

The Red Gloves

Brooklyn Arnot

ALICE lived in a hot country. She was a beautiful girl who her father, a carpenter, loved very much. He gave her whatever he could, although their family was extremely poor.

Alice's mother, Dorothy, had grown to resent Alice's hold over her husband. Dorothy often lay in her bed, longing for him while he sat reading to the girls in their bedroom, with Alice on his lap. He would stroke her hair and kiss her lightly, always paying her more attention than her three sisters. When he finished one tale, and bid the girls goodnight, Alice would often beg her father for another story.

"Let's read the one about the lovely girl in red shoes," she would say. If her father ever refused, Alice would softly scrunch her little blue eyes and make her lips quiver. Her father would always kiss her on the forehead and read the story.

In Alice's thirteenth year, there was to be a large wedding held in town. Even though their family was very poor, Dorothy was determined to bring her girls to the wedding in white dresses and white

silk gloves. For months, the family had been eating meagre meals so Alice's mother could save the pennies to buy the fabric.

One afternoon, Dorothy brought Alice and her other daughters to town to buy the silk and cotton. On the way, they walked past a little shop with magazines in the window. The cover of one displayed a beautiful model, wearing long, sleek, red gloves. Alice was mesmerised by the image. Putting her fingers up against the glass window, she admired the tight, shimmering silk of the crimson gloves. The shopkeeper emerged, smiling at Alice pleasantly. Enchanted by her pretty face, he offered her the magazine.

"Not today," snapped Dorothy, and pulled Alice by the hand into the fabric shop. While her mother was testing the quality of white silks, Alice found herself entranced by the large rolls of red silk. She tugged at one and, as it unravelled, she wrapped it around her hand, picturing the crimson gloves. She glanced around the room, and seeing the shopkeeper was occupied with her mother, she snipped off a piece of the fabric and stuffed it into her pocket.

"Mother," she asked. "May I please wear red gloves to the wedding? Oh, how truly glorious I would look in crimson gloves!" Dorothy refused, telling Alice she would wear dainty white gloves.

She made her lips quiver in her way that always moved her father, but Dorothy was like steel.

"I want the red fabric!" Alice demanded. When her mother refused, once again, Alice began to wail. Her scream pierced like a screeching lamb. "I hate you!" People on the street gathered around the little shop to view the commotion. Dorothy smacked Alice's hand so that it was sore and red. She quickly paid for the white fabric and pulled her daughters out of the shop.

For the following weeks, Alice did not speak a word to her mother, and the more Alice rejected her, the more Dorothy's husband did as well. Alice would stand by his side attentively as he worked in his shed. A little magpie also sat at the top of the shed, collecting little silver trinkets. He would often steal the nails and bolts her father needed.

"Little bastard," he would swear. Her father showed her how the big machines worked, which Alice watched with eyes of wonder. They

buzzed and gurgled and spat; they spun and danced and shouted! Alice's favourite machine was a big table with a hood looming over the top. Out of it shot a shiny silver rod with chomping spiky little teeth.

"It's called a bandsaw," her father explained, threading a large piece of wood through the vibrating arm to form a beautiful curve.

One day, Alice's father gave her a block of eucalyptus wood and a hand saw. Holding her hand, he told her that she could make anything she liked out of that piece of wood. She just had to try hard enough.

Alice spent a week working beside her father on the block of wood. She spent the first three days cutting into it with the saw, and the next four rubbing it with a strange piece of scratchy paper her father told her to use. She didn't speak a word to her mother this whole time, even at the dinner table, and her father mostly followed her example. Dorothy sat alone every evening in her room, embroidering the girls' dresses and gloves. By the end of the week, Alice had created a lopsided car, about the size of her hand. She painted it white and drew on a badge of a lion holding a stone.

Her father held the crooked car in his hand and beamed.

"See?" he exclaimed, "You can make anything you like! In this world, you can take anything you want, anything!"

A few weeks before the wedding, Alice resumed talking to her mother as if nothing had ever gone wrong. She had a plan. Dorothy did not question this change of heart — she was just relieved to have her family's company once again.

The night before the wedding, Dorothy slowly stitched the last flower on Alice's glove. She called her daughters together and presented them with the dresses. The girls yelped with joy. They put on the dresses and twirled around. After this, Dorothy presented the gloves to the girls.

The intricate design on these gloves was sweet and delicate. Gloves like these had never been made in this strange land. Their white silk shimmered as one by one the girls slipped them over their hands. Dorothy and the three younger sisters each went to sleep that night smiling, proud of the beautiful dresses.

But Alice did not sleep. She hid the gloves, a knife, and a torch in a bag and went outside into her father's shed. Her mind was transfixed by the image of the crimson red gloves. She climbed up the shelves to where the magpie nest was perched in the roof, careful not to wake it. Her hand shot out and grabbed the animal. She flicked her knife through its neck, covering her hands in warm blood. Moving quickly, she took the gloves out of her bag and kneaded them into the bird's broken neck. Alice smiled.

She was proud of her work.

The next morning when the girls were getting ready for the wedding, Alice did not put her gloves on.

"Why aren't you wearing your gloves?" Her mother asked, offended. Alice complained that she was hot, and she would put them on when she got to the party.

It wasn't until the ceremony that Alice slipped her fingers into the crimson gloves.

Alice had not ever seen so much splendour as that which surrounded her in the church. She was overcome by it. Not only that, but her gloved hands seemed mysteriously drawn to the décor surrounding her. They seemed to move, without her command, and plucked four little silver bells from the row of seats she sat at.

Later that night, while the town feasted, Alice could not take her eyes off the silver cutlery. How it shone and glistened! She caressed it in her red fingers. She knew she shouldn't take it, but her gloved fingers fastened over two silver knives, a fork, and a teaspoon, and shoved them into her pocket.

That night when Alice went to sleep, she changed into her nightclothes, but when she went to take her gloves off, she couldn't bear the thought of it. She wore them to bed.

The next morning Alice left the house. Her mother had flung into a rage and sent her away, furious about the destruction of her delicate handiwork, and the little silver bells she had found by Alice's bedside. Alice had been a bad girl. She wandered into the fruit shop and a customer was speaking to the owner. Alice noticed some silver coins sitting on the counter. Her gloved hands reached out and swept them

off the table. Alice hadn't wanted to steal the coins, but now there was nothing she could do.

Next Alice went into the magazine shop to visit the kind man who had offered her the magazine. She thought maybe he could help her give back the money, but when she saw the magazine in the window once again, she couldn't resist. She took it to the counter and paid with the silver coins.

"Why are you wearing gloves on such a hot day?" the shopkeeper asked. He looked at the magazine cover. "Ah, I see! You are just like the model! Well what a beautiful young lady you make!" Alice wasn't listening to his compliments. She had noticed a stand of shiny earrings at the counter which dangled like cherries. As the man's head was down, putting the coins away, Alice's gloves reached for them. Her hand slipped and knocked over the stand. The earrings scattered like shards of broken pottery. The shopkeeper pretended to smile. "Oh it's okay. I'll clean that up."

Alice left the shop trembling. *She had to get rid of the gloves!* Drawing in a deep breath, she tried to take them off; but her hands felt weak, as if they were melting. They flopped helplessly by her side.

She walked home with the magazine in her bag. On her way she came across a car with a badge like the lion and the stone she'd drawn on her model, parked outside her house. The badge on the front was silver and it shone in the sunlight. It was hard to remove, so she braced herself against the grille and she pulled and pulled. With a twist it came off.

Alice didn't want to go inside her house because her mother was furious at her, so she went into her father's shed. Smelling the rotting carcass of the magpie, she felt sick, and held her nose. How could she get the gloves off? She spotted the little saw her father had given her on the table, and thought it might cut through the fabric. She ran her palm against its teeth, but it wasn't strong enough. Alice stood, wondering what to do. Then she remembered the band saw.

Her gloves reached gleefully towards the blade. Her fingers extended to caress the polished surface, but her mind was determined

to remove the gloves. She jerked her knee towards the switch, and with enough force, managed to flick it on.

The blade cut first through the fabric, and then her skin. It chugged as it went through her bone. The glove was gone, her flesh still inside. Crimson flooded the table. It splashed her face like pomegranate juice. THUD! THUD! She heard a knock on the door. Rubies dripped one by one. A river streamed between her bare toes. Alice saw the glistening silver blade, dancing like a ghost before her. She thought of it among her collection, with the little bells and the silver cutlery. They all shone, sparkling in brilliance before her like the face of the sun.

Her hand twitched on the table, still grasping for the saw.