

'A triumph'  
Philip Pullman

THE  
WOLF  
WILDER

Katherine Rundell

Costa Children's Book Award Winner

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THE  
WOLF  
WILDER

KATHERINE RUNDALL

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‘*Stupid*,’ said Feo again. Tenderfoot’s hackles were on end. Feo smoothed them down. ‘We’re all right, I think. Shh, *lapushka*. I won’t let anyone hurt you.’

She tugged the wolf to her feet. ‘Come, we’ll find you a good tree. I’ll show you how wolves build their dens.’

She led the wolf to where the trees were thickest, and began to pile the snow. As she worked, Feo told the wolf about the land around her new home.

Feo’s part of Russia was a place that the world had, by and large, decided to pass by. The hilltops absorbed the cold, and the snow there lay thicker and stiffer than anywhere for a hundred miles. If you stood on the tallest hill and looked to the north, there were the woods, hills and the stone barracks of the soldiers. The soldiers used to be a bunch of harmless drunks, sent into the countryside to be out of the way; but since Rakov’s arrival Feo had heard regimental orders shouted on the wind. Sometimes at night there were screams. Beyond the soldiers’ grey buildings were flat

countryside, snow-covered fields and trees, and then, far off and merging with the clouds, the smoke of St Petersburg.

‘See?’ said Feo to the black wolf. ‘And to the south there’s just snow and snow, and then, see here if you squint –’ she shielded the wolf’s eyes with her hand – ‘more snow.’

Feo loved it. The land around the house shook and shone with life. She had seen people pass by her wood bewailing the sameness of the white landscape, but they were just illiterate: they hadn’t learnt how to read the world properly. The snow gossiped and hinted at storms and birds. It told a new story every morning. Feo grinned, and sniffed the sharpness of the air. ‘It’s the most talkative weather there is,’ she told Tenderfoot.

Her world was not, of course, all perfect. The few children in the farms were much older than her – almost grown up, with the beginnings of beards – or too young, and liable to cry and vomit unreasonably if