



Little Red Riding Hood

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Once upon a time, in a small village nestled among a thick forest, there lived a kind-hearted girl named Little Red Riding Hood. Everyone called her that because she always wore a bright red cape with a hood that her grandmother had sewn for her. The cape was her favorite thing to put on, and it made her feel ready to take on any adventure. She was a cheerful girl, always happy to help out, and she loved her family more than anything in the world.

One sunny morning, Little Red Riding Hood's mother called her into the kitchen. The smell of freshly baked bread filled the air, and a basket sat on the wooden table. "Red," her mother said, "your grandmother has come down with a cold. I've packed some bread, cheese, and a jar of homemade jam for her. Can you drop this basket off at her house? It's not far, just through the forest, but you must promise to stick to the path and not chat with strangers."

Little Red Riding Hood nodded eagerly. "Of course, Mother! I'll watch out and make sure Grandma gets everything." She loved visiting her grandmother, who lived in a cozy cottage on the other side of the forest. Her grandmother was a sweet old lady who always came up with the best stories and gave the warmest hugs.

She picked up the basket, which was heavier than she expected, and put on her red cape. "Don't worry, I'll be back before dinner," she said, waving goodbye. Her mother smiled but looked a bit worried. "Just keep to the path, Red. The forest can play tricks on you."

With the basket in one hand and her hood up, Little Red Riding Hood set off. The forest was beautiful that day. Tall trees stretched up to the sky, their leaves letting in just enough sunlight to make the path sparkle. Birds chirped happily, and a soft breeze rustled the leaves. Red hummed a little tune as she walked, feeling as free as a bird. She knew the path well, having stopped by her grandmother's many times before, but today, something felt off. The forest seemed quieter than usual, as if it was holding its breath.

As she walked deeper into the woods, she noticed a pair of shiny eyes watching her from behind a tree. She stopped, her heart speeding up. Out stepped a wolf, tall and lean, with gray fur and a sly grin. This wasn't just any wolf. This wolf was clever, and he had a reputation in the forest for being as cunning as a fox. He had heard about Little Red Riding Hood and her trips to her grandmother's house, and he saw a chance to stir up some mischief.

"Good morning, little girl," the wolf said in a smooth voice, bowing slightly. "What's a lovely child like you doing wandering around in the forest all alone?"

Little Red Riding Hood remembered her mother's warning about strangers, but the wolf didn't seem dangerous. He was polite, and his smile looked friendly enough. "I'm heading to my grandmother's house," she said, holding up her basket. "She's come down with something, so I'm bringing her some food to cheer her up."

The wolf's eyes gleamed, but he kept his voice sweet. "How kind of you! And where does your grandmother live, if I may ask?" He tilted his head, pretending to be curious.

Red hesitated for a moment but thought there was no harm in answering. "She lives in a cottage just past the big oak tree, near the stream," she said. "It's not far from here."

The wolf nodded, his mind racing with a sneaky plan. "That's wonderful," he said. "You know, there are some beautiful flowers just off the path over there." He pointed to a patch of colorful wildflowers a little way into the forest. "Why don't you pick some up for your grandmother? I'm sure they'd brighten her day."

Little Red Riding Hood looked at the flowers. They were bright and pretty, and she imagined how happy her grandmother would be to have them. "That's a great idea!" she said. "Thank you, Mr. Wolf." Without thinking too much, she stepped off the path and walked toward the flowers, her basket swinging in her hand.

The wolf's grin grew wider as soon as Red turned away. "Take your time," he called out, then slipped away quietly, making a beeline for the grandmother's cottage. He knew he had to move quickly if his plan was going to work out. He ran through the forest, his paws barely touching the ground, until he reached the little cottage by the stream. The door was unlocked, as it often was in such a peaceful village.

The wolf knocked gently. "Who's there?" called a weak voice from inside. It was Grandmother, lying in bed, trying to get over her cold.

"It's me, Little Red Riding Hood," the wolf said, making his voice high and sweet to sound like Red's. He was as sly as ever, and he knew how to trick people.

"Oh, come in, dear," said Grandmother, coughing a little. The wolf pushed open the door and stepped inside. Before Grandmother could figure out what was going on, the wolf grabbed a blanket and tied her up gently, making sure she wasn't hurt. "Don't worry," he whispered with a chuckle. "I just need to borrow your bed for a little while." He hid Grandmother in a closet, then quickly put on her nightgown and cap, pulling the covers up to his chin. He lay in bed, trying to look as harmless as a lamb.

Meanwhile, Little Red Riding Hood was having a great time picking up flowers. She gathered a big bunch of daisies, tulips, and bluebells, humming to herself all the while. She didn't realize how much time had slipped by, and by the time she got back on the path, the sun was a little higher in the sky. "Oh no," she said to herself. "I hope Grandma isn't worried." She hurried along, clutching her basket and the flowers, eager to see her grandmother's smile.

When she reached the cottage, she knocked on the door. "Grandmother, it's me, Little Red Riding Hood!" she called.

"Come in, my dear," said a voice from inside. It sounded a bit strange, deeper than usual, but Red thought maybe her grandmother's cold was messing with her voice. She pushed open the door and stepped inside. The room was dim, with the curtains drawn, and the figure in the bed looked... off.

Red walked closer, squinting. "Grandmother, I brought you some bread, cheese, and jam," she said, setting the basket down. "And look, I picked these flowers to cheer you up!"

"How sweet of you," said the wolf, trying to sound kind. He adjusted the cap on his head and smiled, showing just a hint of his sharp teeth.

Red tilted her head, picking up on something strange. "Grandmother, what big ears you have!" she said, her voice full of surprise.

"All the better to hear you with, my dear," said the wolf, his ears twitching slightly.

Red took another step closer, her eyes wide. "And Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"All the better to see you with, my dear," the wolf replied, his eyes glinting in the dim light.

Red frowned, starting to catch on. "And... Grandmother, what big teeth you have!"

The wolf couldn't hold back anymore. He threw off the covers and leapt out of bed, grinning from ear to ear. "All the better to eat you with!" he growled, his voice no longer sweet.

Little Red Riding Hood screamed and dropped her flowers. She turned to run, but the wolf was quick. He blocked the door, laughing. "Don't be afraid," he said. "I'm not going to eat you. I just wanted to have a bit of fun and maybe get hold of that delicious food in your basket!"

Red's heart was racing, but she stood her ground. "That's not fair!" she said, her voice shaking but firm. "You tricked me, and you scared my grandmother! Let her go right now!"

The wolf looked surprised. He wasn't used to people standing up to him. Before he could come up with an answer, there was a loud knock at the door. "Who's there?" the wolf growled, suddenly nervous.

"It's me, the woodcutter!" boomed a deep voice. The door swung open, and in stepped a tall man with an axe slung over his shoulder. He was strong as an ox and known in the village for helping out anyone in trouble. He had been passing by when he picked up on Red's scream.

The woodcutter took one look at the wolf in Grandmother's nightgown and knew something was wrong. "What's going on here?" he demanded, gripping his axe.

The wolf's ears drooped, and he backed away. "It was just a joke!" he said quickly. "I didn't mean to mess things up!"

Red ran to the closet and untied her grandmother, who was a bit shaken but unharmed. "Oh, Red, you're so brave," Grandmother said, hugging her tightly. "And thank you, kind woodcutter."

The woodcutter glared at the wolf. "You've stirred up enough trouble," he said. "Get out of here, and don't come back to this village!"

The wolf didn't need to be told twice. He bolted out the door, his tail between his legs, and disappeared into the forest. Red and her grandmother sat down together, relieved. The woodcutter stayed for a while, making sure they were okay. Red told the whole story, from running into the wolf to picking up the flowers, and Grandmother shook her head. "You're a good girl, Red, but you must watch out more. The forest is full of surprises."

They shared the bread, cheese, and jam from the basket, and the flowers looked beautiful in a vase on the table. The woodcutter even joined them for a cup of tea, and they all laughed about how silly the wolf looked in Grandmother's nightgown. "He thought he was so clever," Red said, giggling. "But he wasn't clever enough to get away with it!"

From that day on, Little Red Riding Hood never strayed from the path again, and she was extra careful about chatting with strangers. The wolf was never seen in the village again, though some said he was still out there, trying to come up with new tricks. Red and her grandmother grew even closer, and the red cape became a symbol of her courage and kindness.

And so, the village stayed peaceful, the forest stayed beautiful, and Little Red Riding Hood learned that sometimes, even a kind heart needs to be as wise as an owl. They all lived happily ever after.

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