



Carola Wolff 1962-2024

In memory of my dear friend Carola, who passed away on April 13th.

I thought you might like to read 2 short stories Carola wrote especially for Christmas. Both were originally published in German and were translated online with small corrections by me. All errors are mine.

The first was for the Phantastic Authors' Network (PAN) and the second was written for the Writers' Coaching Christmas Special readings in the Humboldt Library in Berlin Tegel.

The same as every year

Christmas Eve, just before ten o'clock. The bells of the small church in the village rang out over the snow-covered meadows and woods. It is bitterly cold.

On the village square the Christmas market is still in full swing. The scents of mulled wine and gingerbread waft up to the top of the church tower. Freddy and Bruno, the gargoyles on duty sniff with pleasure.

"Mmhh. Do you think he's coming?"

"Of course. We have done our job properly all year long."

As everyone knows, gargoyles, also known as waterspouts, are the guardians of a house, or in this case, a church. Since their job is to deter evil, they are designed to look as grim as possible. With large, rolling eyes, their mouths full of pointed, sharp teeth, they crouch on the corners of church towers and rooftops, their leathery wings already half-unfolded. Always ready to pounce on intruders if their intimidating appearance alone is not enough.

"Bruno, my corns are killing me."

"Stop complaining, Freddy. What if HE hears you?"

As everyone also knows, gargoyles are always visited on our Christmas Eve by a very special person: the great Luci. He brings good news and a present for each little stone gargoyle.

"Maybe I will get some warm knitted socks," sighs Freddy.

"Hardly," says Bruno. "Quiet now, I see something."

"The great Luci?" Freddy asks happily.

Bruno hisses a warning, Freddy falls silent. With wide eyes they stare at the furthest corner of the graveyard, where the suicides are buried in unconsecrated ground. A dark mist rises from the depths and condenses into a black form.

Freddy squeaks quietly with excitement. The figure becomes more and more clear. The wind carries a quiet murmur to them. Gargoyles have very sharp hearing.

"Hooves, tail, horns. Everything appears to be there. I should install an escalator. This manifestation business is really annoying."

Luci looks around: "It's that time again. The time of festive lights, the time of peace, joy and pancakes. Disgusting. You just want to bang your horns into something. But not a church wall."

Churches in general. Strongholds of hypocrisy, of frigid piety. This stink of incense is horrible. And all that singing all the time. Terribly annoying. Every year the same."

"Well, I like it," Freddy whispered.

The great Luci looked up at them: "Come, my ugly children ..."

"Did he just call us ugly?"

"Quiet, Freddy!"

The great Luci is only now really getting going: "You repulsive, disgusting beings ..."

"He is quite insulting," complains Freddy.

"Psst!" whispers Bruno.

"All year long you have done your duty rigidly and silently. Now it is time for you to enjoy life. And that is why I give you..."

"Here it comes!"

"Shut up, Freddy."

"Your freedom!" shouts the great Luci.

"No woollen socks?"

"Go and walk among men. Pester them, play pranks. Disturb this festival of joy that I hate so much, thoroughly spoil it for them."

A lightning bolt strikes them. There is a crunching sound, stones crumble and fall to the ground.

Freddy and Bruno are transformed.

"Oh my goodness. You're human!"

"You too!"

"I'm wearing woolly socks!"

They are dressed just like the local farmers and are at least as ugly.

The great Luci looks benevolently at his creations. "Now go forth and sin. You have until midnight, then the magic will wear off and you must return to the roof. Use the time well!"

Freddy looks at his woollen socks with delight.

"Thank you, great Luci!" they both shout in unison. They are already heading towards the Christmas market.

The great Luci watches them go. He rubs his hands together in anticipation. He can hardly wait for the people's horrified screams to destroy the peaceful Christmas calm.

His two envoys have reached the first stall. Are they setting it on fire? Are they smashing everything to pieces? No, they are ordering mulled wine! The great Luci can hardly believe his eyes. They gulp down the mugs and ask for more. Then they go to the gingerbread stand. Ah now, they're going to burn, bite, chop...! They order gingerbread and eat it with obvious pleasure.

Bruno helps up a little girl who has fallen down. Freddy proudly shows a farmer his woollen socks.

Then they both join the choir and sing "From Heaven High".

The great Luci angrily stamps his hoof into the snow.

"Every year I try to corrupt them. They look like creatures from hell, but inside they have a heart of gold. It's enough to make you scream! Maybe I should concentrate on other creatures? There are still so many to present gifts to..."

He disappears amidst a burst of thunder and lightning. The smell of tar and brimstone in the air vanishes. What remains is the scent of mulled wine and cinnamon.

Monster Christmas

People were getting into the Christmas spirit, snow was falling and out in the forest a baby was crying. Or so it seemed. Fleur, the old elf, couldn't hear so well any more. She had just brewed a fresh floral tea and was ready to sit down comfortably at the kitchen table with her latest gardening magazine. She had never understood the meaning of human Christmas celebrations. It was just another day on her calendar.

Now she stood there and listened.

It was late in the afternoon and getting dark outside. Inside, on the first floor, she could hear Marina, the mermaid, splashing in the bathtub and singing softly.

In the room above Fleur, Grim, the werewolf, was pacing restlessly. It was almost full moon, and even though he could no longer transform properly, he could still feel it in his old bones. Fleur would soon have to get him some more ointment for his rheumatism.

The crying sounded again, this time a little weaker.

Villa Mythos was located outside the big city, well hidden in a forest. Its residents kept their distance from people. Too many bad experiences.

The kitchen door burst open. "Fleur, there's something in our forest!"

The tree nymph Greentwig had rushed in excitedly.

"A thing?"

Fleur sighed. She put down her teacup, wrapped her shawl around her neck and went out to look. Just behind the house, where the woods began, there was a bundle lying in the snow. It looked like trouble. For a moment, Fleur considered just leaving it there. Then there was a soft whimper. She bent down, picked up the baby and carried it inside.

"You brought it?"

The tree nymph wrinkled her nose in disgust.

"Stoke the fire in the hearth," said Fleur.

"Do you want to burn it like people burn forests?" asked Greentwig with interest.

Fleur shook her head. The baby began to cry.

"Turn it off!" Greentwig stuck his gnarled fingers in his ears.

"It's hungry," Fleur explained.

Grim, the werewolf, burst in and growled: "I smell human flesh!" The crying grew louder. "You brought home a cub?"

"Get some blankets," said Fleur.

"Never! Humans have been hunting and killing us since the beginning of time. That little one will grow big and be just as bad. I'll eat it!"

"Uncooked? You'll hardly be able to do that with your dentures," said Fleur.

"Roasted!" suggested Greentwig and threw more wood on the fire. The baby was now howling like a siren.

"What's going on here?" Marina, the mermaid, appeared in the kitchen, dripping wet. "Do you have, erm, ... a human child?"

Grim growled, Fleur nodded.

"A specimen of the species that pollutes the oceans and makes them uninhabitable?"

"Exactly!" shouted Greentwig.

"I could drown it upstairs in my bathtub," said Marina.

"Eat!" growled Grim.

Fleur rocked the baby. In vain.

Grim leaned over it, bared his teeth, and... the crying stopped. Grim stopped growling. A small chuckle came from the bundle. A small pink hand came out and ruffled the werewolf's fur.

"You take it," said Fleur.

"But ..."

She pressed the baby into Grim's hands. The others gathered around him.

"Its eyes are as blue as the sea," said Marina.

“Look, it’s laughing,” said Greentwig.

Grim rocked the baby gently.

"I could call the police," suggested Fleur. "But then humans will be snooping around."

Everyone shook themselves.

"It has a beautiful singing voice," said Marina. "I could train it to be a siren."

“And I’ll build him a wicker cradle,” said Greentwig.

“What about his parents?” Fleur asked.

"You know how they are. Abandoning their own young when they don't want them!" grumbled Grim.

"I'll teach him hunting and pack behaviour."

He stared in delight at the happily giggling child.

Fleur sighed. She would have to put baby food on the shopping list.

Outside, in the cold winter night, a little star rose.