

**'The Company of Wolves' by Angela Carter  
adapted for the stage by Mark Allen**

A SINGLE ROCKING CHAIR IS POSITIONED CENTRE STAGE AS THE AUDIENCE ENTERS. AS THEY ENTER, THE NARRATOR SITS ROCKING IN THE CHAIR AND WATCHING THEM INTENTLY. LIGHTS DOWN. A SINGLE WHITE SPOT LIGHTS THE NARRATOR FROM ABOVE. HE LEANS FORWARD, TAKING THE AUDIENCE INTO HIS CONFIDENCE. THROUGHOUT THE STORY, THE NARRATOR PLAYS EACH OF THE VARIOUS CHARACTERS (AS INDICATED IN BRACKETS NEXT TO ANY SPOKEN TEXT).

**Narrator:** I suppose you are wondering why you are here  
On a cold and dark Midwinter's night,  
Well I feel it my duty to inform you all  
Of such things that could make you go white.  
There is evil you see that can lurk in the woods  
And will prey on a nice bit of meat,  
And if you continue to be unaware  
You could well be the next thing they'll eat.  
These terrible beasts that I talk of are wolves  
And they pose a significant threat,  
If you're out on your own and you bump into one  
Then for god's sake don't think it's a pet.  
You should run like the wind and don't stop to catch breath  
'Cause the wolf will be hot at your heel,  
If you pause for a second there deep in the woods  
You'll become the wolf's next tasty meal.

A wolf is by nature a true carnivore  
And he craves for the taste of raw flesh,  
So he hides in the shadows to wait for live meat  
'Cause at least then he knows that it's fresh.  
All you'll see of the wolf if you travel at night  
Is the moonlight reflect in his eyes,  
And it's then that you know that you're in the wolf's sights  
And that no-one will hear your vain cries.

The only sound people will hear late at night  
Is the hungry wolf's wavering call,  
And the townspeople pray that it's no-one they know  
That has just met their gory downfall.

So I urge you my friends to beware of the woods  
For a wolf might be lying in wait,  
And whatever you do don't be tempted by shortcuts  
Not even if you're running late.  
Always stick to the path if you must go at all  
And don't dawdle or stray for a minute,  
For a wolf's stomach never completely fills up  
And he always wants meat to put in it.  
You would also do well to take further advice:  
Make sure you and your family have knives,  
Then if ever you come face to snout with a wolf  
It could help to save all of your lives.  
But by far the most frightening thing about wolves  
And the thing generating such fear,  
Is the fact that they are such mysterious beasts  
That are never quite what they appear.

THERE IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE MOMENT AS THE NARRATOR STARES INTO THE AUDIENCE MENACINGLY. THIS BRIEF PAUSE IS BROKEN BY A SUDDEN CHANGE OF TONE.

"I think he's gone mad" you are probably thinking  
"What can this man possibly mean?  
Surely wolves are just wolves and not anything more  
How can they not be all that they seem?"  
Well I tell you my friends, of a story I've heard  
Of a hunter who tracked down a beast  
That had eaten some sheep and a crazy old man,  
Which had not filled him up in the least.

So the wolf carried on 'til he found a young girl  
Tending goats on the side of a hill,  
If she hadn't have screamed and attracted attention  
She'd surely have been the next kill.  
The hunter decided to set up a trap  
So the wolf could not cause further harm;  
He intended to slay this most bloodthirsty beast  
To assuage the townspeople's alarm.  
So he dug a deep hole and then threw in a duck  
Placing dung covered straw on the top,  
Then he hid in a bush 'til the wolf came along  
And he saw the immense creature drop.  
Showing no sign of fear, the man leapt from the bush  
And he took the huge wolf by surprise.  
By beheading the beast he had killed it stone dead  
And he hacked off its paws for a prize.  
As the hunter looked down to survey his brave deed  
Which had all gone according to plan,  
He observed that the headless and footless remains  
Were not of a wolf, but a man.

THE NARRATOR PAUSES AND LOOKS AT THE AUDIENCE AGAIN. THERE IS A PAUSE BEFORE THE MOOD IS SUDDENLY LIGHTENED ONCE MORE.

There's another tale told of a man from the Village  
Who vanished on his wedding night,  
He had only popped out to relieve his full bladder  
Away from his pretty bride's sight.  
So she waited and waited wrapped warm in the bed  
'Til her husband saw fit to return,  
But a long chilling howl floated in from the night  
And the girl's stomach started to churn.

'Cause she knew that the sound meant the end for her man  
And she wept for the loss of her groom,  
And although searches failed to find his remains  
She was certain that he'd met his doom.  
But my life must continue, the pretty bride thought  
As she dried off the tears that she'd cried,  
And she went out to find someone else who would not  
Be ashamed to pass water inside.  
So she found a new man and they soon had two kids  
And continued to live without fear,  
'Til they were paid a visit the night of the solstice -  
The longest night of the whole year.  
As the Mum stirred the soup for her man and the children  
A loud knock was heard at the door,  
So she opened it slowly to see who it was  
And was terrified of what she saw.  
Stood there on the step dressed in rags and bedraggled  
Was the husband she thought was deceased,  
She could still recognise him although he was covered  
In lice and resembled a beast.

**(Beast):**

"Here I am missus, now get me some cabbage,  
And be quick about it!", he said,  
But when the girls husband and children appeared  
He promptly began to see red.

THE NARRATOR SUDDENLY BECOMES FRANTIC AS HE CONTINUES  
THE STORY.

**(Beast):**

"My wife is unfaithful" the first husband cried  
"Now I wish I were wolf once again."  
And at that the intruder tore off all his clothes,  
And a wolf the man quickly became.

In his anger the fiend sought to wreak his revenge  
In a flurry of vicious attacks,  
And as the beast tore off the eldest boy's left foot  
The father emerged with an axe.  
The hatchet crashed down on the wolf's skinny frame  
And it instantly hacked him to death.  
As the family came round to survey this vile creature  
They watched as he drew his last breath.  
And as soon as the life had drained out of the wolf,  
Its blood-soaked pelt peeled back to show  
The stark naked corpse of the young girl's first husband  
Exactly as he'd been years ago.  
So beware of the wolf is the thing that is taught  
To both adults and children alike,  
For he's cunning and fierce and can change his disguise  
So you'll never know when he will strike.

NARRATOR PAUSES AND SMILES AT THE AUDIENCE. ONCE MORE HE  
SUDDENLY CHANGES HIS TONE TO A MUCH LIGHTER ONE.

One day long ago on a cold Christmas Eve  
A young girl got it into her head,  
That she'd visit her granny who lived far away  
And was strictly confined to her bed.  
So the girl packed a basket with oatcakes and jam  
Which would fill her old granny with cheer,  
And she also remembered to pack a huge knife  
Because wolves were rife this time of year.  
And although granny's house was a bit of a trek  
The young girl wrapped up warm and prepared,  
'Cause the two hour walk took her right through the woods  
Though wasn't the slightest bit scared.

She'd been sheltered through life by her Mum and her Gran  
And was always protected from harm,  
And she looked like a doll in her blood coloured shawl  
With the basket of food on her arm.  
So the girl started off on her journey to granny's  
And entered the woods without fear,  
As she skipped through the trees the young girl was in awe  
Of the things she could see and could hear.  
There were rabbits and deer and a great deal of birds  
That appeared to be too cold to sing,  
But whilst wearing her shawl she was safe from the cold  
And the young girl could not feel a thing.

Then out of the trees came a wavering howl  
And the young girl's hand sprung to her knife,  
There were wolves in these woods and she had to be  
Extra alert if she valued her life.  
So she kept her eyes open for signs of a wolf  
Or a stark naked man in the least,  
Because legend says men always take off their clothes  
Before turning into such a beast.  
But the girl saw no wolves and no men without clothes  
Just a man who'd been out hunting pheasant,  
As he sprang from the bushes he made her a bow  
And she soon thought that he was quite pleasant.  
He was handsome and young, dressed in green and quite smart  
And he had such a beautiful smile  
That she didn't object when the young man decided  
To walk alongside her a while.

So they went on their way and they talked and they joked  
As if they had been friends all their life,  
And the man kindly offered to carry the basket  
Although it contained the girl's knife.

She consented because the young man had a gun  
Which could kill off a wolf with great ease,  
And they soon came within half a mile of Gran's house  
Which was good 'cause they'd started to freeze.  
The man pulled a compass from out of his pocket  
The young girl observed it with awe,  
As he told her it helped him find shortcuts through forests  
And had never failed him before.  
The man said they'd get home fifteen minutes early  
If they went away from the path,  
But the girl said she'd rather they stayed on this route  
Which caused her new acquaintance to laugh.

**(Young man):**

"Tell you what" said the man, "I will give you a race,  
And if I win you give me a prize."  
When she asked what he'd like, the young man said "A kiss."  
And she blushed as she lowered her eyes.  
So the young man raced off and the girl took her time  
Making sure that the man won the bet,  
And although he had taken the basket which carried her knife  
The young girl didn't fret.  
As she dawdled along, the young man had arrived  
At the Gran's house just outside the woods,  
As the girl wasn't there yet he thought he'd deliver  
The basket of Grandmother's goods.  
So he strode to the door and he knocked hard and loud  
Making sure the old woman could hear,  
And adopting a falsetto voice he called out

**(Young man):**

"It's your Granddaughter, Grandmother dear."

Now the young girl's Grandmother was frail and old  
And had grown unbelievably thin,  
But she relished a visit from family and called out

**(Granny):**

"Please lift up the latch and come in."

So the young man consented to lift up the latch  
And walked into the Grandmother's room,  
Her eyesight was poor but she knew that it wasn't  
Her Granddaughter there in the gloom.  
As she peered through the darkness towards her intruder  
Imagine poor Granny's surprise,  
When the only thing she could see of the young man  
Was the evil in his blood red eyes.  
It was then that she knew that her guest was a wolf  
And her fear quickly started to grow,  
As she frantically looked round the room of her house  
For a suitable object to throw.  
She picked up a bible and threw it with force  
But her efforts were to no avail,  
As the young man stripped off she could see he was wolf  
And she quickly began to turn pale.  
As a last ditch attempt to preserve her own life  
Grandma picked up her apron to throw,  
'Cause she still clung on tight to the adage:  
"The clothes make the man" that she'd heard long ago.  
But the wolf was unhindered and still he advanced  
Despite all that the Grandmother tried,  
And the last thing she saw in this world  
Was the wolf man approaching just before she died.

THE NARRATOR SUDDENLY BECOMES WOLF-LIKE AND MIMES  
MESSILY EATING BITS OF GRANDMOTHER OFF THE FLOOR. AFTER A  
MOMENT HE NOTICES THAT THE AUDIENCE ARE WATCHING HIM,  
REMEMBERS WHERE HE IS AND APOLOGETICALLY CONTINUES  
WHERE HE LEFT OFF.

The wolf ate his fill and discarded the bones and the hair  
Which were not good to eat,  
Then he changed all the bed linen covered in blood  
And prepared for his next tasty treat.

As expected the young girl arrived at the house  
As the knock on the door did announce,  
And the wolf called out loudly in Grandmother's voice

**(Young man):** "Who is there?" and got ready to pounce.

**(Young girl):** "It is me, your Granddaughter", the young girl replied  
As she stood on the step in the cold,

**(Young man):** "Well you'd better come in then my dear" the wolf mimicked  
Trying hard to sound suitably old.

So the young girl walked in and she looked round the room  
For the hunter she'd met on her way,

'Cause she owed him a kiss for the wager they had  
And right now was the moment to pay.

As she looked round the room she was quite disappointed  
The young man was clearly not there,

But at least her Grandmother was here and was safe  
As she sat by the fire in her chair.

THE NARRATOR SITS DOWN IN THE ROCKING CHAIR WITH HIS BACK TO THE AUDIENCE. HE SLOWLY STOPS ROCKING, STANDS UP AND, WITH A SUDDEN BURST OF ENERGY, LEAPS OVER THE CHAIR AND TURNS TO FACE THE AUDIENCE WITH A CRAZED LOOK IN HIS EYE.

At that moment the wolf leapt up out of his seat  
And he filled up the door with his shape,  
It was then that girl realised it was a wolf  
That was blocking her means of escape.

The girl scanned the room for the knife in her basket  
She could reach it but she didn't dare,  
'Cause the wolf's eyes continued to be fixed upon her  
In such an intensely cold stare.

**(Young girl):** "What big eyes you have got", said the girl to the wolf

**(Young man):** "All the better to see you with dear!"

Then the girl saw a tuft of her grandmother's hair  
On the floor and it filled her with fear.

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**(Young girl):** "Where is my Granny?" the young girl demanded  
But deep down inside her she knew  
And the wolf just replied with a sickening smile

**(Young man):** "There is nobody here but we two."  
It was then that a howl came from outside the door  
That was instantly joined by another,  
Soon a vast multitude of fierce wolves sat outside  
As they all serenaded their brother.  
When she peered out the window the young girl observed  
That as far as her own eyes could see,  
There were wolves sat in wait and no possible way  
For the young girl to get out and flee.

WE HEAR THE FAINT SOUND OF WOLVES HOWLING IN THE DISTANCE.

**(Young man):** "Ah, I do love the company of wolves", said the wolf  
As they sat by the window and bayed,  
And since fear was of no use at all to the young girl  
She quickly stopped being afraid.  
So she took off the shawl that her Granny had made and said

**(Young girl):** "What shall I do with my cloak?"

**(Young man):** "Well you'll need it no more, throw it down on the fire."  
So she did and it went up in smoke.  
Next she took off her *blouse* and the rest of her clothes  
And they soon followed suit in the blaze,  
And she stood there as *naked* as when she was born  
Being held in the wolf's *hungry* gaze.

As her *body* reflected the light from the fire

It seemed *ripe as a cherry* and *pert*,

And the young girl then stepped forward on her tiptoes  
To undo the top of his shirt.

**(Young girl):** "What big arms you have", said the girl to the wolf

**(Young man):** "All the better to hug you my dear"

And she gave him the *kiss* that she owed from their wager

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By pulling his slavering face near.

**(Young girl):** "What big teeth you have", the girl also observed

And the wolf knew the next thing to say;

**(Young man):** "All the better to eat you with my little girl!"

But she didn't try getting away,

She just laughed in his face as she ripped off his shirt

'Cause she knew she was nobody's *meat*,

As she threw all his clothes in the fire with hers

And she realised she couldn't be beat.

'Cause the only thing that can appease any wolf

Is the sight of *immaculate flesh*,

And the young girl was safe as she *stripped* off her clothes

With her *body* so *young* and so *fresh*.

THE NARRATOR SITS BACK IN THE ROCKING CHAIR. THE LIGHTS ARE BROUGHT DOWN UNTIL THERE IS ONLY THE SINGLE SPOTLIGHT ON HIM.

As the company of wolves howled outside in the snow

The girl knew that she'd come to no harm,

And she carefully laid the wolf's head on her lap

As he fell for her *virginal* charm.

And she picked out the lice from the pelt of her wolf

She would eat them all as was his will,

And the blizzard outside slowly faded away

Leaving everything perfectly still.

Then the clock signalled midnight, which meant Christmas day

And the door to the house opened wide.

It's the werewolves' birthday and a young girl is seen

In the paws of the wolf - as his bride.

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So this girl knew the right way to handle a wolf  
And her tale didn't end in defeat,  
But not everyone has such *immaculate flesh*  
And most people would be *tasty meat*.  
So don't get complacent or think you are safe  
You should always be watching your back,  
Because no-one can tell who is wolf, or who's not  
'Til the moment they start to attack.

THE NARRATOR SMILES, STANDS UP FROM HIS CHAIR AND SURVEYS THE AUDIENCE - VIEWING THEM AS POTENTIAL MEALS. HIS EYES REST UPON A GIRL IN THE FRONT ROW, WHO LOOKS AROUND FRANTICALLY FOR AN ESCAPE AS THE NARRATOR CLOSES IN, LICKING HIS LIPS. HE LUNGES AT HER, HOISTS HER OVER HIS SHOULDER AND RUNS OFF STAGE WITH HER AS SHE SCREAMS.

**The End**