



## The Wolf Wilder

*Katherine Rundell , Gelrev Ongbico (Illustrator)*

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Feodora and her mother live in the snowbound woods of Russia, in a house full of food and fireplaces. Ten minutes away, in a ruined chapel, lives a pack of wolves. Feodora's mother is a wolf wilder, and Feo is a wolf wilder in training. A wolf wilder is the opposite of an animal tamer: it is a person who teaches tamed animals to fend for themselves, and to fight and to run, and to be wary of humans.

When the murderous hostility of the Russian Army threatens her very existence, Feo is left with no option but to go on the run. What follows is a story of revolution and adventure, about standing up for the things you love and fighting back. And, of course, wolves.

## The Wolf Wilder Details

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## From Reader Review The Wolf Wilder for online ebook

karen says

*Her wolves, Feo thought, were a bunch of the most beautiful criminals.*

yes yes a thousand times yes. THIS is the book i was waiting for as a chaser to Rooftoppers.

this is all just wild speculation, but Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms just *feels* like it was written before Rooftoppers and maybe only saw the light of day to tide rabid fans like me over while rundell was writing her next masterpiece. Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms is a fine book, it just doesn't read like it's from the same creative period as the two bookending it. it doesn't have the same sparkle of language or story; it feels ... dusty. which made me nervous that Rooftoppers was one of those one-hit-wonder flashes of genius the author is never able to replicate. but then this book.

this book is even better than Rooftoppers.

i know.

bold statement.

Rooftoppers was all charm - a magical book with beautifully light prose, unforgettable characters, and a plot like a symphony - all rise and fall and elegance. but wolf wilder has bite. (chortle, chortle) it has the same kind of unconventional and bold heroine as Rooftoppers, the same killer prose, but it has much more depth. it's dark and stark and sleek and less charming than *fierce*.

twelve-year-old feodora petrovna and her mother marina live in a secluded forest just outside of st. petersburg in 1917.\* feo is a half-wild child who hasn't seen many humans in her life. she and her mother work as wolf wilders - people who remind wolves how to be wolves when the aristocrats who have raised them from cubs to be pets grow tired of them, or when the wolves, crazed by captivity, became too dangerous to remain in the households.

*Aristocrats in Russia believe that the killing of a wolf brings a unique kind of bad luck. It is not the glamorous kind of bad luck, not runaway trains and lost fortunes, but something dark and insidious. If you kill a wolf, they say, your life begins to disappear. Your child will come of age on the morning that war is declared. Your toenails will grow inward, and your teeth outward, and your gums will bleed in the night and stain your pillow red. So the wolf must not be shot, nor starved; instead, it is packed up like a parcel by nervous butlers and sent away to the wolf wilder.*

feo and her mother are scarred from their dealings with wolves, as all wild, unpampered things in nature are scarred. they have the same kind of intense and enviable relationship as charles and sophie in Rooftoppers - one made up of mutual respect, loyalty and love, awe and appreciation.

*Humans, on the whole, Feo could take or leave; there was only one person she loved properly, with the sort of fierce pride that gets people into trouble, or prison, or history books.*

while marina is the very embodiment of protective maternal love

*"...you will keep your hands off my daughter if you value their current position at the ends of your arms."*

*Rakov snorted. "That is somewhat unfeminine."*

*"Not at all. It seems profoundly feminine to me."*

besides the people who bring them discarded wolves, the wolves themselves make up the extent of their social circle. these are not pets, but *companions*, as "...wolves cannot be owned." they can be tamed for a while and taught to do things that go against their wolf natures, but the wild will always come out eventually. there are three wolves feo considers to be special friends, named black, white, and gray. together, they constitute an unconventional pack - a sort-of family of wild equals who hunt and run together, but are not necessarily obedient. feo never treats them like pets - she always respects them as the wild and unpredictable creatures they are.

*Feo did not go close - it is wisest not to interrupt wolves when they are eating, even if they are your best friends*

when their home is burned and her mother imprisoned by general rakov, head of the tsar's imperial army, feo and her wolves escape into the bitter cold where feo plots her mother's rescue. over the course of the book, feo will meet more people than she has in her entire life; she will find friendship and community and experience all the benefits and hindrances of a human pack. however, she never compromises her fearless, wild, independent self, being all too familiar with what can happen to a noble creature in captivity.

*"Society" wolves could always beg, hold out a paw, lie still. Often - it made Feo want to cry - they could dance on their hind legs, their faces blank.*

there's so much to this tiny little book, i can't even begin to make a dent in the bucket of praise i have for it.

you can turn to any page in this book and encounter a piece of perfect prose, a startling description, a delicate turn of phrase. let's test this hypothesis:

*\*Marina's shoulders and back and hips were wide; she had muscles that were more commonly seen on men, or rather, Feo thought, on wolves. But her face, a visitor had once said, was built on the blueprint used for snow leopards, and for saints. "The look," he had said, "is 'goddess, modified.'" Feo had pretended, at the time, not to be proud.*

*\* ...any knocking at all was unusual. Nobody knocked: It was just her and her mother and the wolves. Wolves do not knock. If they want to come in, they come in through the window, whether is it open or not.*

*\*"I sleep with a dictionary under my pillow, sometimes. Just to remind me that there are more words in the world than 'Come here, boy.'"*

that's how a hypothesis grows up to be a fact.

the only thing i didn't love with all my heart was rakov, who was just a little TOO villainy for me. it's not that i require a whole lot of nuance in my antagonists when i'm reading middle grade, but for a book that was so admirably restrained and subtle in so many other ways, having a cackly mustache-twirling villain didn't blend well, tonally.

but it's one of those "imperfections," like the scars on marina's face, that makes everything around it even more beautiful. the characters are remarkable, the story original, the setting beautifully and very visually described, and there's some really fine subtext going on here that makes my heart sing. there are also some solid life lessons, but they're gracefully woven into the plot instead of jazzhanded at you.

i really loved this book. i read it in two giant gulps, completely immersed in its world and characters. for those of you with feelings - parts of this book might require kleenex, but it's not a bleak story overall.

just stunning. i'm nothing but swoon.

\* book just says *a hundred years ago*, but i'm timing this by the february revolution, so.

\*\*\*\*\*

i'll write a real review as soon as i can, but right now i just want to celebrate the fact that this book is just as good as (possibly better) than Rooftoppers, and that the mediocre Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms was a fluke and katherine rundell is the real deal.

also, this book is physically gorgeous.

front:

back:

endpapers:

full review to come.

come to my blog!

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## Emily says

[(aka the dancing boy) (hide spoiler)]

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## Cait • A Page with a View says

This was such a gorgeous little book! I mean, the cover on the edition I have is stunning... but the actual story itself is just so beautiful.

Feo and her mother live in rural Russia and train wolves to be wild again after aristocrats are done with them as pets. The locals say Feo's halfway feral, but she just understands the wolves really well. One day Feo befriends Ilya, a young soldier who was sent by a cruel general to kill her wolves. A bunch of drama happens and then the two friends set off for St. Petersburg to rescue her mother after she's taken by soldiers.

The writing is amazing and the whole setting seemed so real! Basically, it's a really charming middle grade book I totally recommend.

## Munro's Kids says

I really loved this book. It had just lovely writing and a very fairy-tale like feel about it, though more action than you would usually find in a fable-like novel.

Feo is a young Russian girl who is a wolf wilder - she takes domesticated wolves whose owners don't want them anymore (it is very unlucky to kill wolves in the story's Russia) and "wilds" them by training them to hunt, howl and be wolves. She is a strong and wonderful heroine facing off against a very evil Tsarist officer. The background is pre-Revolutionary Russia and there is rebellion in the air throughout the story. Actually, I fell in love with the historical setting so much, that I had to double check that Rundell made up the whole notion of "wolf wilders" (she did). The supporting characters were likewise lovely and well-drawn, and the line by line writing full of quirks and quips and nice pieces of description. Though by no means perfect - there were some plot contrivances, etc - it was a very satisfying read. Great for Diana Wynne Jones or Eva Ibbotsen fans, or a slightly simpler *Plain Kate* kind of read.

-Kirsten

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## Stacey (prettybooks) says

*"Stories can start revolutions."*

*The Wolf Wilder* was one of my most anticipated books of 2015. I refused to read my early copy as I wanted to wait to see Gelrev Ongbico's divine illustrations . And it was well worth the wait. I cannot decide which cover for *The Wolf Wilder* I love the most; it's a stunning book, inside and out.

*The Wolf Wilder* is a beautiful story about one girl's treacherous adventure through dangerous, snowy Russia to save her mother, who has been attacked and captured by the Russian Army because she refused to give them what they wanted. They burned down the house and dragged her away to a Russian prison, as ordered by the diabolical general, Mikhail Rakov. Feodora's mother is a wolf wilder and Feo is a wolf wilder in training. A wolf wilder teaches tamed animals to fend for themselves, to fight and to run, and to be wary of humans. Wolves are often sent back into the wild by rich owners who have grown bored – or afraid – of their good luck charms, but it's bad luck to kill a wolf. Accompanied by three loyal wolves and a surprisingly trustworthy boy soldier called Ilya, Feo sets off into the woods and begins a journey that will change her life. Feo is a resilient and determined character, and an absolute joy to read about.

*"Wolves, like children, are not born to lead calm lives."*

It's certainly been the year of the wolf because this is the second 'wolf' book to make my top ten books of the year. I loved learning about each of the wolves and their personalities: White, Grey and Black, plus the adorable wolf cub and Feo's dutiful Tenderfoot. All of the wolves are characters in their own right and guide the courageous children as they defy the adults around them. Katherine Rundell's picturesque and memorable writing combined with Gelrev Ongbico's haunting and wintry illustrations create a fantastic adventure story for all ages. I do not have any excuses for not picking up my copy of *Rooftoppers*, do I?!

*"It's inhuman to take your books away before you know the end."*

*I also reviewed this book over on Pretty Books.*

## Katherine says

*"Once upon a time, a hundred years ago, there was a dark and stormy girl."*

This novel just goes to show you that you don't have to be old or tall to start a revolution. And **sometimes the bravest of individuals come in the smallest (and fiercest) packages.**

Feodora and her mother live deep in the Russian wilderness. It's always been just the two of them, and they have an interesting occupation; they teach domesticated wolves to be wild again. Back in the day, Russian nobles showed their wealth and nobility by having a pet wolf. The wolves were often overfed and mistreated by their owners, and when they got too big, bothersome, or dangerous to be kept as pets any longer, they were sent to wolf wilders to release back into the wilderness, since in Russian folklore it is considered bad luck to kill a wolf. Feo and her mother make a living doing this, and have wilded hundreds of wolves. Because of this, Feo is considered by many to be half-wild herself, with her mother and three half-domesticated wolves as her constant and only companions.

*"Feo could not remember a time when she had not known and loved the wolves. It was impossible not to love them: They were so lean and beautiful and uncompromising. Wolves made sense to her; wolves were one of the few things worth dying for."*

But their peaceful world is shattered when one of their wolves kills the czar's prized horse, and a general by the name of Rakov comes into their own private world, shattering the once peaceful atmosphere. When he takes Feo's mama, it's up to her, her wolves, and a few new friends made along the way to stop him... and spark a revolution.

I've always had a fondness to middle grade because oftentimes, the protagonists are so fun to read about. They're spunky, they're wild, and they're at that stage where they feel they can take on anything. Feo is no exception. She's fierce, aloof, determined, and fiercely devoted to her wolves Black, Gray, and White. She could be socially aloof and awkward at times, but that's because she's one of those individuals who gets along better with animals than people. The existence many would consider to be a harsh, lonely and isolated one is Feo's version of pure happiness. I loved how close of a relationship she has with her mother, and how devoted they are to one another. I also liked her burgeoning friendship with Ilya, a boy who's a Russian soldier on Rakov's army. Some of their exchanges are just brimming with sass!

*"'He doesn't like you.'  
'Why not?'  
'Because I don't like you. And he can feel it.'  
'Well, stop it!'  
'Disliking you?'  
'Yes! Now! Stop it immediately!'  
'You very much started it! You're pointing a gun at me.'"*

You might have to suspend some disbelief in the fact that there was separate children's revolution in Russia (which never happened), but **this book contains such a powerful message, especially at this politically tumultuous time.** Children are our future, whether we want to believe it or not, and oftentimes their words, actions and ideas can make all the difference.

So let this story of a fierce, independent, stubborn, determined girl who runs with the wolves be all the motivation you need to go out there and make a change. **Because if a half-wild girl can speak such**

**eloquent words as those below, than there's no reason your voice shouldn't be heard either.**

*"Mikal Rakov started all this. Rakov came in the night and burned down our home. He took my mama away, because he was afraid of her. He was afraid that she **wasn't** afraid. He's taking our food and homes. And he's taking the people we love. And he's taking our future. And the future needs our protection: It's a fragile thing. The future needs all the help it can get.*

*Rakov wants to kill my mama. He wants to use today to take her away from me forever. But I- I am the wolf girl, and I am not afraid of him!*

*He's blind in one eye because of me. But he's **always** been blind: He doesn't see the facts. The fact that there are more than us than there are of him. The fact that fire in your soul beats fire on the ground. The fact that love always beats fear. And the fact that it helps to have wolves on your side.*

*He saw no reason to take the things he wanted. He thought fear was the most powerful thing in the world. He thought fear had the most kick- he thought we'd care more about being safe than being bold. And I'd rather be bold. We've got to say, **You do not get to take anything more.**"*

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## **Sophie Woodward-Rowe says**

I laughed, I cried, felt like my heart would stop and then that it might break. Feo and Sophie from Rooftoppers are somewhat interchangeable so don't read them too close together but otherwise I'm pretty ok with that! I can always read more of heroines that are both badass and really untidy...

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## **C.G. Drews says**

**This was one of those books that is entirely BEAUTIFUL and also devastatingly BORING.** Such a quandary. Like, I'm seriously struggling to think of anything to say in this review because...it was a simple story! Totally was! It's a middle-grade, which is fabulous. And it had a lot of elements I'm like 99% in love with. But the execution of the story was...slow. I nap at slow, peoples. I am a high speed humanoid.

### **THINGS I LIKED:**

- + It's set in Russia. LIKE HELLO YES PLEASE AND THANK YOU. (I have a weird obsession with Russia. Don't even ask.) I was super excited when the surprise ARC arrived in the mail because I adored Shadow and Bone (which is a Russian-esque fantasy) and also Egg & Spoon. I always need moooorrrr Russian in my life.
- + It's very cold and snowy. Always fun since I, unfortunately, have never seen snow.
- + THERE BE WOLVES. I like wolves! I like ones that don't necessarily shapeshift, but just running around being genuinely wolfish.
- + The protagonist is kind of spunky and talks too much and is rather endearing. Plus her name is Feo, and isn't that awesome? IT JUST IS. Although her *full* name is Feodora, which reminded me of the hat. I'm sorry. But it happened.
  
- + It promises illustrations. I had an ARC so there were just these big blank spots that says

"ILLUSTRATIONS HERE" which allowed my imagination to create, you know, the average squiggles of dragons and apple pies and things. But I *trust* that the illustrations will be epic, if the cover is anything to go off.

+ THE COVER IS GORGEOUS.

+ It hurts characters and things get shot and it's actually genuinely nerve-wracking in several places. YAY. I like to be on the edge of my seat.

...but let me be a sad frozen berry now...

### THINGS I KINDA DIDN'T LIKE AT ALL, REALLY:

+ They rode on the wolves. Like??? Is this possible??? Um/??? No.

+ It is also notoriously boring after a while. Like the beginning was exciting! I loved the setting up of the story and the concept of "Wolf Wilders" (they get given tame wolves and they help turn them wild again and teach them to hunt and then realise them...eeepic) BUT! After that? They're just running through the snow with wolves and occasionally eating food and having no character development whatsoever. And then it launched into FREEDOM! speeches which I cared even *less* about because even *the protagonist was bored*, omg. The politics pretty much had no place in the story.

+ They got rid of the mother so they could have the adventure. Cliche? Yes. --

+ While I liked Feo because she was spunky and bright and bubbly...she was also super naive and stupid. I guess this is her mother's fault for closeting her away in the woods with wolves? BUT. It was a bit irritating. (That could just be me, though.)

+ The entire "villainy" side took a looooot of stretching of the imagination. Like the captain of the Tsar's army says that the Wolf Wilders have to kill their wolves, if they don't, he'll come back and kill their wolves and kidnap Feo. (And do what, I don't know?) Anyway, as the story unravels, he turns out to be a regular psychopath, who quickly dedicates ALL this time and soldiers to hunting down Feo. LIKE WHY?! SERIOUSLY?! All they'd need is a proper tracker to get her. And a total grown general-dude is obsessed with revenge on a *kid*?! Yeah. Um. Okay then.

+ I wish it'd had more Russian culture because THAT is what I'm dying to read about.

**I think the key is to read this as a whimsical Russian-ish childrens story.** It's about wolves and friendship and adventure and saving-mothers and outwitting-adults and running wild-and-free-with-wolves. It's COOL. And I really like the thought of it. But the entire thing didn't really envelop me. I do like the author's note though, where she tells how she grew up in, like, two million different countries, and her dad always told her Russian folklore stories. COOL STUFF.

I also highly approve of this quote:

"It's inhuman to take your books away before you know the end."

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**Nat says**

**DNF at page 61.**

*"Aristocrats in Russia believe that the killing of a wolf brings a unique kind of bad luck. It is not the glamorous kind of bad luck, not runaway trains and lost fortunes, but something dark and insidious. If you*

*kill a wolf, they say, your life begins to disappear."*

I was so excited to start this one because the premise sounded right up my ally and also the book cover is absolutely gorgeous.

And it did start out really great- honestly, any story starting with *Once upon a time...* will have my utter and complete attention. It was really easy getting into Feo's world, I could feel the cold of winter (even though it's summer and hot as hell where I live), and the wolves breathing next to Feodora and every description was so visually pleasing.

But the more I got into the story, the more I realized how naive and irrational Feo was acting. She got herself into too much trouble and after watching her do the same mistake over and over, it started to feel really repetitive — I mean, how is she still alive after talking back so many times to so many soldiers with guns??

And then we get introduced to Ilya, a 13-year-old soldier boy, and he just ruined the story. I'm surprised that someone can ask so many damn questions, aren't soldiers like him trained to keep quiet??

Example number 1 (out of too many) of Feo's naivety:

Why would you tell a soldier, that's been ordered to kill you and the wolves, where you live?? How can she afford to be so irrational and gullible?

*"We have to go," said Feo. "Good night."*

*"Where are you taking her?"*

*Feo hesitated. "You won't tell?"*

*"Never! Really, I swear, Feo."*

*"I'm taking her home: my house. She can sleep inside if she wants to, or on the porch."*

I'm truly astonished that the wolves trusted her with their lives.

*\*Note: I'm an Amazon Affiliate. If you're interested in buying **The Wolf Wilder**, just click on the image below to go through my link. I'll make a small commission!\**

This review and more can be found on my blog.

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## **Kelly says**

**"Stories can start revolutions."**

*(Full disclosure: I received a free electronic ARC for review through Edelweiss. Mild trigger warning for sexual harassment of a minor.)*

"Humans, on the whole, Feo could take or leave; there was only one person she loved properly, with the sort of fierce pride that gets people into trouble, or prison, or history books."

"[A] wolf who cannot howl is like a human who cannot laugh."

Once upon a time, a hundred years ago, there lived a dark and stormy girl. She was wild in spirit and loved fiercely; and no wonder, for she was raised in the company not of humans, but of wolves. They were her friends, her teachers, her pupils, her family - her (almost) everything. And, at the tender age of twelve, this girl and her half-tame friends would go on to lead a revolution.

Feodora Petrovich and her mother Marina live in the Russian wilderness, not too far from Saint Petersburg. Though they're the only humans for miles, they're hardly alone - not exactly. The Petrovich family has been wilding wolves for centuries - since the days of Peter the Great, in fact.

Wolf wilding is the exact opposite of wolf taming (not that you can ever truly tame a wolf, mind you): training captive wolves to survive in the wild, without any human interference. Feo and Marina take in wolves who were kidnapped as pups, sold as pets, and subsequently - unsurprisingly - became "dangerous" or "nuisance" animals as they aged. Many of "their" wolves left with a piece of their former owners, literally: fingers, ears, noses, or a pound of random flesh.

Wolves aren't just status symbols in Russia, but also good luck charms; conversely, it's considered bad luck to kill a wolf. Thus, unwanted wolves become problems, foisted onto wolf wilders by the rich.

Not that Feo would ever describe her wolf friends as such: aside from Marina, the wolves are the only family Feo has ever known. So when the Tsar's favored General, Mikhail Rakov, orders that they stop wilding wolves - the same wolves who are killing "his" wild game - under penalty of imprisonment or death, Feo and Marina defy his command. Naturally. In retaliation, Rakov destroys their home, arrests Marina for treason, and vows to exterminate Feo and her wolves for good.

Now it's up to Feo to rescue her mom from Kresty Prison. Luckily, she has a little help in the form of Black, White, and Gray, her adopted wolf family. There's also Ilya, an unwilling child soldier gone AWOL; Alexei Gasteviski, a fifteen-year-old agitator from a nearby village, ransacked by Ravok and his men just days before; and the village children, who have tired of their parents' deliberations and want nothing more than the chance to wreak a little mayhem.

*The Wolf Wilder* is a beautiful, magical, heartfelt fairy tale wrapped in a warm, furry package. Rundell's prose is simple yet stirring; *The Wolf Wilder* is filled with lovely, eminently quotable bits.

The wolves, of course, positively steal the show. The passages about the wolves - their mistreatment at the hands of humans, their indomitable spirits, Feo's interactions with (and love for) them - are among the most beautiful in the book.

Animal activists will note a clear parallel between the treatment of wolves in contemporary America and turn-of-the-century Russia: eschewing traditional superstitions surrounding wolves, Rakov instead sees them as vermin (and Feo, tellingly, is likewise vermin when she is with them; holy dehumanizing and othering, Batman!). When the wolves kill other free-living animals, such as elks, Rakov becomes enraged: in his speciesist worldview, all the animals of the world (or Russia, at least) belong to him, and as such the wolves are stealing his animals. Sentience be damned. This is also the same effed up logic that's led to the mass extermination of wolves in the U.S.: ranchers become positively murderous when wolves kill "their" cows, pigs, chickens - farmed animals who were destined for the dinner table one way or another.

That said, the kids are pretty awesome too. This is a story populated largely by children; save for Marina, the adults are mostly villainous or indifferent. Or scared to act - that is, until their children show them the way.

Feo is ... well, Feo. I suspect that I feel the same way about dogs that she does wolves - I have five rescues and also foster - and I could relate to her on so many levels. Her friendships with Black, White, Gray, Tenderfoot, and the pup were a pleasure to witness, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I cried more than

once. ("More than once"? I went through half a box of Kleenex, dammit!) Socially awkward due to her limited interactions with humans, it was also nice to watch her cultivate relationships with teenagers Ilya and Alexei. Likewise, I loved watching Ilya overcome his fear of wolves.

And can we talk about Ilya for a moment? A sensitive and artistic boy, Ilya's father made him join the tsar's Imperial Army after the death of his mother. When he first meets Feo, it's to carry out Rakov's order to KILL ALL THE WOLVES! In this case, a very pregnant, about-to-give-birth Tenderfoot. He doesn't particularly want to, which is perhaps why Feo is able to scare/persuade him into dropping his gun. Once he meets Tenderfoot's unnamed pup - one of two, the first of which was stillborn - his heart slowly starts to warm to this vilified species. (I also appreciate how Rundell employs the power of baby animals to break down barriers.) Thus begins a friendship to last a lifetime.

Rundell drops small hints that Ilya might be gay; so small, in fact, that I initially thought I was imagining things. For example, Ilya always seems to turn beet red in Alexei's presence, and manifests a strong desire to impress the older boy.

Ilya loves to dance (not that challenging gender roles makes you gay, fyi) and never misses an opportunity to dazzle. Feo describes his dancing "like a lost boy foun: like a victory parade." When the famed Igor Darikev comes to recruit Ilya as a student, he cautions the boy that such a decision is not to be taken lightly: the life of a dancer is a hard one, filled with strenuous work, long days, and a lonely social life. The exchange that follows pretty much sealed the deal for me:

*"Dancers - they are not always respected. They often find it hard to marry."*

*Ilya fiddled with his lip. "That's not a problem, for me," he said.*

While it's clearly geared toward younger readers, *The Wolf Wilder* is an enchanting fairy tale for those of all ages.

**Read it:** During the next snow storm; from the bottom of a dog pile; to your kids, no matter their age.

<http://www.easyvegan.info/2015/08/26/...>

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## **Saruuh Kelsey says**

The Wolf Wilder is what children's fiction is all about. A sweeping landscape, an unforgettable main character, a budding revolution, and wolves!

This book held my attention from the first page, so much so that I read a huge chunk of it in one sitting (50%!) I was instantly drawn into the snowy wilds of Russia, and my heart attached itself to Feo and the wolves without my knowing. This book is just so unique, and genuine, and unlike anything I've read before that it was impossible to put down.

When we get into the second half of the book, we're made aware of the state of Russia, and how beaten they are by Rakov, the terrible tyrant who rules over Feo's little corner of Russia. And we meet a slowly-building revolution, with ordinary, and angry, children at the heart of it. This book, if nothing else, tells of the power of children. And it shows, when organised and determined, that someone small can accomplish something great and affect the lives of hundreds. Feo's bravery drove this story, but her love for the wolves, her mother, and Ilya really brought it to life.

Charming and magical, The Wolf Wilder is a captivating novel of courage and love for people of all ages. I loved it!

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### **Lauren James says**

This book makes me feel ten years old again. Every time I read a Katherine Rundell book I wonder why I ever spend time reading anything else. Her writing style is so unique and stunning I could probably recognise it from one sentence. Every word is a treasure, and her concepts are so original and different reading her books is like a breath of fresh air.

Loved it.

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### **Donalyn says**

Wonderful from beginning to end.

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### **Katrina says**

I badly wanted to love this book. On the surface, it holds so much promise: why wouldn't I be excited about a sharp-elbowed Russian heroine who spends her time teaching partially domesticated wolves to howl again? Plus, I've enjoyed the author's other works, and I've been excited about this one since I saw it on display (but not being distributed) at ALA. It is, without a doubt, one of the prettier books I've bought this year.

Unfortunately, this is a disaster of a narrative. It's getting two stars only because there are some beautiful passages strewn into the mess. I'd consider dropping it to one and a half stars, if I could, because those profound little shards don't even fit into the rest of the story. I don't know what Katherine Rundell was trying to accomplish in this work, and that's the problem.

It's a story about a wild girl who was raised in the Russian woods by her mother and a pack of wolves. But how does this play out? There's no backstory. Other than an offhand comment about stemming from generations of wolf wilders, nothing on the page explains why they're in the woods, what happened to her father, what happens to the other wolves (presumably they've "wilded" more than the four Feo interacts with on a daily basis), and what they do with the rest of their time. Feo's mother could have been a fascinating character, but she disappears quickly, setting the stage for a band of children to march on a Russian city to rescue her.

And that's how it transitions into an oddly political missive about an inept tsar and a legitimately unhinged general, who makes it his personal mission to murder the wolves (for killing an elk?), as well as Feo and her mother. General Rakov is so far off the charts as a foaming at the mouth, bloodthirsty, fire-loving caricature that he can't even count as a legitimate character. He burns down Feo's house, arrests her mother, shoots three wolves (killing two), and tracks them through the woods for the rest of the book - but in the most ridiculously ineffective way. At several points, Feo manages to drive him off by frightening his horse, then spends a solid day *camping out in the same spot*, then digging a grave for her wolf, and leaving a bloody trail for him to follow. Somehow Rakov, despite his overpowering presence as her personal nemesis, doesn't manage to turn his horse around and return to the scene until Rundell is ready to spin another implausible scenario. To make this even more ludicrous, *a ballet teacher* easily tracks them to the abandoned castle

where they've taken shelter, but Rakov waits until they're ready to confront him in the way Rundell had planned.

Then there's the revolutionary component, with agitator Alexei, whose radical ideas lead to soldiers burning down his village. He, in combination with a four page, entirely out of character speech by Feo, convinces hundreds of other villagers, city people, and nuns(?) to batter down the gates of the prison and ... start a revolution? I guess?

What makes it worse is that this is intended to be set in a historical context, 100 years in Russia's past, yet I didn't gather the impression that Rundell knew a single thing about Russia, wolves, the political structure of the country, the historical time period, or pretty much anything else she chose to write about. *Rooftoppers* was a breathtakingly brilliant book, because it was grounded in a world she knew well, and could twist into a unique view. Cartwheeling in *Thunderstorms*, her second novel, faltered through some predictable storylines, but had an appeal of its own. *The Wolf Wilder* doesn't even feel like it was produced by the same author; in places, the ideas Feo and the other children craft during their rescue mission sound like they'd sprung from the imagination of an actual child, which is interesting in its own way, but not something that gives a book sustained interest and longevity.

For example, Feo chases away some of Rakov's men from a village, not understanding that they can return, in greater numbers, and do far more harm than they'd originally intended. When this is pointed out to her, she ropes the other children into whittling "wolves' paws," which they can tie to their hands and feet and use to leave intimidating pawprints around the village. This will, somehow, frighten the dozens of gun-toting soldiers away. Obviously nothing comes of this plan, but what I don't understand is why it's included to begin with. That's not the only incident of its kind.

There are also weirdly lazy hand-waving elements, like the fact that a thirteen year old boy, who had previously been training as a soldier, rides on the back of a running wolf for extended periods of time, as though wolves can double as horses. Or the compass, which Feo creates out of a bowl of water and a needle, then balances on the head of her running wolf (without the water splashing out, I suppose?), and continues to use even when the weather dips below 40, which is the point that your actual eyeballs begin to freeze if you don't find shelter quickly enough. How is the water not solid ice? How is the compass still functioning? The author doesn't care. That lack of interest in creating a world with consistent internal logic makes it difficult to care about the story, as a reader.

Then there's Feo herself, who feels like she was plucked straight out of *Cartwheeling in Thunderstorms* and renamed. Her age is some oddly nebulous number (over ten but under thirteen - I don't think it was ever specifically stated, and have no desire to skim back through the book for confirmation), yet her dialogue shifts between the ages of three and thirty. In the aforementioned call to arms, she makes proclamations such as: "We've got to say, *You do not get to take anything more...*The adults, they want us to be quiet and careful, but we have a right to fight for the world we want to live in, and nobody has the right to tell us to be safe and sensible. I say, today, we fight!" This battle cry could be pulled from any number of Hollywood blockbusters, but it's safe to say that Feo, in the Russian countryside a century ago, probably wasn't soaking up this kind of language from movies like *Braveheart* and *Independence Day*. It's a clear author-insert, as she wrangles the reins from her own narrator.

On the other side of the equation, Rundell periodically remembers that Feo is meant to be a young, not well-educated wild child who doesn't have substantial knowledge of the world outside her isolated woods. She conveys this through jokes that fall rather flat. For instance, when Alexei's sister describes him as an "agitator," Feo doesn't know the word, and assumes that she's being told that he's an alligator. "That just seems...so unlikely," she says, and they move on.

It's baffling. I suspect that, without the success of her two earlier novels, this one wouldn't have made it past

the publishers. I wish it had spent more time in the editing process, and that it'd been substantially rewritten to provide a solid arc - any storyline at all, really, that would make more sense than this one. What a disappointment.

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## Jessi ♥? H. Vojsk says

"The fact that fire in your soul beats fire on the ground. The fact that love always beats fear. And the fact that it helps to have wolves on your side."

Story ??????????

After her mother is captured by an evil General Feo begins an adventure with her wolfs, her new friend Ilya and a lot of brave people.

Characters ??????????

I can't even choose which character I loved more, they were all so kind hearted and brave and everyone had something that just made you love them. But of course Feo was a great main character with her naive, but brave point of view and Ilya who became such a good friend to Feo, even if they didn't met in good circumstances.

Relationships ??????????

In this story friendship is so important and of course family. Not only the family you have by blood, but the family you choose to have.

Your own wolves pack. ?????

Writing style ??????????

This was just so heart warming and cute.

I loved it so much! The pictures in it were beautiful and made the story even better.

It easily could have been a Russian story they tell children before they go to sleep.

I will definitely read another story of the author, because her writing is simple but beautiful. And probably reread this book.

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