

A WOLF STORY

**by
Lady Wilde**

"A Wolf Story" is taken from Lady Wilde's *magnum opus*:

Lady Wilde ("Speranza").

*Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland —
To which is appended a chapter on "The Ancient Race of
Ireland," by the late Sir William Wilde.*

Ward and Downey, London 1887.

Lady Jane Wilde was a brilliant and boldly unconventional woman — an Irish revolutionist in her youth; a poet; a linguist who did translations from half a dozen languages. She and her husband, Sir William Wilde, were among the foremost folklorists of the 19th century. Lady Wilde held literary salons in Dublin and, after Sir William's death, in London. These included such regulars as George Bernard Shaw and William Butler Yeats, not to mention her son, Oscar.

John Lauritsen

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TRANSFORMATION into wolves is a favourite subject of Irish legend, and, many a wild tale is told by the peasants round the turf fire in the winter nights of strange adventures with wolves. Stories that had come down to them from their forefathers in the old times long ago; for there are no wolves existing now in Ireland.

A young farmer, named Connor, once missed two fine cows from his herd, and no tale or tidings could be heard of them anywhere. So he thought he would set out on a search throughout the country; and he took a stout blackthorn stick in his hand, and went his way. All day he travelled miles and miles, but never a sign of the cattle. And the evening began to grow very dark, and he was wearied and hungry, and no place near to rest in; for he was in the midst of a bleak, desolate heath, with never a habitation at all in sight, except a long, low, rude shieling, like the den of a robber or a wild beast. But a gleam of light came from a chink between the boards, and Connor took heart and went up and knocked at the door. It was opened at once by a tall, thin, grey-haired old man, with keen, dark eyes.

"Come in," he said, "you are welcome. We have been waiting for you. This is my wife," and he brought him over to the hearth, where was seated an old, thin, grey woman, with long, sharp teeth and terrible glittering eyes.

"You are welcome," she said. "We have been waiting for you — it is time for supper. Sit down and eat with us."

Now Connor was a brave fellow, but he was a little dazed at first at the sight of this strange creature. However, as he had his stout stick with him, he thought he could make a fight for his life any way, and, meantime, he would rest and eat, for he was both hungry and weary, and it was now black night, and he would never find his way home even if he tried. So he sat down by the hearth, while the old grey woman stirred the pot on the fire. But Connor felt that she was watching him all the time with her keen, sharp eyes.

Then a knock came to the door. And the old man rose up and opened it. When in walked a slender, young black wolf, who immediately went straight across the floor to an inner room, from which in a few moments came forth a dark, slender, handsome youth, who took his place at the table and looked hard at Connor with his glittering eyes.

"You are welcome," he said, "we have waited for you."

Before Connor could answer another knock was heard, and in came a second wolf, who passed on to the inner room like the first, and soon after, another dark, handsome youth came out and sat down to supper with them, glaring at Connor with his keen eyes, but said no word.

"These are our sons," said the old man, "tell them what you want, and what brought you here amongst us, for we live alone and don't care to have spies and strangers coming to our place."

Then Connor told his story, how he had lost his two fine cows, and had searched all day and found no trace of them; and he knew nothing of the place he was in, nor of the kindly gentleman who asked him to supper; but if they just told him where to find his cows he would thank them, and make the best of his way home at once.

Then they all laughed and looked at each other, and the old hag looked more frightful than ever when she showed her long, sharp teeth.

On this, Connor grew angry, for he was hot tempered; and he grasped his blackthorn stick firmly in his hand and stood up, and bade them open the door for him; for he would go his way, since they would give no heed and only mocked him.

Then the eldest of the young men stood up. "Wait," he said, "we are fierce and evil, but we never forget a kindness. Do you remember, one day down in the glen you found a poor little wolf in great agony and like to die, because a sharp thorn had pierced his side? And you gently extracted the thorn and gave him a drink, and went your way leaving him in peace and rest?"

"Aye, well do I remember it," said Connor, "and how the poor little beast licked my hand in gratitude."

"Well," said the young man, "I am that wolf, and I shall help you if I can, but stay with us to-night and have no fear."

So they sat down again to supper and feasted merrily, and then all fell fast asleep, and Connor knew nothing more till he awoke in the morning and found himself by a large hay-rick in his own field.

"Now surely," thought he, "the adventure of last night was not all a dream, and I shall certainly find my cows when I go home; for that excellent, good young wolf promised his help, and I feel certain he would not deceive me."

But when he arrived home and looked over the yard and the stable and the field, there was no sign nor sight of the cows. So he grew very sad and dispirited. But just then he espied in the field close by three of the most beautiful

strange cows he had ever set eyes on. "These must have strayed in," he said, "from some neighbour's ground;" and he took his big stick to drive them out of the gate off the field. But when he reached the gate, there stood a young black wolf watching; and when the cows tried to pass out at the gate he bit at them, and drove them back. Then Connor knew that his friend the wolf had kept his word. So he let the cows go quietly back to the field; and there they remained, and grew to be the finest in the whole country, and their descendants are flourishing to this day, and Connor grew rich and prospered; for a kind deed is never lost, but brings good luck to the doer for evermore, as the old proverb says:

"Blessings are won,
By a good deed done."

But never again did Connor find that desolate heath or that lone shieling, though he sought far and wide, to return his thanks, as was due to the friendly wolves; nor did he ever again meet any of the family, though he mourned much whenever a slaughtered wolf was brought into the town for the sake of the reward, fearing his excellent friend might be the victim. At that time the wolves in Ireland had increased to such an extent, owing to the desolation of the country by constant wars, that a reward was offered and a high price paid for every wolf's skin brought into the court of the justiciary; and this was in the time of Queen Elizabeth, when the English troops made ceaseless war against the Irish people, and there were more wolves in Ireland than men; and the dead lay unburied in hundreds on the highways, for there were no hands left to dig them graves.