



Translated extract from

Bettina Wegenast
Wolf sein
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Chapters 1 & 2

Bettina Wegenast:
Being The Wolf

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Chapter 1

“The wolf is dead, the wolf is dead!”

The three little pigs sang the words loudly and tunelessly, but with enormous relish.

“The wolf is dead!”

Sheep were standing in the meadow, munching the grass.

Suddenly Curly stopped munching.

“So what was he like?”

“Who?” Stan, the sheep who was standing opposite, used his tongue to remove a blade of grass from between his teeth. He was bigger and stronger than Curly.

“The wolf!” Curly was becoming slightly agitated.

“What do you think he was like! Bad, of course!”

“Really bad?”

“Of course!” Stan knew what he was talking about. “That’s the way wolves are!”

Curly thought. “So are all wolves bad?”

“Of course all wolves are bad. And he’s the baddest of them all! He wasn’t the big bad wolf for nothing!”

“Not for nothing?” Curly asked in astonishment. “You mean he was paid for it?”

“Of course he was paid for it!” Stan grinned. “What did you think? The big bad wolf ... that’s bound to be well-paid!”

Curly blew bits of fluffy wool off his face. “Oh ... I wonder what he looked like?

What do you reckon?”

Stan pulled a face and rolled his eyes. “Bad, of course! He looked bad ... really bad, with red eyes ... black, that’s what he was, and horribly shaggy.”

“Oh yes! And I’m sure his coat was completely matted! And he had sharp claws and sharp teeth!” Curly was gradually getting into the topic.

“Definitely! And between his teeth ... old bits of food!” said Stan dully. “The remains of his victims.”

Curly felt his fleece starting to stand on end.

Quickly, the pair plucked out a morsel of grass and chewed.

“So what did he do?” asked Curly, his mouth full.

“What do you think he did?” Stan used his hoof to scrape out a particularly juicy tuft.

“He was bad! I’d imagine that gave him more than enough to do.”

“Indeed! But what do people do when they’re bad? Do they ... bite sheep’s legs?” A shiver ran down Curly’s spine.

“Bite sheep’s legs? Of course they do! And they do worse than that!” said Stan.

“Worse?”

“Much worse!”

“But what could be worse than that?”

“Well ... that depends ... but I don’t like to think about that. Thank goodness he’s dead!”

The little pigs’ singing gradually disappeared into the distance until it could no longer be heard at all.

“So did you know him?” Curly now asked cautiously. You couldn’t put anything past Stan.

He, however, denied it. “My goodness, no! Do you think I’d be standing here having a cosy chat and munch with you if I’d known him?”

“But you saw him!”

“Saw him ... saw him ... well, not in fact ... well ... I almost saw him.”

“Almost? What do you mean, almost? Did you see him or not?”

Stan looked up. “I think I once knew someone who saw him! Yes, and then ... then of course there’s Eddy, who did his shopping for him sometimes.”

Curly was speechless. “Shopping? For the big bad wolf? But ...”

Stan remained completely cool. "Of course! How do you think it would look if the big bad wolf just went into the shops ..."

"Well, obviously, but I thought he was really bad!"

"Of course he was really bad! But you still need stuff, even if you're really bad."

"And this Eddy bought it for him ... I see."

A bumble-bee buzzed over their heads. Curly watched it until it disappeared into the high grass. "And what's going to happen now? I mean, now that the wolf's dead?"

Stan spat out a lump of earth that had been clinging to a tuft of grass. "They're looking for a new one now. The job's already been advertised."

"Advertised? But why? When everyone should be glad that the old one's dead!" Curly was baffled.

"Of course everyone's glad that the old one's dead! But we really can't be doing without any wolf at all. There's always one around! There has to be! I'll have you know it's a really difficult job. Nothing for bell-wearers ..." Stan looked rather contemptuously at the little bell that hung around Curly's neck and gave a faint ting-a-ling every time he moved. He stretched his neck out proudly. Stan didn't wear a bell. "I've been wondering whether I shouldn't apply."

Curly coughed; he could almost have choked. "But ... you're not a wolf: you're a sheep!"

"So? If the fur coat fits ... And as for my teeth: I'm bound to be able to sort that out."

Stan tested out his theory by baring his yellow teeth.

"I'm just going to go down there and find out what's what. Why not? I'd really like ... to be really bad for once! I'll liven the place up, let me tell you!" He looked expectantly at Curly. "So? What about you? Are you coming with me?"

Curly didn't reply. He looked up at the sky, where a heavy cloud was passing above them, casting its shadow onto the meadow.

"Are you coming?" Curly wasn't giving up so easily.

But Curly shook his head. Going with Stan to apply then and there for the wolf's job? He wasn't mad, for goodness' sake!

“Come on, don’t make such a fuss! So what do you want? To spend all day standing in the meadow eating grass? To end up as a leg of mutton? You can’t be serious!”

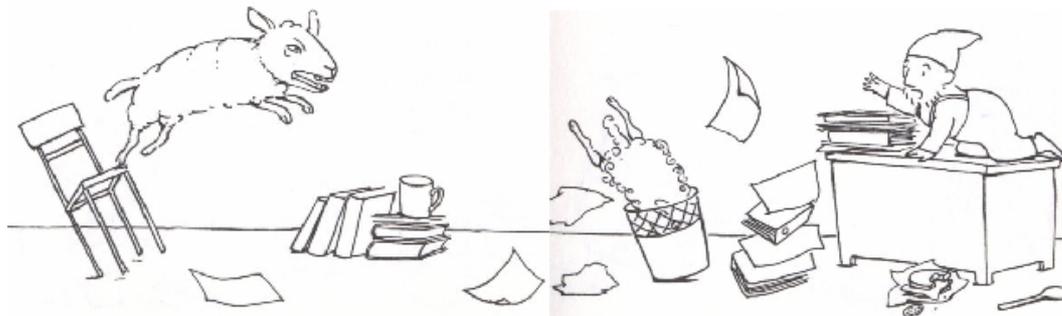
“I’m not a leg of mutton! I’m Curly!” Curly was insulted.

But that didn’t bother Stan. “Once you’re lying on the plate, nobody’s going to ask you what your name used to be. Come on, it’s your chance too! And anyway, you’d enjoy it – I know you!” His voice was as sweet as sugar. “Come on, Curly! We’re a team, aren’t we!”

Curly finally accepted defeat.

“Okay. If you think ... you as the big bad wolf ... I’d dearly love to see that one! I somehow can’t remotely imagine ...” He took a deep breath. “I could do your shopping sometimes.”

“Brilliant!” Stan was thrilled. “Come on, let’s go straight down there! Not that anyone will beat us to it ...” He jumped up and galloped across the meadow at a goodly pace. Curly took a last, longing look at the juicy grass before he trotted off in pursuit of his friend.



Chapter 2

Stan stopped outside a nondescript little building. He looked around.

“Here it is. The job centre.”

Nervously, he trip-trapped to and fro outside the door labelled ‘office’.

“Don’t you want to go in?” asked Curly.

“Course I do. I can hardly wait.” But Stan hesitated further. Then he suddenly pulled himself together and wrenched the door open.

“Hey! What sort of manners do you call that? I ask you!” resounded a disapproving voice.

It came from a little man in a brown jacket who was wearing a pointy red hat on his head and was sitting on a revolving chair behind a desk.

Stan planted himself before him, his legs apart.

“It’s me,” he said. “Me, the new wolf.”

It seemed to Curly as if his friend’s familiar voice sounded deeper and somehow more threatening. But this didn’t seem to impress the dwarf.

“Pah”, he replied coolly. “You want to be the new wolf? Fine. But anyone can say that.”

He busily rustled the papers that lay on the desk in front of him. “The position of wolf has in fact just become available, that much is true. But as to whether you’re suitable ... we’ll have to see about that!” He stood up and came out from behind his desk. He scrutinised Stan carefully. “We’ll have to see about that ...”, he repeated.

“Go on then! Looking doesn’t cost anything!”

The dwarf ran his fingers thoughtfully through his long grey beard and straightened his glasses. “We’re not talking about external appearances. We can sort all that out. It’s far more a question of inner values. Whether you’re up to the job, for example.”

Stan began uncomfortably to paw the ground under his scrutinising gaze. “My digestive system is in perfect working order. As are my teeth! But ... would you mind opening the window a bit?”

The dwarf grinned broadly. “You’re starting to feel a bit warm, are you?” He went over to the window and opened it a crack. “Is that better?” the dwarf asked, smiling again.

Curly, who had up to that point barely attracted the dwarf’s attention at all, didn’t like this smile in the slightest. “He’s due for a shearing!” Curly said quickly. “His wool really is top notch. If you happened to be interested in a pullover ... we’ve got excellent connections!”

“Thanks, but no thanks! Don’t need one. So let’s get down to business.” The dwarf turned to Stan again. “So why should we choose you of all applicants to fill the wolf post?”

“Because ...” Stan looked at the ground.

“Well?” the dwarf drummed impatiently on his desk.

Stan took a deep breath. “Because ... because I want it! Because I’m the best! Because I’m not one of these bell-wearers; because I want to know what the grass tastes like on the other side of the meadow; and because ... because it’s well paid, no two ways about it!”

The dwarf stopped drumming. He looked at Stan in astonishment. Then he reverted to being cool and matter-of-fact once more. “Any other reasons?” Stan stuck his chin out with great confidence. “And because I’m always the best at *What Time is it, Mr. Wolf.*” Now he was grinning broadly.

“*What Time is it, Mr. Wolf?*” The dwarf frowned. “What’s *What Time is it, Mr. Wolf?* I’ve never heard of it!”

Now Curly intervened again. “*What Time is it, Mr. Wolf* is a game! And it’s true: Stan’s unbeatable as a wolf!”

“So, it’s a game ... but this isn’t a game!” the dwarf said sternly.

“I know. But you’ve got to have brains to be Mr. Wolf!” Stan wasn’t going to be put off so easily.

The dwarf now seemed amused. “So, you’ve got experience as Mr. Wolf ... Good for you! So can you tell the time, too?”

Stan hadn’t been expecting that one. “Tell the time? So do wolves have to be able to tell the time?”

“Well, not necessarily, but if you’ve already worked as Mr. Wolf, you’re bound to be able to tell the time!”

“Tell the time ... no, that is, not exactly. Mr. Wolf doesn’t tell the time in this game. He turns his face to the bushes.”

Stan ducked down behind a chair. “The bushes have to have no thorns. You have to make sure of that one. If you get stuck to it, you look pretty silly! So you hide there and wait. The lambs stand in the meadow, eating and playing along. They’ve not got a

clue. But Mr. Wolf tenses every muscle and awaits his moment. And at the right moment ...” Stan began to growl. He ducked down even lower.

“Then ... at the right moment: *Dinner time!* He jumps out! Pounces on the lambs!” Stan rushed out and was about to pounce on Curly when the dwarf quickly stepped out and stopped him in his tracks. “Thank you, that’s quite enough to give me the picture!”

Curly shook himself. “Brr ... he’s good, isn’t he? It could quite scare you ... Yes, he was always the best at that. Phew ...” He suddenly looked suspiciously at Stan. “When I see you like that ... I almost think René was right! You really did bite him that time!”

Stan just pursed his lips contemptuously. “René! Rubbish! Stop talking about that sheep-brain! That show-off. That know-all! René of all sheep!”

“But he said ...”

“*René said!* I’ve had just about enough of him! Him with the bell! I’ll tell you something: once I’m the wolf, then we’ll call on him! We’ll pay him a real visit and ...”

“If I might interrupt for a moment!” The dwarf intervened again. Stan quickly turned to him. “Of course! I’m sorry, we were just ...”

“No worries! Your quarrels are nothing to do with me and, what’s more, don’t interest me in the slightest.” The dwarf had sat back in his revolving chair and was rocking gently backwards and forwards.

Then he fell silent and leant nonchalantly on his desk. “And so far as your application is concerned ... well ... yes, I can see it. I reckon we can give you a go!”

Stan’s eyes opened wide. “Yes? I’ve got the job? Really? I’m the wolf? From now on, I’m the wolf?” Stan threw himself into position and began to growl.

“I’m the wolf!”

As Curly saw the sudden transformation in his friend, his mouth gaped open.

“Stan! Stop it! Stan!” he cried in horror.

The dwarf arose again and stood in front of the desk. “Not bad. But calm down please. Give you a go, I said. We’ll give you a go. No more than that.”

Stan's eyes narrowed to become little slits. "A go? Why a go? I'm not a guinea-pig for goodness' sake!"

The dwarf remained unimpressed. "That's got nothing whatsoever to do with it. What it means is that we initially give you the job on probation. You get the opportunity to prove yourself as wolf. After a certain period, we have another look at things and then decide whether to offer you a permanent post."

This was not what Stan had been expecting. "That's ..."

He was about to protest, but the dwarf cut him off. "That's perfectly common, and in any case, you're not the only applicant."

"No?" Stan was taken aback.

"No. Not by a long chalk!"

"Um ... I'd thought ... what's all that rubbish about a probation period? The job is made for me! And, while we're at it, you keep saying 'we'. So who are the others? Where are they hiding?" Stan looked around searchingly.

"I'm part of a team", the dwarf explained grumpily.

"Just a little cog in the wheel, so to speak. The others don't get involved in interviews; they prefer to remain in the background. So how about it? Do you want the job or not?"

"Of course I do! I'm not giving up that easily ... you want a sample of my work: you can have one! So how long does that sort of thing last?"

The dwarf rummaged in his papers. "Probation period for a wolf ... aha! I've got it! Probation period for a wolf ... well ... shall we say the day after tomorrow? That should be long enough to see whether you're up to the job." He opened a cupboard and produced a large cardboard box. "So. Here's your equipment. Better see whether it actually fits you." In the box was a tangled black coat. He pulled it out and gave it a shake.

"First of all, the fur." He coughed briefly and then put it over Stan's back. "Well, the fur is a bit dusty, but otherwise it's been quite well looked after."

He tried to pull the coat over Stan, not entirely successfully. "If you could just pull your tummy in a bit ..."

"That's not my tummy! I've just got a thick fleece!" protested Stan.

“Well, if you could kindly just pull your thick fleece in a bit ...” The dwarf finally took a step back and examined his handiwork. “Ah well. It’ll do. Give it a day or two, and it’ll fit you like a glove. And now ... your teeth!”

Stan pressed his lips together.

“I don’t need new teeth! There’s nothing wrong with my teeth, thanks very much!” he hissed.

The dwarf looked at him, amused. “I’m sorry, but you have no choice. The arrangement of a wolf’s teeth is tried and tested. If you don’t mind ...” With one quick movement he had forced Stan’s teeth apart, and had just as rapidly shoved the pointy dentures into his mouth.

“So, give me a growl!”

“Grr ...” Stan coughed and cleared his throat, then he began cautiously to growl.

Quietly at first, then more loudly.

“Grrrrrrrrrrrr!”

The dwarf seemed satisfied.

“Well, that’s pretty good. Now the howling!”

Stan cleared his throat. “Aooo!” he said.

“Not quite. Take a deep breath, open your mouth wide, and breathe out slowly.”

Stan closed his eyes and took a deep breath. “Awowow ...”

“Better already! Now imagine a dark night. Strips of cloud are scudding across the sky. Only the full moon is casting its pale light on the earth ...”

Stan took another deep breath, breathed out slowly, and this time it sounded like a proper wolf’s howl. “Aooooowowow!”

A shiver ran down Curly’s thick, fuzzy fleece. “Stan, stop it”, he said pitifully.

“You’re scaring me!”

“Fantastic”, said the dwarf. “Go for it!”

“Aaaaooooooooooooooooowowowowowow!”

The dwarf was very impressed. “That really is very promising! You’re a quick learner! Well, that’s everything sorted. We’ll meet here again the day after tomorrow. In the meantime, you can have your first go at being a wolf. Show us what you’re made of!”

Stan opened his eyes again. He cleared his throat. "And what about my salary? Is it actually worth my while? What about the terms and conditions? Personal insurance? Health insurance? Holidays?"

"Well ... I don't think you'll have many complaints in this regard." The dwarf flicked through his papers again. "So ... what does it say ... We'll give you fifty hens, three little pigs, half a kingdom and regular health checks. In particularly tricky situations we can also offer you psychological counselling. But someone like you – someone who's so wholehearted about the job – probably won't need to worry about that. It doesn't really go down well; it makes a bad impression on the public!"

Stan frowned. "I can't see the point of it either. And all that other stuff – what am I supposed to do with that?"

"I beg your pardon? What do you mean?" The dwarf looked at him in astonishment.

"Hens! Pigs! I don't want to start a farmyard!"

"You're not supposed to be opening a farmyard! You're a wolf, for goodness' sake! And as for holidays ... well, I have to tell you now that so far as we're concerned, there aren't any holidays on the agenda. But you can choose how you spend your time! If you take a day off here and there ... we would of course completely understand."

"Sounds good to me!" said Curly, who had recovered from his shock and was keen to join in the conversation again. "You never go on holiday anyway! And all the other stuff ... maybe you could sell it! Especially half a kingdom! There's bound to be a demand for that sort of thing!"

"Yes indeed", confirmed the dwarf. "People always want hens and pigs too. But once you're a wolf, you might have something else in mind for them."

"And when will I be paid? Monthly?" asked Stan.

"What are you on about!" The dwarf shook his head.

"Of course not! We normally pay our employees once they've finished their jobs."

"I beg your pardon?" Stan was incensed. "When the job's done? That's fraud! What am I supposed to live on in the meantime?"

He stamped violently on the floor, thrust his head down into his neck, and stared at the dwarf.

But it made no impression on the latter. “Oh, when you’re a wolf you won’t bother much about that anyway. It’s much nicer if you can sit down in the twilight of your life and say: all this is mine! I earned it honestly! And in the meantime, you’ll just live as wolves live. A morsel here, a tasty bite there ...”

This, however, did not satisfy Stan.

“And what if I die before that? In an accident at work, say? That can happen, so I’ve heard! Then everything I’ve earned goes down the pan!”

“Well ...”, the dwarf answered slowly. “ ... Yes, that is right! But that’s just the way it is! And in any case, it’ll encourage you to be careful. If it’s a problem for you ... please do just say so! As I said, there are other applicants!”

“No, no!” said Stan quickly. “I didn’t mean it like that!”

“Then so far as I’m concerned, it’s all sorted. You can start whenever you like; there are several possibilities. Good luck; I look forward to a successful report. Goodbye, and have a nice day!” The dwarf turned and started to rummage around on the shelves behind him.

The sheep looked at one another. Then Stan shrugged and left the room. Curly followed him.