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The Wolf and It's Shadows

a play in one act

authorized short version

By

SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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(THE WOLF AND IT'S SHADOW)

ISBN: 0-87602-365-0

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FIRST ACTOR

(begins a subtle jogging motion with her hands as well as her feet, reminiscent of the wolf's effortless trot.

The movement continues throughout this passage creating a mood of ritual rather than realism.)

It is said that the wolf travels easily between the spirit world and our own --

SECOND ACTOR

(Picking up the rhythmic jog)

Along the path we now call the Milky Way --

THIRD ACTOR

(Picking up jog)

Once known as the Wolf Road.

SECOND ACTOR

Forever moving --

FIRST ACTOR

Moving in shadow --

THIRD ACTOR

Moving in mystery --

FIRST ACTOR

The wolf disappears into the night --

SECOND ACTOR

And returns before the morning sun.

THIRD ACTOR

A silent messenger --

FIRST ACTOR

Bearing a silent message --

SECOND ACTOR

Knowing what we cannot see --

FIRST ACTOR

Seeing what it cannot say --

SECOND ACTOR

The wolf dies --

And is reborn --
THIRD ACTOR

Dies --
FIRST ACTOR

And is reborn --
SECOND ACTOR

At dusk and at dawn --
FIRST ACTOR

In both worlds --
THIRD ACTOR

And in the stories people tell.
SECOND ACTOR

(stops jogging)
We tell the stories.
FIRST ACTOR

(stops jogging)
We believe the stories.
SECOND ACTOR

(stops jogging)
We become the stories.
THIRD ACTOR

Be still!
SECOND ACTOR

Listen!
FIRST ACTOR

Understand!
SECOND ACTOR

(STARS and FLUTE fade. FIRST and SECOND ACTORS
put on masks of WOLF and DOG.)

THIRD ACTOR
(to audience)
Early one evening, deep in a forest, a wolf and a dog chanced to meet.

(THIRD ACTOR exits. FOREST SOUNDS are heard.
WOLF trots toward DOG; circles him at a safe distance.
WOLF is cautious, but neither aggressive nor afraid. FOREST
SOUNDS fade under dialogue.)

WOLF

Good evening, Dog.

DOG

(wary but perky by nature and always eager to please)

Good evening, Cousin Wolf.

(growing quite uncomfortable as WOLF continues
to circle, but ever-perky and pleasant)

And a very fine evening it is, wouldn't you say?

WOLF

(stops circling, more concerned with her hunger)

It could be better. What brings you into the forest?

DOG

Oh, I enjoy a romp in the wilderness now and then. But I seem to have gone a bit farther than usual.

WOLF

So have I. Hunger has forced me to leave my pack.

(She growls with the thought of it; DOG whimpers and cowers
although WOLF shows no interest in eating him.)

DOG

Hu-hunger?

WOLF

We have gone many days without a successful hunt.

DOG

You haven't eaten in days?

WOLF

It happens now and then.

DOG

How dreadful!

WOLF

You seem fat and comfortable enough. Tell me, Dog, how do you manage it?

DOG

Oh, well, there's food enough for all at my master's house.

WOLF

Is there?

DOG

Oh, yes -- if you're willing to work.

WOLF

I do what I must to keep from starving. What is this work you speak of?

DOG

I guard my master's house, and I guard it very well. I bark to keep thieves away from his door.

(demonstrates with noisy yips and yaps)

And in return, my master gives me plenty of good, fresh meat, scraps from his own table, morning, noon, and night. That is the secret of my shiny coat.

WOLF

I could do as much as you and more.

(emits truly menacing growls and snarls, frightening DOG again.)

Is there work for me at your master's house?

DOG

(more than slightly apprehensive)

No doubt there is.

WOLF

Then show me the way.

DOG

(demurring)

Oh, now, perhaps you'll find the position doesn't suit you.

WOLF

(a statement of fact)

Good, fresh meat suits me very well.

(she growls at the thought; no threat intended, although a threat is felt by DOG)

DOG

(very nervous, being the closest source of fresh meat)

Come along, then. This way.

(LIGHTS, FLUTE, and FOREST SOUNDS indicate a change in time and place as WOLF and DOG circle stage.)

Suddenly, WOLF stops and sniffs air suspiciously. FLUTE and SOUNDS fade. A sharp WHISTLE is heard offstage, in the distance.)

WOLF

We must hide! Quickly!
(She begins a nervous search for a hiding place.)

DOG

Why? What's wrong?
(Also sniffs air)

WOLF

There's a man nearby.

HUNTER

(offstage, from a distance)

Dog!
(another WHISTLE)

WOLF

(not cowardly, but truly concerned)

Hurry! Hide!

(DOG hesitates, not sure which way to run. WOLF slips away and hides. She may be seen, now and then watching what follows, but never where the HUNTER can see her.)

HUNTER

(Offstage, but closer)

Dog!

DOG

(glances off in direction of HUNTER's call)

It's only a hunter. He won't do us any harm.

HUNTER

(enters, calling DOG, but searching for WOLF, shotgun at the ready)

Dog! Come here! Come to me!
(Another second's hesitation and DOG trots over, whining apologetically. HUNTER lowers gun and pets DOG.)

Why, you're hardly more than a pup, are you? Was it my imagination then? Or did I just see you trotting through the forest with a wolf?

DOG

(all tail-wagging affection now)

It was a wolf. We're going to my master's house. She intends to ask for work and be given food in return.

HUNTER

You're bringing a wolf to your master's house?

DOG

(confiding, in a whisper)

She'll make a meal of me if I don't.

HUNTER

(laughs it off)

She'll have to catch you first.

DOG

She's very quick!

HUNTER

(tapping his head)

But not very clever.

DOG

She's not?

HUNTER

The wolf's a fool and that's a fact.

DOG

She didn't seem . . . foolish.

HUNTER

Let me tell you a story. Then you may decide for yourself.

DOG

(with immediate, childlike eagerness)

Is there a dog in your story?

HUNTER

There is.

(Puts gun aside and pulls STORY DOG stick mask from his coat or elsewhere on stage. He hands mask to DOG, who admires it, "tries it on.")

DOG

Very well. Begin.

(MUSIC and LIGHTS mark transition into story.
MUSIC may be used to highlight action.)

HUNTER

A dog that had grown old and weary and was of no more use to his master was turned out into the forest and left to die.

DOG

Oh! How horrible!

(Begins to yip and whine; identifying with the story, he speaks lines in quotation marks as STORY DOG.)

HUNTER

Bemoaning his fate, the dog made a terrible racket --

(DOG howls mournfully)

until he attracted the attention of a huge, grey wolf.

(Pulls out PUPPET WOLF. At the sight of PUPPET WOLF, STORY DOG yips in alarm. HUNTER puts PUPPET WOLF on his own arm and speaks lines in quotation marks as PUPPET WOLF.)

"Greetings, mangy cur. Do you remember me? I was the one you chased from your village when I was driven there by cold and hunger. At last, I will have my revenge!"

DOG

"What do you intend to do with me, Wolf?"

HUNTER

"First, I intend to eat your fur.

(STORY DOG whines.)

Then your hide.

(STORY DOG whimpers.)

Then your flesh.

(STORY DOG yowls.)

And after I've eaten all that I can, I intend to dance on your miserable bones!"

DOG

(a series of whimpers suddenly ends in a HMMMM!
as inspiration strikes STORY DOG)

"Foolish wolf! I am sickly and weak and barely have flesh enough to cover my bones, let alone satisfy your hunger. Why not fatten me up a bit, so you can truly enjoy your feast? Bring me some fresh mare's meat and see the difference it makes."

HUNTER

"Ah, ha! I see the wisdom in your idea, mangy cur. I will slaughter a fine young mare for you and bring you her meat.

(with leaps, loud growls, MUSIC underscoring and PUPPET jaws snapping, HUNTER mimes the kill and delivery)

Here you are, cur! I have brought you the meat you desire."

DOG

"Many thanks!

(chomping, slurping, and licking his chops)

"Aaaaah! That was my first good meal in months. How refreshing!"

HUNTER

"Well, are you fat enough yet?"

DOG

"Fatter. Oh, definitely fatter. But -- I think not as tender as I might be. If you fed me a bit of lamb's meat, you'd be pleased with the difference it would make in me."

HUNTER

"Do you think so?"

DOG

"Oh, I know so."

HUNTER

"Wait here. It won't take me but a minute to steal you a tender lamb from the shepherd's flock."

(again, much leaping, growling, MUSIC, and snapping)

DOG

(to himself)

"Has there ever been a more foolish creature?"

HUNTER

(as "lamb" is delivered)

"Fresh lamb, cur, just as you requested."

DOG

"Eternally grateful.

(chomping and slurping greedily)

"Mmmmm! With every bite of this lamb's meat, I feel my old body growing stronger and stronger."

HUNTER

"And are you fat enough now?"

DOG

"Fatter and fatter still. But not as sweet as I think you would like. Bring me a wild boar to eat, and my flesh will turn as tasty as suckling pig."

HUNTER

"Hmmm, yes, I see what you mean."

DOG

"I thought you might."

HUNTER

"I'll hunt your wild boar and bring you its delectable carcass.

(More MUSIC, leaping about and growling from PUPPET WOLF as "boar" is killed with difficulty and delivered. PUPPET WOLF is obviously near exhaustion from his efforts; more subtly, STORY DOG is gaining strength.)

This is the last of your meals, cur, and the end of my patience as well."

DOG

"Won't be a minute!"

(much drooling and chomping, ending in a deeply satisfied sigh -- and a burp.)

WOLF

"I've waited long enough. The time has come for me to kill you and eat you up. And then, at long last, I will have the pleasure of dancing on your cursed bones."

DOG

(as PUPPET WOLF moves toward him)

"Think again, foolish wolf! Thanks to your kindness, I've regained my strength and am more than a match for you!

(much barking and growling, and MUSIC, as STORY DOG attacks PUPPET WOLF, eventually pulling it off HUNTER'S arm and dashing it to the ground)

Spend a few days in your den, foolish wolf, licking your wounds and rethinking your plans for me. I suggest you give up all hope of revenge."

(MUSIC and LIGHTS mark transition out of story as DOG bays triumphantly over fallen PUPPET WOLF)

HUNTER

(as himself, to DOG)

I see you enjoyed my story, Dog. You agree with me, then, that the wolf is a foolish creature?

DOG

(shaking off the story's spell, looks at the fallen PUPPET and then across the stage to where the WOLF, unseen by HUNTER, is watching)

I suppose you could be right, Hunter.

HUNTER

Of course, I'm right. I'm always right.

DOG

But how could a creature so foolish survive?

HUNTER

Ah, well, the story goes on. No dog in this part. Would you mind playing the wolf?

DOG

The wolf?

HUNTER

This is the easiest part of the story. And my favorite. The hunter gets to trick the wolf.

DOG

(as HUNTER puts PUPPET WOLF on his arm)

Well, all right, I suppose . . .

(MUSIC and LIGHTS mark transition into story as
HUNTER retrieves his gun; mimes placing of meat.)

HUNTER

No sooner had the wolf decided to be more careful in selecting his prey, then he came upon a fine piece of meat lying in the road right in front of him.

DOG

(as PUPPET WOLF, "happens along" and discovers meat)

"Hmmmmm, no tricks left in that one, I'll wager! Some careless peasant must have dropped it by mistake. His loss is my gain."

(DOG moves PUPPET WOLF to the meat and begins
to devour it noisily. HUNTER raises his shotgun and aims it at him.)

HUNTER

Foolish wolf! It was no careless peasant who left that meat in your path, but a mighty hunter -- whose shotgun is loaded with pellets --

(DOG ducks as PUPPET WOLF'S head snaps up
and turns toward HUNTER.)

DOG

(as himself, terrified)

NO!

(GUN goes off. PUPPET WOLF slumps over "dead"
as DOG cowers, whimpering.)