I'm fine," the old woman said. "But do you remember what happened next in your dream?"

"As a matter of fact I do. You punched the wolf on the nose and he started to cry. Then a cab came and he jumped in asking the driver to take him to the big city."

"Indeed a strange dream. But again all dreams are strange, don't you think?"

"Yes, I do," Red Riding Hood replied.

"Oops, I forgot," declared Red Riding Hood and fumbled into the rucksack she was carrying. "I've brought liquid soap and a pair of scissors. Is there hot water in the house?"

"Oh, yes, there is," replied the old lady and made to stand up.

"No, don't stand up," Red Riding Hood said, "I see that the kettle is on the woodstove; I'll get it."

"Thank you, dear."

"Now, I'll need a dishpan for the feet and a bowl for the hands,"

"You'll find them in the cupboard below the kitchen sink," replied the old woman.

Red Riding Hood poured tap water in the bowl and the dishpan, added liquid soap and then slowly poured hot water. A warm lather was now ready. She then asked the old woman to see if the water was warm enough for her feet and hands.

"Oh, the water's fine, dear. Thank you!"

"Please rest your feet in the dishpan and your hands in the bowl for ten minutes," Red Riding Hood said.

Ten minutes later Red Riding Hood pulled a little stool in front of the old woman, put on a pair of rubber gloves and started to work with the feet first. It was not easy to cut the long and hard nails, although they had softened a lot in the warm lather.

When Red Riding Hood finished cutting the toenails and the fingernails of the old woman, she stood up and said, "Before I trim your nails you should let them dry a little."

The old woman was very pleased.

"Excellent job, my dear," the old woman said. "Now it's my turn to give you something in return."

"Oh no, I didn't do this for money. I did it because I like you. You remind me of my grandmother," Red Riding Hood said and her eyes filled with tears. "I know, dear," the old woman said and dipped her feet back into the thick lather. She moved them from side to side as if she was trying to feel the cut nails with her feet. Red Riding Hood could hear the scratching sound of the nails on the bottom of the dishpan.

The old woman removed her feet from the dishpan and said, "Dear, remove all hard objects from the dishpan and put them in this pouch."

The old woman took a dark brown pouch out of her pocket and Red Riding Hood put her hands in the thick lather. She touched a number of hard objects at the bottom of the dishpan but they didn't feel like the nails she had cut.

"Oh my God!" Red Riding Hood cried. "I think this is a nugget of gold!" she said as she pulled out one of those hard objects.

"There are many more in the dishpan and in the bowl," the old woman said. Red Riding Hood removed all the pieces of gold from the dishpan and the bowl, and put them in the pouch.

"Now, this gold is yours," the old woman said.

Red Riding Hood remained speechless. Her father had often told her stories of pirates and of hidden chests filled with gold, so she had a fairly good idea of the value of this precious metal.

"Thank you very much, granny," Red Riding Hood said.

"Take the pouch to your father. I'm sure he'll make good use of the gold and you'll never be hungry or short of anything for as long as you live."

"How about you?" Red Riding Hood asked. "Don't you need any of this gold? Aren't you poor, too?"

The old woman took the magic wand out of her pocket and touched its tip on her left shoulder. She immediately changed form.

"Oh my goodness," exclaimed Red Riding Hood, "You're so beautiful!"

"I'm the forest fairy, my dear, and this gold will be of no use to me where I'm going."

"Going?" Red Riding Hood murmured in surprise. "Where are you going, forest fairy?"

"I'm going to the big city," the fairy replied. "I'm going to live with my sister for a while."

"Your sister's a fairy, too?"

"She was the fairy of the stream," the forest fairy replied.

"You mean she's not a fairy anymore?"

"No, she lost her wings and her powers as soon as she arrived at the big city. You see, the big city changes anyone who comes from the magic forest. We, the fairies, are the most sensitive of all creatures. We change even before we set foot in the big city. It also changes the gold of this forest into coal."

"The wolf will change, too?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"Yes, he will change but not as fast as we do. Fairies change by the air they breathe and the water they drink. The wolves change by the food they eat."

"Do you have to go?" Red Riding Hood whimpered.

"I'm afraid so, my dear. I've lived long enough in this magic forest. My time has come to meet someone and fulfill my destiny."

"Oh, I don't know what you mean, but I know that I'm going to miss you."

"Well, you shouldn't, really. I'll be back one day and in the meantime you will always be in my heart," the fairy said and vanished with a flap of her wings.

Now, let's see what happened to the wolf.

He arrived at the big city very early one morning, when everyone was still in bed. He went straight to the house of his cousin the jackal and knocked at the door. The wolf didn't know that his cousin had become a man whose name was Jack.

Knock, knock, knock.

Jack had just got out of bed for a drink of water when he heard the knock. Curious about the identity of the night visitor, he looked through the peep hole and saw the wolf.

"Wolf," he said as he opened the door, "Do come in!"

Of course the big bad wolf didn't understand the language of the city people but he knew that the person who answered the door was his cousin the jackal. The wolf sniffed the hands and feet of his cousin and then lied peacefully on the floor. Remember, most animals have a very strong

smell. So, the wolf had no doubt that the person who answered the door, Jack, was his cousin the jackal from the magic forest.

"Well, don't you worry about how I look, wolf," Jack said, "In less than a week you'll change, too. Just eat and drink anything I give you."

The wolf growled in agreement and Jack smiled in satisfaction.

"You can stay in the guest's room for as long as you wish. You're family, and I'm very glad you came to see me."

Jack led the way to the guest's room and the wolf, exhausted from the long journey, lied in bed and fell asleep immediately.

The following day Jack fed the wolf with the kind of food people eat and, within a week, the wolf had changed form. He noticed the changes little by little. Firstly, his hair fell and Jack had to vacuum the room every day. Secondly, his sharp teeth disappeared and then his nose and ears became smaller and smaller. When at the end of the week the wolf looked himself in the mirror, he shouted with a human voice, "Oh my God! I look like a man now!"

"You look great, wolf!" Jack said, "But you need a name and a little schooling to earn your living in the big city. I'll call you Charlie; it's a fine name."

"Yeah, I like it. Charlie it is then," the wolf, oops, I forgot, Charlie said. "And what's this about schooling?" he continued.

"Well, I'll send you to a driving school to learn how to drive a car and get your license. This will help you find a job as a cab driver to earn a living. This is how I started," Jack said.

Within a month Charlie was a qualified driver and Jack helped him find a job with a taxi company. Charlie stayed with Jack for two months and then found his own apartment. His transformation into a human being was complete and he adapted perfectly to his new life. His full name was Charlie Wolf now.

It was a cold winter evening and Charlie's shift was about to end when he received a radio call to drive to a specific address in town to pick up a client by the name Felicity Forest. He arrived outside an apartment building and saw a young woman run out of the entrance door and raise her right hand in an effort to catch his attention. Charlie rolled down the window and asked, "Are you Mrs. Felicity Forest?" Both of them looked each other in the eyes and both felt as if they knew each other.

"Yes, I am," the young woman said and opened the back door of the cab to take her place.

"Where to, Mrs. Forest?" Charlie asked and turned his head to smile to her. He noticed that the young woman was wearing an elegant white coat, white boots and gloves to match.

"To the Maternity Hospital, please!" Felicity replied politely.

During the ride Felicity was trying to focus on her sister who was about to become a mother for the first time. But she couldn't concentrate. She was sure that she had never seen the cab driver before but she felt as if he was an old acquaintance. Charlie had dark hair, green eyes and a fair complexion.

No, no, I must mistake him with someone else, she thought. Then she noticed the white gloves in his hands. The cab driver was wearing a pair of white gloves!

"May I say that I find it quite unusual for a man to wear white gloves," Felicity remarked casually and smiled.

Charlie smiled, too, and looked at Felicity through his rear-view mirror.

"They're very nice, aren't they?" he said. "They're a gift from a very special ... person," Charlie continued. He meant to say animal, instead of person but he bit his tongue.



"I see," Felicity replied, not showing that her knees were shaking.

"Would it be too much to ask you to remove these gloves and pass them on to me?"

"Sure, no problem," replied Charlie. "Here you are!"

"Thank you!" Felicity said. "You see, white is my favorite color and I may search to find a same pair in the stores."

Charlie saw that Felicity was sniffing the gloves and thought that it was rather strange.

As soon as Felicity had smelled the gloves her mind flew back to the forest she had left behind and hovered above the cypress trees, danced around the ever complaining willows, rolled down the green carpets of lush meadows, gave a kiss to Red Riding Hood picking flowers and tricked the jackals away from the defenseless creatures of the forest. Oh, how she missed all this.

"Mrs. Forest," Charlie interrupted her thoughts, "Are you all right?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," replied Felicity, "I was lost in reveries for a while."

"That's OK. We're here, anyway."

"Oh, we've arrived already," Felicity said a little out of place. "May I ask your name and a favor?"

"Sure, no problem," Charlie replied with a smile. "I'm Charlie, Charlie Wolf." On hearing the name Felicity's heart skipped a beat but managed to remain calm and asked him the favor she had in mind.

"May I keep your gloves for a couple of days? I know I'm asking too much but I promise to take good care of them. I need to find a pair of these in the stores, as I said before."

Their eyes met and Charlie felt a tingle in his heart and a sense of connection with this young woman.

"Of course you can borrow my gloves," Charlie said beaming a smile, "besides; I'll have the chance to see you again, right?"

"Of course," Felicity said and smiled. "Here's my card. You can call me in a couple of days." She paid the fare and got out of the cab.

"Charlie rolled down the window, "Bye Felicity, see you in a couple of days."

"Bye Charlie; thank you for the gloves."

Charlie kept looking at Felicity until she went through the door of the Maternity Hospital.

I think I'm in love, Charlie whispered and looked at the card; it read:

Felicity Forest

Nail Technician

Nail care for older people

Two days later the phone woke him up early, about six in the morning.

"Yeah," Charlie said still drowsy from sleep.

"This is Felicity, Charlie. I'm sorry to wake you up so early."

"Oh, that's all right, I had set the alarm to go off at six fifteen," he lied as he sat up on his bed.

"Listen Charlie, I need to give you something in return for lending me the gloves," Felicity said.

"Oh, you don't have to," Charlie said.

"No, I'm not going to give you any money, only to invite you to dinner this evening, if you are free that is."

"Dinner! Oh yes, I'm free."

"Fine. Could I ask you one more favor?"

"Yes, anything," Charlie said.

"Could you pick me up from work?" Felicity asked.

"Of course. Where's work?"

"It's the triple-C Nursing Home," Felicity replied. "Do you know where that is?"

"Yes, I do."

"Fine, drive past the gate and I'll be waiting for you at the roundabout at six. Bye now!"

"Bye," Charlie said and put the receiver down.

I'm in love, he thought. I've never felt this way before. This is definitely love. I feel I've known Felicity for years, although I'm sure I've never seen her before. But when she is near me I feel ... I feel I'm back home. I can smell the scented meadows of the forest; I can hear the murmur of the stream and the rustle of the leaves on the trees. And yet I feel all this not with the heart of the

wolf, not even with the heart of a human being. I feel ... I feel I'm one with everything in the forest. I am the forest. Felicity is in me. She is in me. She and I are one. How can we be apart?

Without realizing it Charlie closed his eyes and fell asleep again and had a strange dream. He dreamed of Felicity. She was dressed all in white and had delicate transparent wings on her back. She looked like an angel who emitted a brilliant light.

"Come," Felicity said to Charlie as she extended her right hand.

"Where are we going?" he asked.

"To the forest, our home."

She took Charlie's hand, raised him above ground and both of them flew across the sky over the big city. Because Charlie was dreaming he didn't think that flying in the air was strange or peculiar. He was following his heart. He loved and trusted Felicity and would follow her to the end of the world.

"To the forest, to the forest," Felicity declared as if giving directions to an invisible coach driver or to the wind.

Before reaching their destination Charlie noticed the village at the fringe of the forest.

"Oh, look," he said, "There's the village, and this is Red Riding Hood's house. I hope she's happy."

"I hope so, too," Felicity said.

"And there is the hut that I ...," Charlie hesitated for a moment. He wanted to say, where I met a very strange sheep that I wanted to eat, instead, she kissed me.

"This is our final destination," Felicity said and pointed to the hut. Then she slowly started to descend until both of them touched the ground just a few steps before the front door of the hut.

As Charlie touched the ground he realized that Felicity had suddenly disappeared. Felicity, Felicity! He shouted. He came to the door of the hut and pushed it in. He was not surprised to see the fluffy white ewe again. She was standing on its hind legs.

"Where's Felicity, sheep," he shouted.

"Come, wolf," the ewe said. I've been expecting you.

Charlie was not surprised when the ewe addressed him as wolf, besides, his surname was Wolf. He noticed that the ewe had something in her hand and was about to give it to him. It was a package. He took it in his hands, opened it fast, and saw his white gloves neatly folded. He took them out and tried to put them on but he screamed in terror. Both gloves were stained red.

Charlie woke up by his own scream. He sat up, bent his legs and rested his elbows on his knees holding his head.

What a dream! He thought. Then he looked at his watch and immediately jumped out of bed. He had a quick shower, brushed his teeth, dressed fast and jumped into his car to go to work.

As he was driving along the main avenue of the city he heard sirens blaring from behind. He looked through his rear-view mirror and saw the flashing lights of a police car and behind it the lights of an ambulance. An accident ahead, he thought. I should slow down and drive with caution. Half a mile ahead he noticed two smashed passenger vehicles. The police had cordoned off the spot, which explained why traffic was slow from a couple of miles before the site of the accident.

No sooner had he arrived at work than his supervisor informed him that the manager wanted to see him in the main office. Oops, I shouldn't have been late, he thought.

The manager was standing behind his desk and as soon as he saw Charlie through his office window he waved his hand to invite him in.

"Come in, Charlie," the manager said and put the receiver on the hook.

"Thank you, boss," Charlie replied, hoping that he would not lose his job. "Listen," the manager continued. "We've received two phone calls from the General Hospital this morning. There's a doctor there who needs to speak with you. I told them that you would be here soon. As a matter of fact the last phone call was a couple of minutes ago."

"A call from the Hospital? for me?" Charlie asked with disbelief.

"Yes," the manager said.

"But why? I have no business with the hospital or with the doctors there,"

Charlie replied and frowned.

"Oh, don't ask me, Charlie," the manager said.

"Here's the phone of the Hospital and the extension for doctor Harper. He sounded urgent. You can call him from this office if you like," the manager pointed to a piece of paper next to the phone on his desk.

Charlie hesitated for a moment. Then he looked at the numbers on the piece of paper, picked up the receiver of the phone and dialed the number of the Hospital. He asked to be connected to doctor Harper's office. The doctor's secretary answered the phone and no sooner had Charlie given his name than he heard the doctor's voice.

"Mr. Wolf," the doctor said.

"Yes," Charlie replied, "I understand you were asking for me, doctor Harper?"

"I'm afraid a friend of yours has been involved in a traffic accident. Could you come here after work?"

"I'm afraid I don't understand, doctor," Charlie said rather baffled.

"What friend of mine? I ...", he wanted to say: I don't have friends, but then he remembered his cousin Jack whom he had not seen for some time.

"Her name is Felicity Forest. Do you know this person?" the doctor asked. Charlie almost dropped the receiver on the desk. His vision blurred and he nearly lost his balance. The manager pulled up a chair and asked Charlie to sit.

"Hello, hello," the doctor repeated on the phone, "Are you OK Mr. Wolf?"

"Yeah, I'm OK," Charlie managed to reply. "Doctor, I'll be there in a few minutes. Thank you."

"You can come to my office as soon as you arrive, Mr. Wolf. I have something for you."

Charlie arrived at the Hospital in fifteen minutes. He went straight to the doctor's office. The doctor closed the door and sat behind his desk. He opened a drawer and removed a small package that was beautifully

wrapped in gold paper and tied with a red ribbon. That was a gift, no doubt. But there was a letter attached to the package, too.

"Where's Felicity?" Charlie asked impatiently.

"I'm sorry," the doctor said, covering the package with both his hands.

"Mrs. Felicity Forest died on the operating table. She was conscious for about an hour after the accident and asked me to give you this."

Charlie extended his hands to receive the package with the letter. His hands were shaking and his ears were ringing. "Thank you, doctor," he managed to whisper.

Charlie left the hospital but didn't return to work. He called the manager and asked for the day off. He went back to his apartment, sat on the couch and opened the package very carefully. He didn't want to tear off the beautiful paper or cut off the ribbon. He wanted to keep them.

Oh god! My gloves!

He looked at them and saw that they had a glow around them. Actually, they were sparkling white, whiter than ever before. He removed them from the package and put them on. He felt different. His vision became clearer and his hearing more acute. Even his sense of smell increased. What was happening to him? He then noticed the letter.

He took it in his hands and held it against his heart for some time. Then he kissed it and opened it with such care as if he did not wish to disturb the air around it.

He read:

Dear Charlie, or should I say dear "big bad wolf"!

I'm dictating this letter to Dr. Harper with instructions to attach it to the package that I placed in his care for you.

I'm sorry I will not be able to keep my promise for dinner this evening.

I intended to take you to a restaurant famous for its lamb chops. I would have chosen a plate of green salad, being a vegetarian. I know you love lamb chops, don't you? (This would have been our joke for the evening).

But I should thank you for trusting me with your precious gloves. The truth is that I wanted to make sure that they were made from my own wool.

You see, I was the fluffy ewe that kissed you on your big nose in the hut. Oh, I can still picture your face and laugh.

Charlie, I wish you were here; I would kiss you on the nose again. Only this time you and I would feel different, I'm sure, and I know in my heart that you would kiss me back.

Until we meet again,

Yours

Felicity Forest (or the forest fairy)

Three nights later there were reports that a wolf had been seen roaming in the big city, howling and howling (perhaps crying). People reported that they had seen the wolf near the cemetery. In the morning of the fourth day cemetery officials noticed the wolf's tracks on Felicity's grave. A few days later they found the wolf dead on her grave. People say that the wolf froze to death, but we know that he died of a broken heart.