

The Village Keeps the Story

A poem that turns

Once, says the voice that always says once,
a shepherd boy sat on a hill above the village,
with nothing but sheep and sky and hours.

Twice he cried **WOLF!**

and twice they came running,
pitchforks raised, lungs burning,
and found him laughing.

The third time
the wolf was real.
A liar is not believed,
even when he tells the truth.
No one came.

But who is telling this?

Not the boy, because he does not live to speak.
Not the wolf, because wolves leave no testimony.

It is the village that keeps the story:
the ones who stayed home the third time.
And the ones who stay home
are always the ones who write the ending.

Somewhere down the centuries
the boy himself was fed to the moral,
each teller sharpening the teeth a little more,
to make the warning bite.

Can we trust a narrator?

whose silence is the reason
for the grave?

And can we trust the boy? No.

He lied, the lie was real, and the running cost them.
But ask the question the fable never asks:

WHY?

Who sends a child alone up a hill?
to guard a village's whole wealth,
against a thing that kills?

Maybe the cry was a joke.

Maybe it was the only word he had
that turned the whole town's face toward him.

Maybe loneliness learns to shout
whatever gets an answer.

A child who is bored, or scared, or unseen
is not yet innocent or evil.

He is unfinished.

And the village finished him.

The Verdict

Was it just?

A prank for a life.

Two false alarms for teeth.

We nod along because the story nods for us,
because a punishment wrapped in a moral
looks less like a punishment
and more like the way of things.

That is the first trick of framing:

It makes the outcome feel
like the verdict.

The Mirror

Even now, reading this, we have picked a side.
Confirmation bias is not a flaw in other people.
It is the lens we are looking through.

While we search for it.

I have been framing too.

Every stanza here is a hill I chose to stand on.

Another Ending

What if no one had to lose?

What if, after the first false cry,
someone climbed the hill without a pitchfork,
sat down, and asked, "What's going on up here?"

What if they learned the boy was twelve and alone,
and sent a friend, a dog, a horn with signals,
a turn to rest?

Then the third time the wolf came,
two voices would cry out, and everyone would come,
and the sheep would come home,
and the boy would grow up to teach the next one
how to keep a hill.

No winner standing on a loser,
just a village that learned to ask why,
before it learned to stop coming.

Holding Loosely

So how do we keep from being framed?

Ask who is telling it, and who is missing.

Ask what the story needs you to feel, and why.

Swap the faces and see if your verdict holds.

Hold your opinions the way a shepherd holds a lamb:

firmly enough to carry,

loosely enough to set down.

when you learn you had it wrong.

Say "I don't know much about this" out loud,

and let that be a kind of strength.

And when you hear a cry from the hill,

whoever's child, whatever colour, whatever clan,

go and look

before you decide what kind of boy he is.

Brittany Molenaar

The Village Keeps the Story

A poem that turns

As It Was Told

Once, says the voice that always says *once*,
a shepherd boy sat on a hill above the village
with nothing but sheep and sky and hours.

Twice he cried *Wolf!* and twice they came running,
pitchforks raised, lungs burning, and found him laughing.
The third time the wolf was real.

No one came.

And the lesson was handed down like a family knife:
a liar is not believed, even when he tells the truth.

Who Holds the Pen

But who is telling this?

Not the boy, because he does not live to speak.
Not the wolf, because wolves leave no testimony.

It is the village that keeps the story:

the ones who stayed home the third time.
And the ones who stay home
are always the ones who write the ending.

In the oldest telling, only the sheep are lost.

Somewhere down the centuries
the boy himself was fed to the moral,

each teller sharpening the teeth a little more
to make the warning bite.

Can we trust a narrator?

whose silence is the reason for the grave?

The Boy

And can we trust the boy? No.

He lied; the lie was real, and the running cost them.
But ask the question the fable never asks:

why?

Who sends a child alone up a hill?
to guard a village's whole wealth
against a thing that kills?

Maybe the cry was a joke.

Maybe it was the only word he had
that turned the whole town's face toward him.

Maybe loneliness learns to shout

whatever gets an answer.

A child who is bored, or scared, or unseen
is not yet innocent or evil.

He is unfinished.
And the village finished him.

The Verdict

Was it just?

A prank for a life. Two false alarms for teeth.

We nod along because the story nods for us,
because a punishment wrapped in a moral
looks less like a punishment

and more like the way of things.

That is the first trick of framing:

it makes the outcome feel like the verdict.

Us vs. Them

Where else have we heard this?

In every town that decided early who the liar was,
then stopped listening.

We sort the world like sheep from wolves,
ours and *not ours*,

because a line is easier to hold than a person.

When harm falls on the ones we love, we call it tragedy.

When it falls on the ones we don't, we call it a lesson,
consequence, karma, *what did they expect*.

Same wolf. Same hill.
Only the boy's name has changed.

Is there another Boy

Why not change it?

Let the boy be from the clan across the river.

Let his skin be a different colour
from the hands that wrote him down.

Now read it again:

He lied, they warned him, the wolf came.

Does the story settle a little too easily?

Does the moral sound less like a caution
and more like a confirmation

of something you were taught before you ever heard of wolves?

If the ending feels more deserved, ask what changed.

It was not the boy.

It was you.

The Mirror

And here is the harder turn:

Even now, as we read this, we have picked a side.

We came in believing the villagers were cruel,
and so we found the cruelty.

We wanted the boy to be a victim,
and look: we built him a loneliness

the fable never mentions.
Confirmation bias is not a flaw in other people.

It is the lens we are looking through
while we search for it.

I have been framing too.

Every stanza here is a hill *I chose* to stand on.

Another Ending

What if no one had to lose?

What if, after the first false cry,
someone climbed the hill without a pitchfork,
sat down, and asked, *what's going on up here?*

What if they learned the boy was twelve and alone,
and sent a friend, a dog, a horn with signals,
a turn to rest?

What if the village admitted

the flaw was in the plan, not only in the child,
and the boy admitted the harm in his laughing?

Then the third time the wolf came,
two voices would cry out, and everyone would come,
and the sheep would come home,

and the boy would grow up to teach the next one
how to keep a hill.

No winner standing on a loser,
just a village that learned to ask *why*
before it learned to stop coming.

Holding Loosely

So how do we keep from being framed?

Ask who is telling it, and who is missing.

Ask what the story needs you to feel,
and why it needs that.

Swap the faces and see if your verdict holds.

Hold your opinions the way a shepherd holds a lamb:

firmly enough to carry,
loosely enough to set down

when you learn you had it wrong.

Say *I don't know much about this* out loud,
and let that be a kind of strength.

And when you hear a cry from the hill,
whoever's child, whatever colour, whatever clan,

go and look

before you decide what kind of boy he is.

.....

Source: "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" is one of *Aesop's Fables*, catalogued as number 210 in the Perry Index, where it is titled "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf." It is attributed to Aesop, a storyteller in ancient Greece around the 6th century BCE, and has been retold in many collections since. Stanza II relies on a real detail. In many early versions, the wolf kills the flock, not the boy. Later retellings added his death, making that change a good example of framing in the fable's own history.