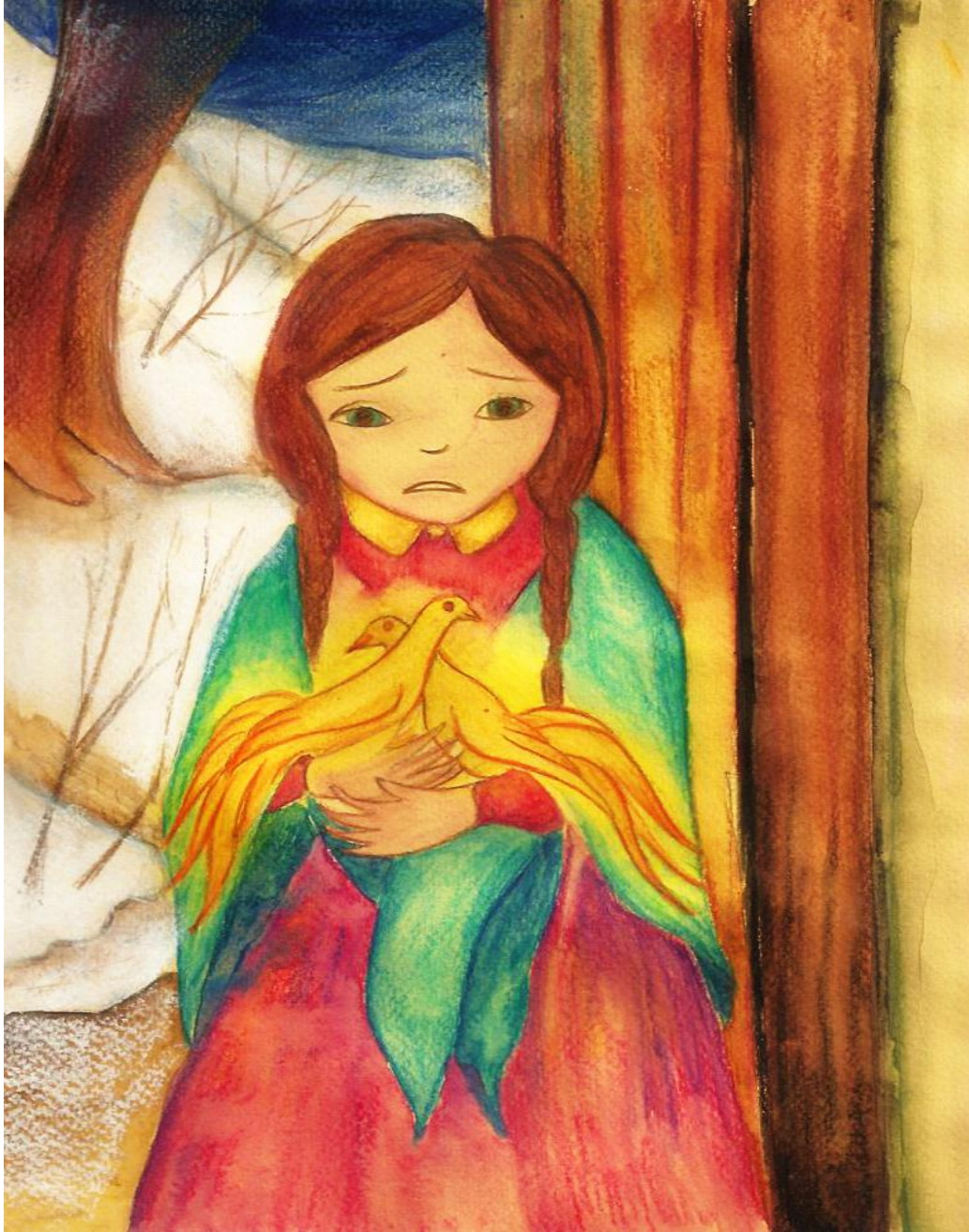


The story of a lonely girl



by

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The lonely girl strode through the heavy snow with the wind tearing at her face and the cold stinging like a thousand needles.

It hadn't always been like this; many years ago, she could remember feeling the warmth of summer upon her face and seeing the eyes of friends now gone forever from her life.

As the years passed by, she grew lonelier and lonelier until she finally felt like she was the only person in the world.

She had family who loved her, but no matter how much they loved her she could feel nothing. It was as if her very heart had frozen in the eternal darkness of an unending winter's night. She was different and unwanted; of that she was certain.

It was on a day like any other day of that winter that she came across the old lady.

The old lady seemed ill-dressed for the cold weather, but even so she seemed to radiate warmth and kindness.

As the lonely girl looked at her, she felt, just for a second, her heart begin to thaw, just a little bit.

"Why are you so sad, little girl?" asked the old lady.

The lonely girl looked at the old woman and a tear fell from her eye. In the darkness of that fading winter's day, the tear froze to ice as it struggled down her cheek.

The old lady gently swept the tear from her cheek. "Come with me. Let me tell you a story."

Every night, for three years, the lonely girl sat at the window like the old lady had taught her.

Her parents and siblings were very worried and nobody understood the strange song that the lonely girl sang.

The villagers thought she had gone completely mad - the song sounded like grinding teeth to their ears. She became even more shunned than she had been before but still the girl sang, for the old lady had sown a seed that burned like the tiniest fire of hope, long into the night.

It was early in the evening when it happened. For the lonely girl, this had been the darkest winter ever and her only comfort had been the strange song she had been taught to sing.

She usually did so up in the loft where they kept a few supplies for the coming spring, like corn and other such seeds. Normally, she could hear the animals in the stable make some noise and perhaps the odd bird would cluck from within the hen house.

This time though, the ambience she knew so well suddenly changed dramatically. There was not so much as a squeak from any animal and even the tedious howling of the winter winds seemed to die down.

Everything had gone dead silent, at least that was how it seemed to the lonely girl. Something was afoot!

Silently, she put on some clothes and went out into the snow. Her family did not seem to notice her at all, as they were engrossed in a game of Mahjong that they were enjoying immensely.

Once outside, she noticed a strange glow that came from above. It was akin to the Northern Lights - not that she had ever experienced those, but from what she had heard that was how it would be. There was even a slight hum that was said to accompany such heavenly displays. However, as she raised her eyes towards the sky, she stopped at the ridge of the stable, for up on the roof sat two giant birds unlike any she had ever seen before. They looked like they were on fire. They just sat there, grand and magnificent. Their feathers shone with the most beautiful deep green colour you could imagine while their plumage was the same as a peacock's except for the tail. The lonely girl was completely mesmerised by them.

Then they looked at her!



Strangely enough she didn't feel scared at all because there was something familiar about the two birds and when they finally spoke, the lonely girl immediately recognised the pitch of their voices.

It was the same language of the song, but it had an overall softness that was very different from the harsh sounds of the song which she had learnt from the old lady 3 years ago.

“Come.” They beckoned benevolently.

As if in a dream, the little girl jumped up onto the rooftop swirling through the air like a Kung Fu Master.

For the first time in years she could feel. The lonely girl gazed from one bird to another and she could actually feel!!! The empty spot in her heart and soul seemed to dissipate and was replaced by warm feelings of love, peace and happiness. Oh the joy! She had never believed it possible to feel that way again, yet here in the darkness of winter, every fibre of her being was brimming with a joyful glow.

“We heard you.” The gentle birds explained, “We heard your sorrowful song and we knew we had to come.”

The girl was bursting with questions that she wanted to ask, “But how ... I mean, thank you... Where have you come from?”

If it was possible, the look that came upon the birds would have been that of a mysterious smile.

“We are of another world and we have come to make sure that you do not feel lonely among all the souls of this world. For you see, no-one has to be lonely, not ever, all you need to do is to reach out and never give up. If you do, someone will hear, someone will come!”

The girl was awestruck. Gone was the feeling of loneliness that had so engulfed her life, gone was the emptiness. What a miracle in this biting cold!

While they had been sitting up on the rooftop, it had begun to snow again. The girl did not know how long they had been there, but suddenly she heard her mother's voice calling out, “Sweetheart, where are you?”

“Oh my!” the girl exclaimed, “How long have we been sitting here? You must be so cold.”

The birds nodded; their glow seemed to have faded and they were trembling slightly.

“Don't worry, we will be fine,” the birds assured her.

“No, it is too cold. You must come inside, but... you are so big!”

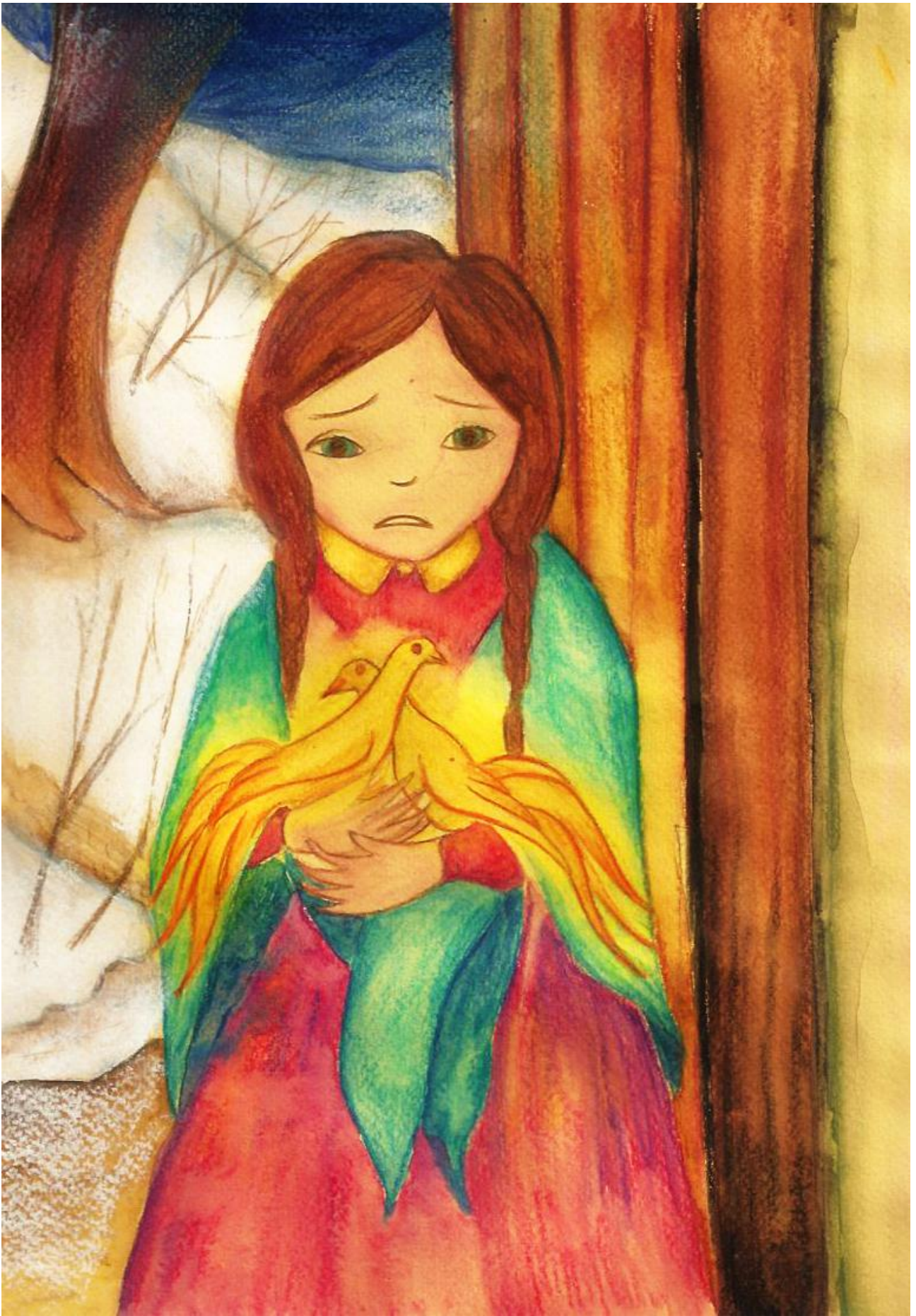
“Hold out your hand, little friend.” Said the bigger of the two birds.

The girl held out her little hand and before she knew it, the birds were sitting on her palm, so small that she could easily carry them.

The girl swung down from the roof again and headed for the door. She could not wait to show her family for they would be greatly impressed.

“So cold.” She heard a faint voice say as she reached the door and she stopped. She looked at her hand.

The two birds were lying down, their glow all but extinct.



“Wait, don't die!” The girl cried and tried to warm the birds who had travelled so far to meet her - but to no avail. She tried to give them warmth from within her own thick garments, but it did not help, and there, right on the doorstep of her home, the last breath left them and they passed away.

A gaping wound reopened in her heart and although the lonely girl had been about to open the door, she turned around, and instead of entering the safety of her home, ran into the night.

She never saw the shock on her mother's face when her mother found her footsteps heading out and away, nor did she hear the pleading voice that called out for her.



She didn't know how long she had been running, but she would have surely died if it were not for someone or something holding a protective hand over her.

The snowfall had turned into a blizzard and the lonely girl wandered blindly and without purpose. In the distance she could hear the howling of a wolf-pack closing in and her heart pounded with fear.



The forest trees that surrounded her seemed filled with darkness and menace.

She thought she was about to die when she sank down to her knees and again, like so many years ago, she began sobbing in the snow.

Once again a warm hand wiped her tears away.

“Poor child, what in Heaven's name are you doing out here on your own? You could die out here.”

“I might as well be dead.” The lonely girl cried, unable to hold the tears back.

“There now, come with me. The woods are no place for a little girl in the middle of the night.”

After a brisk walk they arrived at a small cottage. It was one you would most probably miss unless you knew precisely where to go, as the house was almost completely hidden behind willow trees that formed a natural fence around it.

Once inside, the old lady took off her stiff clothes and wrapped the lonely girl in a warm furry blanket. She sat her down by the fire and laid the two birds on a wooden plate.

The girl, too cold and too exhausted to notice, simply sat there, shivering and looking into the flames dancing in the fireplace. Her eyes were empty and all hope seemed to have left her. Only a thin, silvery thread seemed to be holding her in this world.

“You know,” the old woman began, “I too was once like you, alone and scared. I didn't think that there was one single soul in this world who cared for me or understood me, but then I met someone.

He was a hunter. I never knew precisely where he came from but I found him, very close to where I found you tonight.” He was dressed in clothes made from wolf fur and had a wildness about him that I have not seen since. But he also had something else - a song he taught me. The same song I taught you, and the same song that you will one day teach someone else to sing.”

The old woman stopped. There was someone at the door. It was not as a human would have knocked, rather more like a scraping sound as if something was trying to dig its way through the door.

She got up, while the lonely girl still sat by the fireplace. The door squeaked as the old lady opened it and a gust of cold air followed the proud creature that entered the cottage.

The lonely girl's eyes opened wide with fear! The wolf, bigger than any she could ever imagine, trotted over to the fireplace and lay down at her feet.

The old lady smiled "Don't worry, sweetie, that old fellow will never hurt you. In fact if it wasn't for him, I would never have gone out tonight, and I would never have found you."

The wolf let its gaze sweep from the girl to the old woman and it responded with a little yelp as if to indicate its agreement to what had just been said.

The lonely girl, a little warmer but still suspicious of the wild animal in front of her, offered no comment.

She was too tired.



"But let me get back to the story I was telling you!

"When I found my hunter friend he was in a bad shape. He had almost died from exhaustion and every fibre in his body seemed to be under attack from the winter cold."

"I learned that it wasn't the first time that he'd found himself in such a bad situation. Yet each time, he said he had sung a song; a song from his home, a song that would strengthen his heart and enable him to carry on. When I found him, he had just sung his song and had resigned himself to the fact that it might be the last time the words would leave his lips."

"You can imagine how long it was before he recovered fully. He had gone for days without food or shelter and was on the brink of death when I came upon him - luckily, you are much better off."

"However, being a man of few words, he said he could not thank me enough for saving his life and he had nothing to give me except a song."

"He told me to sing it if ever I felt lonely or filled with despair."

"The first time I sang it, that old fellow you see in front of you came to my cottage. I had gone without food for a long time and that friendly soul you see before you, showed up with a freshly killed rabbit in his jaws, looks at me and just drops it right there on the ground. Then he yelped and ran off again."

"I couldn't believe my luck. My stomach was filled and the world seemed a little less harsh."

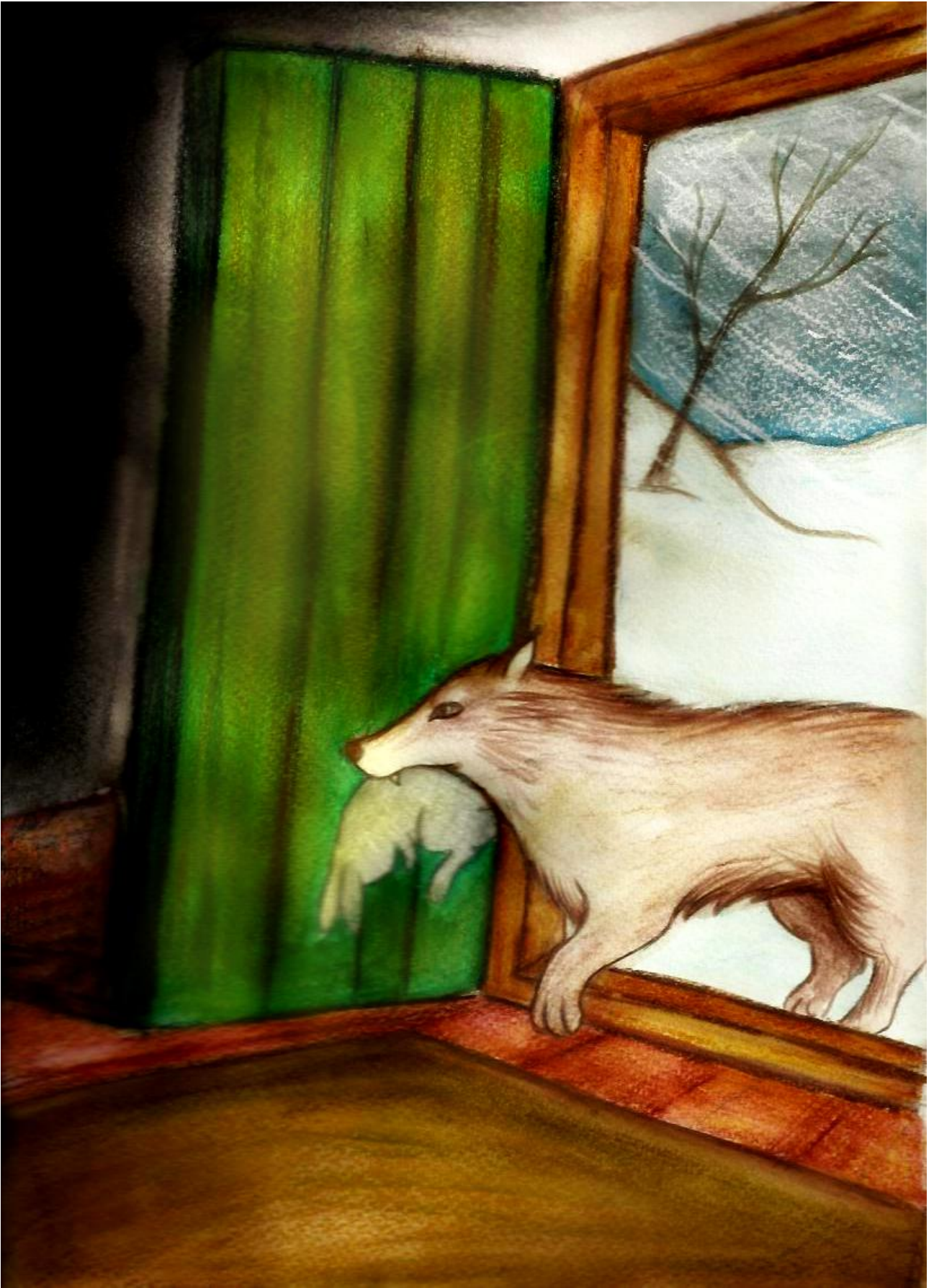
"The second time I met him, I was lost in the woods. I had wandered for days, and as night had begun to fall, I had climbed up into a tree because I was frightened to spend the night on the forest floor."

"I began to sing."

"To my surprise, he showed up. I instantly recognised him because of his spotted muzzle, and he beckoned me to follow him, moving a few feet and yelping every time he moved a bit."

"He showed me to this place, a hunter's cottage that seemed to have been abandoned for years. Inside there was dry firewood, so I lit a fire.

After a while he came back with a forest hen in his jaw which he dropped before me.



Since that day, I have never had to sing for myself. He drops in every now and then, and because of that I have never felt that I needed to be afraid of what might happen for every day is a new beginning."

"I also know that someone came to see you!"

The lonely girl stirred somewhat bewildered. How could the old lady know? Then she realised she must have seen the birds.

"But they are dead...", the lonely girl began.

"Well, in a sense maybe, but you must understand that they are not of this world. In a way, they are merely silent. You know sometimes, when the world becomes too much for us, we tend to say less and our hearts become frozen."

"In essence, that is what has happened to them. Only they took it upon themselves to free you from your loneliness, but alas, it was too much for them to bear in one go and thus their spirit seems to be no longer within their bodies.!

"But actually, you know there is something you can do for them, for these are not just birds, they are of Phoenix lineage. You can set them free and allow them to return to the plane from which they came."

The lonely girl's eyes opened wide - could they truly be saved? Her heart tingled.

"What must I do?" She asked.

The old lady smiled. "It is very simple, actually." She got up and walked over to the table where she had placed the wooden plate. She handed it to the girl.

The wolf got up and looked at them with sorrow in his eyes and a short series of small complaining sounds ensued.

Without further ado, the lonely girl also got up and approached the fireplace, plate in hand.

She looked at the old woman who gave her a nod.



The lonely girl gently placed the plate on top of the burning logs. Slowly the flames engulfed the plate and the wood darkened. The instant the dark wood burst into flames, the two birds vaporised, melting first into sand, then turning into coloured smoke which disappeared up the chimney.

“It is done.” The old lady said.

The girl sank into the chair again and fell into a deep, deep sleep. She was awakened by a wet tongue licking her cheek. "Yeuch!" She exclaimed as she opened her eyes.

The old lady was standing over her and had apparently carried her to bed to sleep. The old lady smiled and held out the girl's clothes which were now crisp and dry.

"Can you hear it?" She asked.

The lonely girl tried to listen and could make out muffled voices.

"Mother?" The girl asked, her heart still heavy with sorrow.

"Not just your mother. I believe the entire village is out looking for you. Get dressed quickly and don't keep them waiting."



The lonely girl was soon united with her mother and the search was called off as they headed home.

Before they did though, the lonely girl turned around in order to wave goodbye to the old lady, but she was gone.

The lonely girl could not even see where the entrance to the fence surrounding the cottage might be and her mother was too excited to have found her to notice that her daughter was trying to tell her that something was amiss.

The lonely girl did glimpse the head of a wolf for the briefest of moments, and it seemed to wink at her before running off.

As they approached home, the lonely girl felt her heart sink and no matter how joyously she was greeted by villager after villager and family members, one after another, she felt the cold sting of winter creeping back into her heart.

As they entered the yard surrounding the farm house, the lonely girl was silently humming a song of longing. After she had reluctantly eaten a family meal which was more like a feast in order to celebrate her safe return, she was not at all prepared for the sight that met her in her room.

She stepped into the room, after excusing herself from the meal pleading exhaustion, and her eyes opened wide. Before her stood two birds.

They were even more magnificent than the first she had met.

In front of one of them, there was a translucent egg and inside the egg was the most beautiful chick that she had ever seen.

The lonely girl figured that it was the male who was holding his wings around the egg as if to protect it.

Once again, although the birds dwarfed her, she felt no fear and though birds have not mouths but beaks, to the girl, in all other ways and manners they still appeared to be smiling.

"You knew my parents," the male said, waiting a bit to let his words sink in. "Sadly, they told me that they could not stay in this world as they had grown old and weak. They were even about to come back but I told them no! They would not have been able to go through the ordeal again. As the eldest son, I said that we'd go in their place.

After all, we're young and strong and we are able to see your world differently than our parents do. "And as you might have already come to understand, we never leave those who are near and dear to us.

We might be gone for a while but we could not bear the thought of you here alone with no friends, so here we are.

I promise you, that as long as we live, you will never have to be alone again!"

The male turned his eyes upon his mate who had a mysterious look about her.

Then suddenly there was a knock on the door.



“Who is it?” The girl asked, somewhat startled.

“There is someone to see you.” Her mother's voice replied softly.

“Come on in.” The little girl answered rather puzzled.

She had not had visitors for years.

For the first time in many years, she did not feel that sting in her heart, and as the door opened, the lonely girl saw her mother standing there with someone beside her.

At first, she could not quite make out who it was in the dim light, but a smile quickly came to her face and tears of joy filled her eyes; as she embraced her childhood friend, she suddenly realised what it all meant.

The story the old lady had told her, the birds, the wolf, and how it was not that anyone had been ripped from her life, nor had anyone abandoned her because she was different, it was her, herself who had held back, been afraid to open up her heart, it was she who had driven all and everyone away with her behaviour.

At that very moment in the warmth of the embrace, of a friend thought lost and gone for ever, she realised that she was not alone.

And in a cottage far, far away in the forest, an old lady found her peace and laid down to rest, with an old wolf at her bedside.

The End

I hope you liked this story and if you have not done so already will consider that a small contribution would be appreciated in order to allow me to continue my endeavours.

You can do so by clicking [here](#) or on the button below.



And don't forget to share this story with your family, friends and the rest of the world!

All the best! – Einar Petersen – <http://einarpetersen.com>

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