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# THE HUNGRY WOLF AND THE MAIDEN: A MODERN FABLE

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The Hungry Wolf and the Maiden: A Modern Fable

By



**Matias F.  
Travieso-  
Diaz**

*The Girl  
burst out  
laughing;  
she knew  
she was  
nobody's  
meat.*  
**Angela**

**Carter, The Company of Wolves**

It had been a tough year for all living creatures in the valley. A wet spring that stunted crops had been followed by a hot and dry summer that withered them. There had been a frost early in the fall that had killed most crops that had survived the growing season. Now, in winter's grip, gelid winds blew down the mountain, turning the landscape into a desolate waste. People and wild things were cold and hungry and many feared they would not live to see the crocuses raise their yellow and purple heads through the snow.

Wolf was as hungry as anyone, if no more. The last rabbit he had devoured was but a fading memory – even though just skin and bones, it had been a reprieve from the disgusting diet of earthworms and frozen berries that winter had forced upon him. Now even those were hard to find.

His need had driven him close to the hamlet. The place was a jumble of wattle and daub huts, rancid with the reek of humans. There once had been a communal pen in the village, but the sheep that had been there had long disappeared, consumed by their owners. Wolf scowled, remembering how his last foray into that pen had been met with sharp things being thrust or flung at him. He still bore a couple of scars that ached dully when the weather got as cold as it was now.

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**Wolf was circling the village, always keeping a safe distance from the huts, when out of the corner of his vision he caught a motion on the road leading to the hamlet. It was getting dark, but it had 24-hour eyes, adapted to seeing during day and night. He discerned that the movement belonged to a young human, heading for the huts and carrying a large basket under one arm.**

**Wolf cut across the field at full speed and ground to a halt in front of the human. She was a small thing, but would make at least one meal. Salivating in anticipation, he got ready to attack, baring his teeth, raising his hackles, and moving towards his target slowly. She dropped the basket and covered her mouth in a gesture of surprise.**

**“Well, Sir, you startled me.” She made sounds in human but her thoughts somehow conveyed to Wolf’s brain. “I am on my way to visit my grandmother, who is ill, in that hut over there.” She pointed to one of the poorest dwellings. “My name is Pyrrha, which means “Fire,” and that is why I wear this red coat and hood. What’s yours?”**

**Wolf was taken aback by the girl’s lack of fear, and managed to respond (that is, to form in his head) the word “Gunnolf.” He added (again in his head): “they named me so because I was always fighting with my brothers and sisters, and even challenged my father, the leader of the pack. That’s why I got to live alone.”**

**Pyrrha thought that was far more information than she required, but kept that judgment to herself. Politely, she replied: “I’m sorry to hear that you were mistreated. However, I must reach my grandmother right away. Please let me pass.”**

**Gunnolf said (thought) brusquely: “Not so fast, human. I’m about to eat you.” Pyrrha replied, still without a trace of fear: “That would be so impolite. We are on a first name basis, and you are talking about murdering me? Where are your manners?”**

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**At this, Gunnolf became rather confused, and raised his hackles in order to appear larger and more threatening. His yellow eyes took on an angry expression and his lips curled back to expose the fangs and gums. He fixed his gaze on the human and said:**

**“Why should I have manners? I am a hungry wolf and you are my next meal. Prepare to die.” Gunnolf crouched and readied to jump on his prey, but his initiative was cut short when Pyrrha issued a sharp command: “Stop all that! You are NOT going to attack me!”**

**Gunnolf was frozen in place by the command in the girl’s voice. He took a defensive stance, assuming an ambivalent facial expression while attempting to stare down his opponent. “That is much better,” commented Pyrrha evenly. “Now, let’s talk like civilized creatures. I’m prepared to share with you some of what I have in this basket, but you have to promise you’ll go away and will never disturb the inhabitants of this hamlet again.”**

**Anger returned to Gunnolf as the meaning of these words sunk in. “I am the lord of the wild, the most ferocious of all beasts. Why would I bargain with a punk like you?” He displayed his fangs again.**

**Pyrrha kept her aplomb. “Because that is the best bargain you will be able to strike today. Share what is in the basket or stay hungry. It’s all the same to me.” She shrugged her shoulders in a sign of unconcern.**

**“This is folly!” growled Gunnolf and crouched with tail cocked, lips pulled back, fangs bared, ears forward, and eyes wild and threatening. Then, fast as lightning, he leapt at the girl.**

**Rather, he tried to. While still in mid-air, he felt a whoosh of wind and was struck by an invisible force that sent him sprawling, rolling like an acorn in the**

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**snow. "What was that?" He asked himself in befuddlement.**

**"It was only the sign of a door opening."**

**"What do you mean?" Unwittingly, Gunnolf assumed a submissive posture, crouching with curled down rump and tail tucked.**

**"I'm not allowed to use my powers save in self-defense" explained Pyrrha. "Now that you have attacked me, you are fair game."**

**A chill went down Gunnolf's spine. He approached the girl timidly and nuzzled and licked at the girl's hand. She gazed ahead coolly, displaying no sign of accepting the wolf's submission.**

**"See," she explained. "The population here has been wary since your last attack. They have seen you roaming around this hamlet and fear that you will hurt someone. I was asked to come and help deal with you. After all, what good is a witch if she cannot help her neighbors?" She bared her teeth in a smile full of menace.**

**Gunnolf had never experienced panic before, and did not stop to analyze the unusual feeling. He turned around and started to run away, head lowered, tail tucked, ears laid back. But, again, his flight was cut short by an impact against an invisible wall. He fell to the ground, feeling increasingly groggy.**

**"I offered you a fair deal," remonstrated the girl. "Look." She picked the basket off the ground and lifted its lid as she drew next to Gunnolf. "Here is this chicken, which I was going to give you had we made a deal." She sighed with regret, lifting the bird and waiving it in the cold night air.**

**She went on: "The rest of what is in the basket, I brought because I feared we would not be able to come to terms. I have herbs ... and spices ... and**

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vegetables ... and cooking implements." Her voice was becoming increasingly faint as a gray haze clouded Gunnolf's vision. "I am told that wolf meat is not as tender as dog's, but these are hard times, so we are willing to give it a try."

She picked up a large rock from the ground and, in a businesslike manner, struck Gunnolf on the side of the head once, twice, three times.

As consciousness failed and darkness surrounded him, Gunnolf had a last thought, more a fleeting sensation than anything: "It was a mistake for me to challenge a human, even a girl. Humans are the most ferocious of all beasts."

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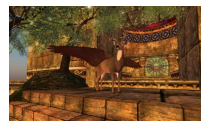
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