



The Wolf Wilder

By Katherine Rundell



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“Fairy tale and history merge seamlessly” (*Publishers Weekly*, starred review) in this enchanting and lyrical novel about love and resilience from the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award winner, Katherine Rundell.

Feo’s life is extraordinary. Her mother trains domesticated wolves to be able to fend for themselves in the snowy wilderness of Russia, and Feo is following in her footsteps to become a wolf wilder. She loves taking care of the wolves, especially the three who stay at the house because they refuse to leave Feo, even though they’ve already been wilded. But not everyone is enamored with the wolves, or with the fact that Feo and her mother are turning them wild. And when her mother is taken captive, Feo must travel through the cold, harsh woods to save her—and learn from her wolves how to survive.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 4–6—Feodora "Feo" Petrovich is a "dark and stormy girl" who lives deep in the snow-covered Russian forest with her mother circa 1917. They are wolf wilders, brave souls who help reintroduce wolves into the wild, once the animals have outlived their usefulness as pets and entertainment for the aristocracy. When the deplorably evil General Rakov threatens their livelihood, burns down their home, and arrests Feo's mother, the plucky young girl sets off into the woods with her three lupine companions and a newborn wolf pup. She's soon joined by a runaway soldier from the tsar's Imperial Army who's not much older than Feo herself. Together, the ragtag band of humans and wolves must outrun Rakov and his men, survive brutal winter conditions, and figure out a way to liberate Feo's imprisoned mother. As in her previous two novels, *Rooftoppers* (2013) and *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* (2014, both S. & S.), Rundell gives readers a fierce young heroine whose strength and independence are as appealing and authentic as her painstakingly concealed vulnerabilities. Though appearing only briefly in a handful of scenes, Feo's mother is a well-drawn, larger-than-life presence in the girl's life; readers will believe that Feo will risk anything to save her. The pacing slows in the middle, as the characters visit a struggling village and recruit other kids to their cause. The ending, though satisfying, comes quickly and stretches credulity just a bit. Rundell's strength is in the beauty of her writing—lyrical sentences that evoke the drama and simplicity of fairy tales and folklore, combined with descriptions of a setting that will have readers shivering along with the frozen characters as they trudge across the unforgiving terrain. **VERDICT** A solid addition to middle grade collections; hand this novel to kids who appreciate strong characters and harrowing survival stories—Kiera Parrott, School Library Journal

Review

"A triumph! Exciting, moving, highly original, fierce, completely convincing. The world had better watch out. I don't really know what a cocked hat is, but you'll be knocking all the rest of us into one soon. I loved the characters, the speed, the force of it all." (Philip Pullman, author of *The Golden Compass*)

"The hero of Katherine Rundell's new book may be young and small, but Feo has a spirit as wild and dauntless as that of the wolves she cares for. I don't know whether this irresistible force of nature and the colorful gang of waifs drawn to her had an actual hand in starting the Russian Revolution, but Rundell convinced me that they did. *The Wolf Wilder* is chilling (quite literally!) and thrilling from start to finish." (Tor Seidler, author of National Book Award finalist *Mean Margaret* and *Firstborn*)

In the white wilderness of Russian fairytales, Feo and her mother live alone in the woods, with only their wolves for company. When the murderous hostility of the Russian Army threatens their existence, Feo and her wolves have no choice but to go on the run, joined by an ever growing band of children. Following the acclaimed and award winning *Rooftoppers*, expectations are sky high but *The Wolf Wilder* more than lives up to them and is, I believe, a future classic. Like all the best children's books, it's a novel about the triumph of a child and what a child she is: fierce, brave and resolute, "dark and stormy" Feo is the literary heir to Lyra Belacqua.

There is a magnificent, almost cinematic sense of place in the winter landscape and opulent palaces of St. Petersburg and some magical set pieces, most notably Feo, clad in a blood red cloak, driving a sled pulled by wolves into St. Peter's Square. The wolves Black, White and Grey are in no way cuddly companions, they are electric, intelligent, semi feral creatures beholden only to Feo. Enchanting, unique and outstanding: don't miss it. (The Bookseller)

"[A] future classic...Enchanting, unique and outstanding: don't miss it." (The Bookseller)

A young Russian who has known more wolves in her life than people sets out to rescue her mother from a czarist prison. In a remote area not far from St. Petersburg, 12 year old Feodora, "a dark and stormy girl," and her strong mother, Marina Petrovich, take wolves that have grown too dangerous for the aristocratic households in which they have been raised from captured cubs and train them to live on their own in the wild. Feo's idyll comes to a sudden end when brutal, sadistic Gen. Mikail Rakov, declaring that wolves are all vermin, descends to burn the cabin and hustle her mother off to Kresty Prison in the city. Off she sets on a seemingly quixotic rescue, with beloved semiferal charges Black, White, and Gray ("a bunch of the most beautiful criminals"), a newly born wolf pup, 13 year old army deserter Ilya, and growing bands of children and disaffected villagers in her wake. Though historical events up to and including the February Revolution take place in the background, Feo's harrowing journey is the story's focus. Through bitter storms and ambushes, terror and tragedy, an unrelenting sense of purpose lightened with flashes of humor—"Black had eaten three toes, which, technically, had belonged to an English lord"—carries Feo and her allies to a decisive confrontation with Rakov. Rugged cross country adventure with a diverse cast of two and four legged fellow travelers and a sturdy main character who is more than a little "wilded" herself. (Kirkus June 15, 2015)

"Feo" Petrovich is a "dark and stormy girl" who lives deep in the snow covered Russian forest with her mother circa 1917. They are wolf wilders, brave souls who help reintroduce wolves into the wild, once the animals have outlived their usefulness as pets and entertainments for the aristocracy. When the deplorably evil General Rakov threatens their livelihood, burns down their home, and arrests Feo's mother, the plucky young girl sets off into the woods with her three lupine companions and a newborn wolf pup. She's soon joined by a runaway soldier from the tsar's Imperial Army who's not much older than Feo herself. Together, the ragtag band of humans and wolves must outrun Rakov and his men, survive brutal winter conditions, and figure out a way to liberate Feo's imprisoned mother. As in her previous two novels, *Rooftoppers* (2013) and *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* (2014, both S. & S.), Rundell gives readers a fierce young heroine whose strength and independence are as appealing and authentic as her painstakingly concealed vulnerabilities. Though appearing only briefly in a handful of scenes, Feo's mother is a well drawn, larger than life presence in the girl's life; readers will believe that Feo will risk anything to save her. The pacing slows in the middle, as the characters visit a struggling village and recruit other kids to their cause. The ending, though satisfying, comes quickly and stretches credulity just a bit. Rundell's strength is in the beauty of her writing—lyrical sentences that evoke the drama and simplicity of fairy and folklore, combined with descriptions of a setting that will have readers shivering along with the frozen characters as they trudge across the unforgiving terrain. VERDICT A solid addition to middle grade collections; hand this novel to kids who appreciate strong characters and harrowing survival stories. (School Library Journal August 2015)

In 20th century tsarist Russia, aristocrats raise captured wolf pups to perform as dogs, but when the wolves go mad, they send them to a girl named Feo and her mother, Marina, who "untame" them, so they may live in the wintry wild again. General Rakov, ruler of the tsar's Imperial Army, orders Marina to shoot the wolves; when she refuses, he burns their home and takes her prisoner. Feo plans to rescue her mother with the help of her best friends—wolves White, Gray, and Black—and Ilya, a teenage army deserter with "skinny wrists, but a muscly brain" and a passion for ballet. As in her previous novels, Rundell's (Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms) evocative prose offers startling imagery; when Feo, feeling abandoned, realizes she is not alone, "The moments in which the world turns suddenly kind can feel like a punctured lung." Fairy tale and history merge seamlessly; in a land where terror reigns and adults grow numb with fear, a "little wolf girl" outmaneuvers a sadistic general, awes a village, and inspires an army of children to march on St. Petersburg with dreams of justice. Breathtaking. (Publishers Weekly *STARRED REVIEW* August 3, 2015)

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"Rundell never fails to work magic with language and deft storytelling. Feo's world of wolves and snow, danger and triumphant bravery, rings with the classic allure of folktales. Her spirited, half wild nature shines brightly on the page, even as her vulnerabilities endear her to readers' hearts." (Booklist, starred review)

"Will have readers cheering or perhaps howling their approval." (BCCB, starred review)

Feodora and her mother, Marina, are "wolf wilders" in early twentieth century Russia: when aristocrats tire of their pet wolves (a status symbol thought to bring good luck), the girl and her mother reverse the wolves' forced domestication, teaching the animals how to survive in the wild despite the tsar's orders to destroy them. When the tsar's Imperial Army, at the command of bloodthirsty General Rakov, arrests Feo's mother for treason and burns down their house, Feo—with the help of a young soldier, Ilya (who has the heart of a dancer, not a fighter), and her three wolf companions—makes her way to Saint Petersburg to orchestrate Marina's escape. At first concerned only with herself and her family (human and wolf), prickly Feo has her eyes opened to the suffering of others by teenage revolutionary Alexei, who enlists her little band in fighting back against Rakov and the tsar. There are enough folkloric elements to make the tale's more implausible events (it's awfully easy for Feo and company to make their way past the guards into the city) feel like part of a grander tapestry: when the children breach the prison, for example, their triumph is transcendent. At the end, Rakov gets his comeuppance in appropriately gory (though offstage) fashion; Ilya finds his footing; and Feo realizes you don't need to keep your teeth bared when you're part of a pack. (The Horn Book October 6, 2015)

About the Author

Katherine Rundell is the author of *Rooftoppers*, *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms*, and *The Wolf Wilder*. She grew up in Zimbabwe, Brussels, and London, and is currently a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. She begins each day with a cartwheel and believes that reading is almost exactly the same as cartwheeling: it turns the world upside down and leaves you breathless. In her spare time, she enjoys walking on tightropes and trespassing on the rooftops of Oxford colleges.

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