

Wolves

A Play in One Act

By

Paul G. Heller

Paul G. Heller
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Wolves

SETTING: A hospital corridor: a chair placed outside a door, which is ajar.

AT RISE: PETER, early 30's. He wears the clothes he has been living in for a week. He seems to be showing slides, though none are visible.

PETER

This is us the first time we ate Top Ramen. With shrimp.

This is us when you and me went to the store and we got six tubs of ice cream, and we got home, and both of us had forgotten our keys.

This is us frying bacon.

The glass vase.

The cup with the kangaroos that you drink your mint tea out of. You wrote "*Wash by hand*" on masking tape and stuck it on the bottom. Most of the consonants got rubbed off. The vowels are in pretty good shape.

This is . . . that . . .place in Italy - Hotel Polonia. No. Pensione. Pensione, yes. Not Polonia, no. Uh, Pol, Pol, Polo, no. Po-LA, Po-LEE, Po-LOW. Popolo?

(beat)

Can you go there? Are you there now?

And the new cat - Jesus, what's its name? What does it eat? Alice, I broke your cup and the tea spilled all over the counter. Where do we keep the fucking Spick-'n'-Span?

"Sir!", says the nurse. Nurse McInnis. Glacial Scottish glare, squeaky shoes, gentle hands. "Sir, this is a hospital!"

"Did she hear me?"

"We all heard you, sir."

"But does she recognize my voice?"

"I'm not sure, sir."

"How long has she been asleep?"

"Seventy-four hours, sir."

"Will she wake up?"

"Get your head out of your ass," snarls McInnis, "She got no chance of wakin' up."

Shit! No! God! What are you thinking. (PETER giggles)
This is what really happened. Nurse McInnis looked at the chart and said, "She has a twenty percent chance of waking up." Her brogue was back in place. She showed me a scan. "There's been bleeding in her brain. That's what these marks mean. And these lesions indicate a blow to the head. It's a lot to heal. But she's young. That's a good sign. She's twenty-nine. That's a good sign."

"Will she have memory?"

"I cannot say."

"What does that monitor say?"

"It cannot say."

"But you say. Does she remember me now?"

"You're dead on your feet, sir. That's what this is."

I would have pushed me out long before. What did I want from her? A spell?

"But say. Please."

"Perhaps, sir," Nurse McInnis says, "perhaps a scatter of memory."

One afternoon, two weeks ago, Alice went out for cilantro. She returned a week later wearing some elf's clothes, someone else's clothes. She put a handful of daffodils in a vase and started to make a salad from the head of lettuce she had begun to strip a week before, and which I had not the heart to touch. Then, she asked me who I was. A scatter of memory. Terrific.

"Alice, go here," I say.

"Sir, you must leave off. Chat is good, sir, but not chatter. Will you not rest and return later? And you should bathe, sir. And eat. You should eat."

"Wait, please. Nurse. Go here, Alice. Open the garden gate and go into the vacant lot."

And then at last. At last a gasp from Alice, no a-a sound like . . . Like what? "Nurse, what is in her?" And before the nurse can stop me, I put my lips to Alice's mouth and I draw her breath into mine. And her lips come into mine the old way. So that is fine. "All right," I say. "A minute," I say. "I'll rest a minute."

Then the little man out into the wide, wide world to sit, to rest.

(PETER tries to hold things together.)

Shoes: laces on the right one smartly tied, laces left - flaccid. Floor tiles two-hundred and forty-three. Ceiling tiles - about the same number - and the holes in each tile - again, about the same number - fascinating. Eyes flitting like "idiot flies" 'round and around again to floor, to ceiling, to laces, to - Where are my socks?

(PETER stops thinking and is overcome by fear, which he expels with -)

Not yet, not yet, not yet. If only, Nurse ~~Burr~~, I could rest and all that that entails.

A man walks through a door. He grows a forest. He makes rain.

(Delighted)

The hallway becomes a lake and it freezes. It's winter, dusk, and the ice is covered by leaves.

Are you delighted by the Prospero-like turn of events this evening is taking? I'll bet. Yeah, be all ironic. That'll help.

A boy edges out, unsure what he's seeing underfoot, uncertain what the markings in the ice mean. Let's say the boy is me. Let's say his plight will explain something intricate that mere narrative cannot reveal. Let's say.

So.

He's on the ice, uncertain. Still, the surface seems to be holding, so the boy imagines these are (in McInnis' Scottish accent) good signs. (in PETER'S own voice) He is so young. His father has to tie his house key around his neck every morning. The boy takes a step, then a surer step, he weighs almost nothing. Or did you imagine a fat boy? A butterball? My boy is delicate, like an egret, noodle-necked, feet splayed. A tip-toer.

If you are the kind of parent whose little one, once upon a time, fell through an icy lake, this may not be a good evening for you. But who can say how any of us will end? You probably didn't do anything wrong. The kid just flew from your side. No warnings at all. A moment ago you were holding tight his paw, but now vanished: Allah-kazam!

The parents hear the splosh and run. They wail, Father stripping himself, creating rope things and lassos from shirt, belt and socks.

The boy might be saved by his own brawn by grabbing on to the rim of the hole and pulling himself up and out. How many afternoons had he been Robin Hood, wrestling around in that vacant lot slash Sherwood Forest, hauling himself barefooted, branch over branch into the tree tops? "So you can do this!" Dad says. "So why are you just dogpaddling like an idiot there in the freezing . . . grab my hand!" But in defiance of dad's general orders, the boy starts his descent.

"Someone's asking for a royal beating, or maybe no more car trips. Maybe just being left behind. What the hell's wrong with you?" ~~the father snarls.~~

"I wasn't thinking," the boy says, "My mind went."

"Your mind went where, Champ? Huh?"

(Humiliated) "Robin Hood."

"Robin Hood! Can't even take a simple walk in the wood and who comes with you? Grab a hold."

That was the first time the boy sank under the tree-thick waters, his feet lighting on branch after branch as though hopping down a ladder. And, looking up through the ice, he saw leaf patters above: a god in flight, a map, a boy bent feet to head, like a bow. On bare patches where the wind has blown the leaves away, the ice reflected a simple light. There. No, there. No, first place. Not too big a light; a beginner's light. An amateur's shabby notion of light. Like something a grandma might have told about. And the child knew solitude for the first time, and loved it so much, he would not swim up toward the man yelling at him.

Now under the lodestar and the hoarfrost, the boy dreams of rest and silence.

Lode: way or course, and star is star. The Northern Star, Polaris.

Polaris. The Pensione in Italy – Polaris!

(Surprised at the revelation)

Huh! Yeah.

. (AND CONTINUED)