In a secluded village nestled between misty mountains, a mischievous boy named Kai often roamed the hills, tending to his family’s sheep. Unlike the boy in the fable, Kai’s lies were not born of boredom but of a restless curiosity to test the villagers’ kindness. One crisp morning, as the sun climbed over the peaks, Kai climbed to the highest pasture and shouted, “Wolf! Wolf! The beast is here!” His voice echoed through the valleys, urgent and raw.

The villagers, who had long trusted Kai’s honesty, dropped their tools and sprinted up the mountain. Their breaths puffed white in the cold air as they reached the boy. But when they saw only sheep grazing calmly, Kai erupted into laughter, his eyes dancing with mischief. “No wolf here! Just a joke to see if you’d come!” The villagers, though initially relieved, turned stern. Old Man Liang shook his head. “Kai, lies erode trust. Do not test our kindness again.” They trudged back to their fields, their trust frayed but not yet broken.

That very afternoon, as shadows lengthened and the wind howled through the pines, a real wolf emerged from the thicket. Its eyes gleamed like smoldering coals as it stalked Kai’s flock. Panicked, Kai screamed, “Wolf! Wolf! It’s here—help me!” His voice cracked with terror, but the villagers, still nursing their hurt pride, hesitated. They had heard his cry once before, and their hearts, though heavy, remained rooted in their fields.

The wolf lunged, its jaws snapping at the sheep. Kai fled down the slope, his legs trembling, but the villagers’ doors remained shut. Only Old Man Liang, hearing the boy’s desperate cries, hesitated at his threshold. He gripped his walking stick, torn between doubt and duty. By the time he reached the pasture, the wolf had vanished into the dusk, leaving Kai alone and trembling among the scattered flock.