



Red, the Pig, and the Automobile

by Annaleese Jochems

One day, Red threw her knitting out the window, packed a basket of fruit, and went for a walk in the forest.

It was a crisp, bright day. Birds bounced on every branch. Red walked a little way, then sat down to eat an apple. Then a plum. Two birds and a squirrel joined her, and she offered them some fruit. They told her about a beaver's attempts to build an aeroplane out of twigs, and she laughed. She told them her thoughts on bed making. "What's the point of doing it each morning when you have to do it all over again the next day?"

They agreed. "Why have a bed at all?" asked the squirrel.

Red must have laughed loudly at this because someone appeared from the bushes. She saw a round pink nose. A pig nose. Then a pair of pink, pointy ears. When he'd revealed the rest of himself, she saw that the newcomer was most peculiar. Thick hair sprouted on his neck and arms. And his trousers were terribly ill-fitting, especially around the back. But he wore a little waistcoat, as pigs do, and his eyes were small and bright. So what else could he be?

Right away, the pig said, "Wow. A human. The smartest creature."

Sometimes, when you meet someone, you know right away that you don't really like them. You don't think you'll ever like them – even if they have paid you a compliment. But Red hated to be rude, so she said thoughtfully, "Well, I don't know if humans really are the smartest ..."

"Oh, I do know," the pig insisted. "Humans are definitely the smartest."

The other animals were quiet.

"Would you like an apple?" Red asked politely.

"Oh, no, no, no," said the pig. "No. I never beg for food. Or share. I just take the things I want. I take as much as I like."

How odd. Red shrugged.

"In my experience, the only other animal that's maybe half as smart as a human would be a wolf," the pig said. He snuffled. "We pigs aren't smart. In fact, we're very stupid, which is why I need help with my automobile down the road."

"I don't know a great deal about automobiles," said Red.

"Sure you do! You're a human! Your lot invented the things."

Although Red was doubtful, she felt obliged to follow the pig. The small animals followed, too. Together, their party walked along the path: the pig and his strange trousers in front, Red with her basket, and the small animals at the back.





"There are lots of thieves in this forest," the pig said. "That's one thing you probably *didn't* know." He laughed and laughed, and kept laughing. He coughed and spluttered, and his laugh became a growl, rumbling up from deep in his stomach.

Red thought, *How could you expect someone to be nice when their stomach was empty?* "Are you sure you wouldn't like some fruit?" she asked.

The pig stopped laughing. "Some fruit? I have as much fruit as I like." He stood a little taller and added, "My automobile is very near. It's not much further at all." He pointed along

the path, which was nothing like a road, and Red thought, *It'll have to be a very small automobile.*

Until that moment, the three small animals had been content to just follow along. But now, the birds and squirrel became agitated. They jumped and flapped. They were trying to catch Red's attention. Up ahead, she could see a turn-off, and this turn-off joined a second path – a much smaller one. This was what the small animals wanted Red to notice. The other path led to a spot at the edge of a cliff where a person – or pig – could stop to admire the view.

"Yes," the pig continued. "Thieves everywhere, many of them in disguise, and they often like fruit. There's always someone nice and stupid, someone gullible, who doesn't suspect a thing." Red knew she was nice, but she wasn't stupid. She wasn't *gullible*, and she was beginning to suspect something was up. If a person – or pig – were absorbed in sly thoughts and plans, they might not stop to look at the beautiful view. Or even notice it. They might keep walking.

"Where's your automobile again?" Red asked the pig.

"Just follow me." Now the pig laughed so hard that tears streamed from his eyes. He fussed about, looking for a handkerchief, then spent a moment wiping his eyes. While he was distracted, Red gently steered him onto the smaller path. They kept walking, and the pig kept laughing – now so hard that his ears and nose jiggled. It looked like they might bounce right off his head. He rubbed his teeth like you'd scratch an itch, at first just a little, then in long motions so that he lifted his lips to reveal glistening gums. Red noticed they were very long teeth, for a pig.



Now they were almost at the cliff. Red stopped a few steps before it. The pig kept walking, laughing, and rubbing his teeth. "Asked me if I wanted some fruit," he muttered to himself. "Asked *me*. As if anyone asks *me* anything."

And then he pitched forward and fell right over the edge. He tumbled and tumbled, flailing his arms and yelling. Finally he managed to catch hold of a branch. "How can this have happened to me?" he yelled. "To *me!*"

Red and the small animals looked down. The pig's waistcoat had come off in the fall. His piggy ears and nose too. They lay below him in a soft, pink pile. They could all see that the pig was half naked, and he was a wolf.

Eventually, he'd have to let the branch go and allow himself to land. But it wasn't much further to the ground. He'd be fine.

"Want a plum?" The squirrel said and threw one down, hitting the wolf on the back of the head.

The wolf kicked his legs and yelled something back.

"Will that be enough to teach him?" Red asked the small animals.

"Oh!" One of the birds laughed. "Oh, no. He's always doing this! He won't disguise himself for a few months. We'll accept him back into the community. He'll share and be polite, just like the rest of us. Then he'll forget this happened, and we'll go through the whole thing again."

illustrations by Daron Parton



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