

In the faint glimmer of dawn as the sun is still rising from its perch below the hills a great inferno terrorizes the mind and soul of all those who approach it. The time on the grandfather clock swings in tune with the half burnt door of the rural manor that mocks the tale of innocence and neglect that led to the barren ashes that line the ember soaked halls. A story accompanying disaster is often begot by miniscule mistakes and good intentions, the fate of the single soul responsible for this tale is no different.

A small girl no older than the cats that took residence outside the manor was left alone on the dreadful day of this tragedy. She was a very normal girl in her own right: kind, emotional, and above all else curious of the world around her. On this solemn day a certain box upon the many loomy shelves captured her gaze, the bright reds and glistening yellows bellowed and screamed at her. The girl was not dumb. She knew better than to listen to any strangers, but this was no stranger. This was just a box; the same box that she would pass by when her mother walked with her through these velvet corridors. She decided to finally listen to these angry yet persuasive voices coming from the colors on the box, and as she grabbed the box two small matches fell out.

She has never touched a match before, only seen her father use them to light the fire on cold winter nights and tempered summer days to cook pork for the neighboring families. She knew how to use them; she just had to strike the red against the black, and with a swift motion she created a small form of life. Seemingly bored of her own creation she cast it aside. After which a new voice appeared. It spoke of terrible events that would transpire if she did not heed the warning of her family. But the girl refused to listen. She reached for the second match on the

ground, seemingly forgetting about the match she left on the ground. The voice in the back of her mind screamed and cried of chilling scenes of ashes covering the manor, and still the girl refused to listen. The same ritual of flame was performed by the small girl, a swift motion to create life, and soon a smile appeared on her face as she drowned out the prognosticator in her head, replacing it with the crackles of fire and the warmth on her hands.

As one voice was drowned out another would appear, she heard the sounds of wolves resentful and starved, she was startled by their awful scratchy howl, and in one swift turn she looked into a throng of her own creation. The wolves, loud and ferocious, wailed throughout the manor tearing and gnawing at everything in their grasp. The girl realized what hell she had wrought.

She sought to run but her legs seemed to turn to stone at the sight of the wolf in the middle. The wolf did not run and destroy everything in its wake like those around it, it seemed content lying in the heart of the horde and staring at the girl, it had an eye blazing with intent and another ash colored and useless. The wolf just stared at the girl, as if it was looking into the abyss. The girl, almost mesmerized by the creatures she created with just one mistake, stared back. At this moment she realized her mistakes, and realized there is nothing she could do to fix them now. She realized she should've heeded the words that bounced around her head, the ones that spoke of condemnation by divine powers if she continued her dangerous play. Most of all she realized that the wolf was smiling, it knew what had happened to the girl and was going to revel in her mistake as long as he could.

This creature was seeking to play with the girl. It only wanted to toy with her, until the inevitable end of both of them. The screams were wretched, horrible, inaudible as they were

snuffed out by the howl of the wolves. Mercilessly the wolves tore through the manor, taking the lives of the family that resided in it. There was no peace for them. After all life had been snuffed out within the rooms and corridors the wolves seemed content to kick up ash in the halls and tear down the shelves to fuel the carnage. Inevitably the hamlet around the manor heard the howling coming from just across the hill, and what they found was startling.

They discovered their esteemed manor is a whirlwind of ash and embers. As onlookers gazed into the maw of flame they heard the solitary scream of a girl, Many ran into the manor to try and save the poor girl to no avail as they were quickly stopped by smoldering rubble and mile high columns of flame. so with no other option they let the voice scream, scream into the night until no voice was heard anymore. The mob that amassed at the manor just seemed to stare, looking on into the den of fire that was tearing the manor to shreds. They could do nothing to stop it. The well was too far back and the fire had already consumed everything in its wake, so they just stared, stared until the fire turned to ash and the ash was blown away by the wind. Once everything was burnt the villagers simply went about their day, walking to their work, fixing shoes, grabbing water for the crops, and handing beer to the local drunk. The events that night became a taboo, no one wanted to speak of it, or maybe there was just nothing to say, an unfortunate event that no one would explain. People could still occasionally hear a voice from the remnants of the manor though, it was a quiet voice that was left behind by someone it would seem. It screamed of the events each night, yelling about it's prediction of what would happen and the wasteful nature of the events that have happened. But most of all, it screamed of wolves.

Works Cited

Hoffmann, Heinrich. "The very sad tale with matches". 1845.