

*The Stories of the Curious Glass Lantern*



# THE BLUE FOREST

*by Geri Decheva*

*Illustrated by Irina Vasileva*

MONT

# Contents

<i>The Dramatic Change</i>	/ 5
<i>What's up with These Socks?</i>	/ 9
<i>A Costume Party?</i>	/ 15
<i>Competition I</i>	/ 17
<i>Competition II</i>	/ 21
<i>The Play</i>	/ 26
<i>The Pepper</i>	/ 31
<i>What a Day! What a Night!</i>	/ 38
<i>More Holidays?</i>	/ 44
<i>The Exhibition</i>	/ 46
<i>The „Thingy“</i>	/ 51
<i>A Special Day for the Ladies?</i>	/ 55
<i>The Spotty Forest</i>	/ 61
<i>How Many Is One Second?</i>	/ 67
<i>Lizzy-Weasie</i>	/ 74
<i>Mysteries</i>	/ 81
<i>A Curly Carrot</i>	/ 85
<i>Eggs and Rainbows</i>	/ 88
<i>Cuckoos and Nuts</i>	/ 92
<i>The War</i>	/ 97

## *The Dramatic Change*

Not far off the river the slope got steeper and the shortish bushes gave way to dolled-up fir trees. Here and there an oak or a beech tree spanned bare branches but only because it was winter and in these places the snow, apart from white, was also deep and persistent.

For the inhabitants of the forest the world outside existed only as far as the local transport system reached. The said transport consisted of the raven Vlad Crowey-Soprano, also known as Lilly Crowey-Soprano's husband, and his grown-up sons who went to some neighbouring places to deliver the minimum necessities for a civilized forest life.

The forest was hardly ever visited by strange animals and never by people because some years ago a clever ant that went by the name Alberta had put up a sign at the beginning of the river valley. The sign read: "**Attention! Radioactive danger!**" That was precisely the reason why the animals in the forest lived happily, peacefully and undisturbed. Naturally, there was no such thing as radioactive danger. Only lots and lots of blueberry bushes. That is why, to the few acquainted with the truth, the forest was known as the Blueberry Forest, later shortened to the Blue Forest because there are so many *R*-s in "blueberry" and because, as we all know, blueberries are blue.

The first, or maybe the last house (depending on which way you look at it) belonged to Mummy Bunny. She had moved in there some years ago with her four babies – now pre-teens with occasional tantrums.

Will, Bill, Phil, and Gina were white just like their Mum but, unlike her, they had a few black spots here and there – on their noses, on their ears and on their bums. They also had blackheads on their faces, which was down to the puberty hitting them like a shovel. However, to Mummy Bunny the four pre-teens were still her small babies.

Every morning the kids got up early, fought over which socks belonged to whom and who was entitled to more time in the bathroom.

They mixed their hats and gloves, and never seemed to find their pencils. Then they ran down the stairs, quarreled over who would sit where. The breakfast table was already set with hot chamomile tea and pancakes, or muffins, or freshly baked croissants. Mummy Bunny made a large mug of steaming coffee for herself – milk, no sugar because she was always on a diet, while failing miserably to cut down on tasty goodies.

Then she would take them to school and on the way back she would sit for some delicious chitchat with her friends: the owl Mrs. Cara Abacus who was also in charge of the local shop “1001 Delights for a Prosperous Forest Life”, the fox Mrs. Foxy Muzzleperk, and the crow Mrs. Lilly Crowey-Soprano. When back at home, Bunny would get down to cleaning the house, washing-up, washing piles of stained muddy clothes by hand, tidying the kids’ rooms, cooking, shopping, shoveling the thick snow, stitching a sock or two...

The children usually came home at lunchtime, sat at the table, swallowed the food, fought over the crust of the still steaming baked bread, ran upstairs to do their homework while starting new rows and fights, and then they dashed outside to play.

It was winter now and they made snowbunnies, snowfoxes and other snowbeasts with the other little ones from the forest, while Mummy Bunny was cooking dinner.

She would always tuck them in with a story and then, at last, she would sit by the fire, open a book or just watch how the loop of the moon spread silver on the snow.

She was so tired. If only someone could help her with the small things! Now it was easier – there wasn’t much work outside. What about when spring came round? There would be so much to be done – planting the new seeds, all that gardening and other things piling on top of the never-ending household chores. Her back would hurt and she would cry and weep like she had done every year before.

One morning the kids woke up with the usual shouting and fighting.

“Willie, you’ve taken my sock!”

“This one is mine! Yours is gray, Billie.”

“Willie, I’ll slap you right in the face!”



“Shut up, Gina! You mustn’t interfere when men argue!”

“And who exactly do you think you are to tell me whether to talk or not to talk? I will interfere as much as I want! It’s not like in the old times now! We are all equal. See? *See this?* Phil has stolen my pink pencil. Give it back! I’ll tell on you! I’ll tell Mummy everything and I’ll tell her how you ate snow yesterday!”

“I’ll tell on you, too! Just you wait!”

“You know what you are? A rat! That’s what you are!”

“Silly cow!”

And so on...

Mummy Bunny had just heated the pan for pancakes and had set the blueberry jam on the table, but something tugged at her heart... like a sharp pinch. She took the pan off the stove, poured her coffee in the mug, sat at the empty table after putting another piece of wood in the fire, put her feet up on the table, and opened *Forest Chic*, a magazine delivered from the neighbouring woods.

The children stomped down the stairs one on top of the other, shouting over each other.

“Mum, stitch the button of my blue shirt!”

“I want a blue shirt, too!”

“I want new shoes! Mine are so old and so old-fashioned!”

“We want shoes, too! And blue shirts!”

“I want my pink pencil! *I want my pencil!* Tell them to give it back to me! Tell them, Mum! *Tell them!*”

And while they were yelling and pushing each other round the table, they finally noticed the dramatic change.

*“What is going on, Saucy dear? Someone tell me, please! I’m hot but I’m making no pancakes,” asked Pan the frying pan in a manly but worried voice.*

*“I have no clue, Panny,” whispered Saucy the saucepan in her delicate, tender voice. “I think she’s angry. But it’s that quiet angry, like the quiet before a mighty storm.”*

## *What's Up with These Socks?*

**W**ithout moving her eyes away from whatever she was reading in the magazine, Mummy Bunny said in a placid tone:

“The pan is in the kitchen. The flour, the milk and the butter are there, too. The jam is on the table. Water is usually boiled in a kettle. The tea and the teacups are in the cupboard.”

The children exchanged stunned, silent looks, but no one made a move towards the kitchen.

“Are you not getting dressed to take us to school?” asked Gina, looking panicky, even scared.

“The path is to be found outside. The shovel for cleaning the snow is next to the front door,” answered their mother with her nose stuck in the magazine.

The four of them rose in deadly silence and confusion, wrapped up in their winter coats and went off to school.

Did Mummy Bunny feel great about the situation? No, not in the slightest bit. She was saddened, but the sorrow soon grew into frustration – her children were so lazy! They couldn't even be bothered to reach for the bread and make a honey and butter buttie. And as annoyed as she was, she summoned Foxy Muzzleperk and Lilly Crowey for coffee with light refreshments. Then she went to “1001 Delights for a Prosperous Forest Life” and spent a whole hour gossiping with Mrs. Cara Abacus about who had done what in the last 24 hours.

She got home through the sea of untouched white snow. A fresh white blanket of snowflakes had erased the kids' footsteps from the morning. The cooker was silent. Saucy and Pan were crying bitterly and relentlessly and were trembling in fear of losing their jobs.

Instead of getting down to work and cleaning and tidying, as Bunny had done every day, she climbed to her room, got in bed, stretched her tired body and opened a book. It was Wednesday and her children

were supposed to stay at school longer because they were all in the school choir “Wild, Wild Voices”. She used the extra free time to take all her clothes out of the wardrobe and put the old rags aside. Some of them could not even be used for mopping and she decided to make new curtains out of the better pieces of the worn-out summer dresses with tired colours. Then she washed her fluffy slippers, put up a picture on the wall from the times she was young and slim, and concluded that there was more to life than cleaning and cooking.

☆☆☆

“It’s your fault! You and your socks! Just so you know!”

“No, it’s *your fault*. You and your rattng-out.”

“She didn’t make breakfast! There’s a thing to worry about! What’s up with that!”

“What’s up with *her*? Why is she so evil, so cruel?”

“She might be sick.”

“I’m hungry, man, I’m hungry! I can’t go through the last meters. I’m so weak. Oh, look, *just look at this!* The snow is still here! She hasn’t cleaned the path! It’s *unheard of!*”

The lively and rather irritated conversation between the four rabbits was so loud, that it could be overheard by the woodpecker Mr. Hammersledge who ran to his wife Mrs. Hammersledge to tell her the big news – Mummy Bunny had made no breakfast for her kids, and had sent them off to school hungry, and “*Can you believe that?*” sort of thing.

Mrs. Hammersledge looked at her husband in a sour and displeasing manner and said:

“So very right and clever! Good for her! If you think I’m so cool with getting up at the crack of dawn while you are all still snoozing and snoring, you cannot be further from the truth, Mr. Nine-Inch-Nail-in-a-Wooden-Plank. Do you really, really, really believe I dreamt of a life around the cooker when I married you? Do you? All right then! Tonight you all cook for me! Lazy bums!” And she went on nagging and getting more and more wound up.

At home the four hungry kids found a table set with nothingness and they couldn't take it anymore. Their mother was arranging bracelets and other trinkets in her carton box for trinkets and the kitchen smelled of one gigantic nothing.

They went up to their rooms and Billie screamed with horror:

"Help! Help! We've been burgled! Someone's broken in and turned the place upside down. Mum, Mum, burglars! Beasts have been in my room!"

"Dumb, dumber, the dumbest," reproached Willie. "That's how we left the place, you fool!"

"Oh, my! *Oh, my!* Is this what we leave behind each morning?" Gina was shaking her head in disbelief while taking off her coat. Right this instant she started making her bed. "What are you three looking at? I'm not touching your beds! Mark my word!"

The boys followed quickly and clumsily and eventually made their beds. Some missing stuff was found in the process: a dozen single lonely socks, several single slippers (one right, one left, but different colours and sizes) plus the pink pencil pronounced missing earlier that morning.

In the meantime, Mummy Bunny made a crunchy toast with honey and butter for herself, ate it slowly, then wrapped up and went out. The bunnies never gave up the hope that they would see her grabbing the shovel and cleaning the snow, but unfortunately, she went past the shovel in that manner in which one neglects a used teaspoon.

The siblings looked at each other bewildered and shaken to the core and since they were quite peckish, they distributed the major tasks and got on with it.

Around five in the evening, it was already dark when Mummy Bunny was slowly walking home after an excruciating debate with Mr. Sage Abacus, the owl who was the Principal of the school and also Mrs. Cara Abacus's husband. Bunny had already accepted the fact that the shovel and the cooker were waiting for her, when she saw the clean straight path leading to the gate of her home. She ran along and peeked through the window.



With no fighting and rowing, with no insults and screams, all her kids were in the kitchen and were chopping vegetables for soup. Billie was on top of operation "Dinner" and everyone else was following his orders. Bunny was looking at them, eyes wet with love and some (but very little) guilt, but then again... they were no longer babies, were they?

With that thought she opened the door and went into the clean, warm house. The four bunnies dashed forward to hug her.

"Never leave us like this again! We are going to help you with all the work!"

"Just don't be so silent and please, Mummy, please, don't disappear like this again!"

"Do you still love us?"

"We are making soup. You are going to have some, aren't you?"

The soup was... well, it was nice. They all laughed and the small ones were happy to see their Mum somehow rested, calm and more beautiful. She was always beautiful. The most beautiful Mum in the world. But tonight she looked younger, untroubled, and the wrinkles on her face had smoothed out.

They talked, they told jokes and it was all funny in a warm kind of way. She tucked them in and told them the story about the Sand Princess. I can't remember it now, but if I do, I'll certainly tell it to you one day.

From that day on, the kids helped at dinner time and washed-up. A few plates were broken in the process. They made their beds and nothing disappeared anymore. Well... almost nothing. The socks still went missing, as did the pencils and rubbers, but this is one of the biggest mysteries in the world. What's a mystery, you say? All in good time, all in good time. ☺

The news spread at the speed of light. After Mrs. Hammersledge also introduced new rules in her household, all the children in the forest started helping at home. Some even exchanged cooking recipes at school. Alas, they could not always put them into practice because... well, we all eat different things, don't we? Some eat carrots; others eat seeds or honey like the bear family, the Sweetsons.

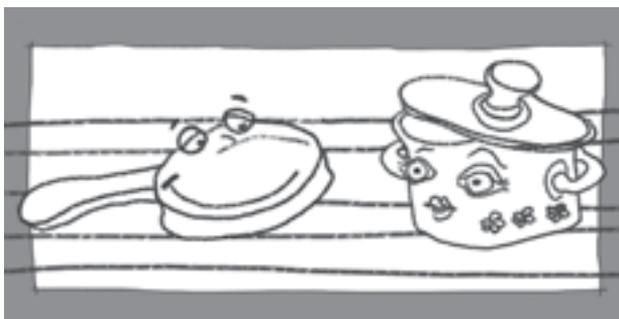
Mummy Bunny had more free time and took on yoga and meditation which comprised of the following exercises: she usually got together with Foxy Muzzleperk, Lilly Crowey-Soprano and Cara Abacus (in her several-hour lunch break) and meditated deeply on the new spring fashion and the flashy drawings of flashy models in flashy magazines.

Yoga was performed on a chair near the booming fire with some coffee and cookies that the ladies kept on making. They also kept on stitching buttons and socks because... well, needles are so easy to lose and so painful to sit on.

*"I was so much happier when Mummy Bunny used to wash me. Now I have food leftovers all over me. I don't like my pretty round body like this," complained Saucy to Pan. Sometimes she was so vain.*

*"My sweet little Saucy, this may be so, but do you think she was happy to wash-up all the time? All alone?" asked Pan and got lost in deep thought. "I like you just as you are, even with the greasy spots. I promise if you agree to become my wife, I'll do all the cooking!"*

*He winked at her, and she blushed in the dancing red shadows of the curly flames in the old woodstove with a black crooked chimney puffing above the world which was softly dozing off in the nostalgic blue winter bliss.*



## *A Costume Party? Really?*

The reason Mummy Bunny went to talk to the Principal of the school Mr. Sage Abacus was the Christmas party. First and foremost, one thing must be specifically clarified: the animals had no idea what they celebrated at Christmas. They knew it was a big winter holiday five days before a new year came, when they started counting from 1 to 365 and once in every four years from 1 to 366. Why was that? It was also something they didn't know, but this counting rule was also written in the thick books. The books? All in good time, all in good time. ☺

Now, in the Blue Forest the bigger holiday (and by bigger I mean attended by more animals) was Easter, when those who dozed off for the winter were already up. For Christmas the animals were less in number and kinds, and each year they had a costume party, which always drove the parents insane and threw some into a long-lasting miserable mood. Why? Because... well, you tell me if it's easy to tailor costumes for six, seven, eight children. Right! That's what I thought.

"How am I supposed to strain my eyes and my patience to make four costumes for the kids and one for me? Do you know what happened last year? I went dressed as Catwoman and Doc Soothman... you know he is a cat and a doctor simultaneously... took me for his wife and it was so embarrassing," she explained to the owl Mr. Abacus. "You and Cara have one child only; your work is a piece of cake! But what about us? The big families? Have you any idea when the field mouse Cheesy O'Mousy grabs the needle, the thread and the knitting needles? Have you? I'll tell you when. In summer! That's when. Every year dozens of costumes for tin soldiers, but her children are sick of it. We must think of something new."

"What is there to think? I don't think. I know!" interrupted the owl with his usual authoritative voice and in his show-off manner. "I am the Principal of this school and *I know* a thing or two about child

psychology.”

“We also know a thing or two, or three, or four about the child... how did you put it..., but I know I’ll be as crazy as a broken cuckoo clock if I have to make costumes for the three musketeers and for one Marie Antoinette.”

Here we have to stop the story again and clarify that the animals in the Blue Forest were very well-read because they read a lot of books, had no Internet, didn’t know what a tablet was, and the only game they knew was called “Outside”.

“Let us think then,” concluded the sage Sage Abacus. “What did you have in mind?”

“Me? Well, I can humbly suggest something like a game with rewards. Each child, and why not each parent too, can write a poem or a story... and there will be just one big prize... let’s say...a roasted sweet pumpkin with nuts for the best poem or story. Everyone will get a reward for their efforts. All rewards must be equal in size and content.”

Sage Abacus was looking out of the window and then he suddenly turned to her. His face was beaming, enthusiastic.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t listening closely. I just thought of something! Each child, and why not each parent too, can write a poem, a story... and there will be just one big prize... let’s say... a roasted sweet pumpkin with nuts for the best poem or story. Everyone will get a reward for the efforts. All rewards must be equal in size and content. I will be the chairman of the jury.”

“No, you won’t. There will be no jury. Each participant will read someone else’s writing, it will be anonymous and no one will know who votes for whom because... you know how enormous Back Buster’s family is. They might be just tiny ants, but they are too many...”

“So... what is *my* responsible, reputable duty then?”

“You will be the chairman of the organizational committee. Each family will prepare as many bags with rewards as the number of members in the family. Later they can exchange stuff from the bags if they don’t like what’s inside.”

The sage Sage Abacus nodded sagely a few times and exclaimed.

“There! I got another brilliant idea! Each family will prepare as many bags with rewards as the number of members in the family. Later they can exchange stuff from the bags if they don’t like what’s inside. That’s what we are going to do! What were you saying? I was thinking deeply and couldn’t hear you.”

Mummy Bunny gave up dealing with the Principal, who had been acting like a parrot for the last ten minutes, and went home.

The next day all the children were given instructions on the Christmas competition. The grown-ups also wanted to take part, and everyone was already acting as if possessed by some wild, bordering on insanity creative spirit. The children rhymed words, the grow-ups wrote long stories and speeches, and Mummy Bunny was delighted that this year she had got off the hook for making Christmas costumes. Instead, she decided to tailor the new curtains. Plus, she made a new apron from what was left.

## *Competition I*

**A** week before Christmas, the five-day contest was opened with a grand ceremony. And so it began, dragging from morning till late in the afternoon – there were so many participants and they all wanted to get on the stage.

The children went first. Great pieces of art could be witnessed.

*“I am a tiny, sweet, and jumpy baby-ant.*

*I am joyous, happy! I can walk and play on sand.*

*My dress is oh, so pretty, dotty!*

*My nose is sometimes snotty.”*

Quite naturally, read and performed by Minky Minkoff – the smallest boy of all the kids in the minks’ household, it was funny and everybody had a great time.

Or:



*“My fluffy tail is such a beauty.  
My brownish squirrel shirt is clean – that is my duty.  
Come on, you Santa, ride that sleigh!  
Let’s cut that Christmas cake! Olé!”*

It was read and performed by little Melody Crowey-Siprano, Lilly and Vlad’s youngest and most talented daughter, who enjoyed the poem a lot and also laughed a lot because she herself had a black shirt. Besides, her tail was not just a beauty! It was *the* beauty, the most beautiful of all, as her Mum used to say.

Gina’s poem was to be read by Roly-Poly Sweetson, the bears’ son.

*“I have a pinkish dress.  
My name is Gina, yes!  
I love ballet. I love to dance.  
I spell, and write, and dream of France.  
My Christmas list is short and easy:  
For Mummy— health and joy and not to be so busy.  
For me and Willie, Billie, Phillie  
I wish us luck and happy faces, really!  
Now cut some cake and don’t be silly!”*

Each masterpiece received a warm welcome, applause and even standing ovations. All participants were rewarded with bags of smaller and bigger delicious things. The biggest prize of all, however, the roasted pumpkin, was given to Wolf Muzzleperk.

*“I’m a kitten and I know it well, gentlemen and ladies.  
My Mum and Dad somehow had no babies.  
They found me lonely by the river bank  
Where all my siblings were by some cruel person sunk.  
They took me in, they fed me milk  
And I became a real mighty fox with fur like silk.  
My Mum is Foxy Lady.  
My Daddy calls her “baby”.  
My Dad is strict but fair  
And has a lot of facial hair.  
And although I was a hungry, homeless kitten,*

*Home love, warmth and joy are no longer for me forbidden.  
When we love each other, and that is true,  
Our house is always warm, and we are never blue.  
Don't be sad, and have no fear,  
It's soon to be a new year."*

The poem was read and performed by the piglet Brilliantina, Mrs. Splendid's daughter. Her father, Mr. Gorgeous, the strong wild boar, was so proud of her. Wolf's poetry managed to deeply touch everyone and there was not a dry eye in the audience.

Then they all made the biggest cheese pie in the world and started getting ready for the last two days – the grown-ups were about to conquer the stage. And how did that go?

All in good time, all in good time. ☺

*"Are we not allowed to participate? I have a poem for you, Saucy, which you'll appreciate. Alas, I'm working early shift... if you, my sweetness, catch my drift," Pan had gone poetic.*

*"So dumb!" grumbled Dippster the Dipper. He was always angry.*

*"Dumb or clever, do us all a favour – shut your mouth, you have no skill, and neither have you any thrill!" Saucy told him off. She too felt romantic that night. "The winter roars outside, the world is gleaming white, so bright."*

*"It's not grammatically correct. 'The winter is roaring' outside is the right way to say it."*

*"In poetry all is allowed – to make up words, to talk of birds, to bend the rules, to tell off fools. Now, will you zip it, Mr. Grumpy Dippy!" Saucy cut him off once again and while still sulking, she shut her lid, saying no goodnight to anyone in sight.*