

**Fiction Writing Exercise for “Fiction Workshop” Course**

**The Fire Mage’s Wolf**

I love my master, and he loves me. He gives me a warm place to stay; juicy, tender meat to devour; and—above all—helps me get plenty of exercise. I like the kind of exercise he gives me. We run together into the woods, hunting down the “bad” people. I know they are bad for two reasons. First, they do not have a singed, ashy odor that tickles my nose like my master and his kin do. They smell like mud and fresh grass. Second, my comrades do not serve them. Instead, they are accompanied by deer, my favorite meat. Their taste reminds me of my mother’s milk, for it is warm and makes my stomach happy.

The bad people aren’t easy to catch. They soften the earth, shift it, or summon pointy stone daggers from out of the soil in order to slow me and my master down. But I know the earth like I know my master. It is easy to navigate, and I can jump over any obstacle. I love seeing their eyes grow wide as I leap at them, and their screams make me want to howl with them as I gnaw at their flesh and pin them to the ground. The best part, however, is the praise I get from my master when I catch them. I sometimes get extra meat if I do good!

After I stop the bad people, my master starts the ritual. I know it is a ritual because I’ve seen his kin do the same. He places his hands together in a mountain shape and mutters in some strange tongue. This language creates a fire at his fingertips. As my master continues muttering, the fire grows fast and moves in whatever direction he wills. When it is large enough, my master directs it toward the earth and tosses the bad people and their deer into the embers. A couple times, I have seen my comrades sacrificed. When I look at the crackling flames, I am reminded of their deaths. I am not scared but instead enticed by the way the fire dances in the wind. So long as my master loves me, I know I need not fear them.

Today is a bad day. I am not sure what will happen, but the air is stale and I can feel tingles in my body, so I know something bad will happen. For today’s hunt, a female—one of my master’s kin—and one of my comrades are joining us. This kin is special. I know this because my master’s face shines like the sun whenever he sees her. They also see each other often and we go on lots of hunts together! I also see the comrade who serves her; she is strong, willful, and beautiful like her master. Maybe the bad thing will happen during the hunt, but as I cannot speak my master’s tongue, I cannot warn him.

There are five bad people, each with five deer. Unlike previous hunts, these people are tougher. They do not run like the others, and their faces bear crescent moon grins and fiery eyes. My master places his hands together and shoots a fireball at them, but they quickly turn their bodies to stone and repel it. When my master’s kin starts to summon another, they charge with rocky spears in hand. My master and the female turn around and run; my comrade and I follow. Now it is us who are being pursued.

As we try to get away, I hear a crack. An agonized howl follows shortly. I stop and turn around. My comrade has been hit! I look back at my master and the female and growl, notifying them. They continue running. The bad people run, too, but they ignore my comrade. They do not notice me. I can attack them at any time. But if I do, my comrade will surely perish. I hear my master and the female call for me. Their voices sound urgent, as if they need me. But my comrade needs me, too.

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Only three of us return from the hunt. The air is heavy; it feels like a ton of rocks are on my back. I look at my master. Though he does not look at me, I can see his soulless eyes. I look at my comrade. She looks at me, then lets out a lamenting howl.

I love my master, and I am certain he still loves me. He must know what happened to the female was an accident, and I'm sure he understands my comrade was more important to me, as I have seen him protect his kin over me. I have always been obedient, so I know I am forgiven. So why do the flames he has summoned terrify me?