

Wolf – Sophie, Year 7, VIC

It lowered its grey head down towards the water. It drank from the lake which was more waste and rubbish than water. All the while it kept its blue eyes up, vaguely glancing over into the distance, watching the landscape of either burnt or torn up trees. When it lifted its wet snout from the water, it scanned the ferns and dead bushes that would have contained berries or edible sprouts, but they were long gone from other animals or even humans scavenging. Not a pest or small body in sight. Another night without prey to shed blood.

It moved back the way it came, a majestic, slow pace its shoulders leisurely operating. Its bristly grey tail swayed and every so often its ears perked up and quivered. After passing five trees it stopped and turned its head back to the lake. The wolf stopped and stared.

The girl pressed her body to the tree, remaining as calm and quiet as she could. Making the least amount of movement as she could, she dug her hand into her bag. She realised she shoved her hand in her bag to quickly, accidentally carving a small knife into her hand. The girl winced but pulled it out. Dark blood drizzled from the blade and sprinkled the leaves, dirt, and grass.

The creature's head turned. The girl began to slowly crumble onto her knees and attempt to crawl back the way she came. The creature rotated his head and swiftly ran away from the girl. She thought for sure she had a guaranteed death at that moment. Relief swept through her, and she found the way to her feet. The girl ran as far away as she could, until she became tired and walked the rest of the way.

The silent padding of its feet created a sound that no one could hear, except for mice or small creatures with skilled ears. The atmosphere was hushed like everyone and everything was holding their breath. It paced along, weaving through trees and swiftly dodging rocks and other hazards. It felt branches brush against its delicate grey fur, thankful for its thick coat protecting skin.

The moon was like a massive eye with no pupil, grey veins spreading across. Birds and owls swooped past; the air cold from their wings sending it slight shivers. It wasn't a creature people would think to be a gentle thing with relaxed sensation. Most people assumed wolves to be things that violent, brutal, and ruthless.

But this wolf was innocent.

It had deep brown eyes, that if you looked closely, you would see your reflection in, which made it reassuring. Its mouth remained closed, not in a snarl or an exhibit to show how it will rip you. It even had blunt claws which seemed less of a threat but more like claws that a domestic cat might have. The wolf stopped and sniffed the air. It knew there was something off. Like someone was here.

The girl woke with a jolt to the feeling of rain saturating her face. It felt refreshing, but it had woken her up, so she couldn't be thankful for it. She gathered her belongings; sleeping bag, backpack, and items in backpack, and stood up to find shelter. Looking at the sky she saw that it was probably one am or sometime close. It was pitch black to most humans, but the girl had been in the wilderness long enough to train her eyes to see through it and not into it.

She didn't know what direction she was going but continued this way. Trees brushed her shoulders and rain ate through her clothes and hair. Rain wasn't the best weather or condition to be walking around, because there were creatures that liked rain, poisonous and toxic that reached out for flesh and living things. Plus, rain made things heavy and soggy.

The girl came across what she guessed was a cave from her limited eyesight and went inside for shelter. Fortunately, bears had become extinct, so caves were safe.

The wolf had seen her arrive and knew where she had inhabited. It strayed away from her at a safe distance but had become curious and had started to come closer each day. One day it spied her putting water from its lake into a human mechanism. The next day it found the girl digging through soil and pulling out what must have been edible roots. The wolf attempted root-digging like the girl, but found nothing.

The girl had seen the wolf appear multiple times but had never been too close to it. It kept its distance but as she had noticed, the wolf became invested in her humanly ways. So when she woke up to the cry of a wolf, she suspected it was nothing, and maybe she had just never heard the wolf's cry up close.

In the morning the girl ate leaves and tree sap. The wolf did not show. The girl washed her face in a puddle of water and packed up her belongings. The wolf was still not visible. She searched in caves, falling over trees and behind bush growth. The landscape was dull, the sky grey, like it was going to cry down with rain but was holding the tears in.

The wolf had given up howling for help and preserved its breath. The contraction around its leg felt torturing, and the wolf felt itself doubting its escape. Pain grabbed the wolf's leg, the bear trap's silver colour dotted with blood. The wolf didn't know why humans had created things like this, to trap innocent animals like itself.

The girl took a long time before she located the poor creature. When she took the sight in of the wolf on its side unable to leave the trap she felt sorrow, lots of sorrow. The girl knew she couldn't get close to the injured animal because it might still attack in fear. She approached it slowly with her hands shown to the wolf to prove she has no weapons. Its eyes vaguely showed life, glancing in her direction.

The wolf panted like a dog, its tongue flopping out due to being on its side. The girl hushed the wolf and squatted a metre away from it. The girl reached into her bag and pulled out a sliver of meat she had planned to consume later. She gently placed the meat in front of the wolf's snout and pulled her hand away.

It smelt the substance before eating it. But its senses were all stuffed up from lying here with a bear trap around its leg for too long. The wolf had lived a life through this human changed planet all its life, never realising there were humans that were good. The girl was sat a couple of meters away from it not knowing how to approach. She stayed with the wolf for 3 days, the same pattern, fetching meat for the wolf, pouring water into an old plastic bowl and watching over the wolf.

The girl made sure to not let the water spill out of the bowl as she headed back the way she came. The trees shaded her from the scorching sun and their leaves reached out to her asking for a share of the water. The girl had noticed more and more trees disappearing, in their place a stump, no longer green.

When she returned to the place where the animal was stuck with the bear trap, the wolf lay unmoving. Its fur was stale and crusty, its eyes, closed. The wolf's tail was like a dead weight and its snout was no longer wet. Out the open, the sun sparkled over the wolf's body and acted like everything was fine.