

In the deep woods

Spring is coming. The nights haven't felt this mild for a long time, and the forest floor smells of green, growing things. Beyond the forest the low hills are almost clear of snow . . . unfortunate for the ptarmigan I caught just after moonrise, still stark white against the damp, dark ground. I flex my paws and claws, stiffer now with age, my bones and joints still suffering the aches and pains of winter. But spring is coming: I raise my head and howl in happiness. No wolf answers, nor do I expect one to.

The full moon is high above the trees now, and the clear night will grow colder, so I return to the sheltering forest at a brisk trot. Owls and pine martens hunt for mice but there are few other sounds, just the little streams running full and fast with meltwater. So peaceful, without the harsh sounds of tree felling which had gone on all day.

Much later, I see what must be a lek and my mouth waters at the thought of a big, tasty grouse. Sure enough, one appears just before dawn, the most eager to win a mate. Preoccupied with displaying, the cock is easy prey. I look at the black feathers and red blood on a patch of sheltered snow and suddenly the words 'snow white' come into my mind. Snow White, with black hair and white skin. It is always the way; suddenly I think of something that draws me back to the human world as it nears dawn. Picking up my prize, I start to walk home.

My dogs run out, barking, but stop when they recognise my scent. Tails wagging, we go in through the scullery door to their pile of blankets. I huddle down with them, wolf for now but not for much longer, as the dawn light grows stronger in the eastern sky. I doze, tired from hunting and running, from the change itself.

When I wake the sun is high in the sky. I feel fantastic, refreshed and vigorous as I always do after a full moon night. I put on my bathrobe, put the kettle on the stove and start my human day. Looking in the dressing table mirror, I see 'granny': grey hair and old, wrinkled skin, but I'm bright-eyed and joyful. The dogs have helped themselves to the grouse while I slept so I start to make my breakfast; porridge, tattie scones and bacon. Cooking reminds me that my granddaughter will be coming for tea. I love my daughter but she worries about me too much, always sending the little one with a basket of groceries. Still, she's a dear little girl, so fond of that red hooded coat she always wears. She's so pretty too; thank goodness she's ten and just a child not fifteen, naive and impressionable or I'd be worrying about her and those lumberjacks. I mean, anything could happen . .