

FAIRY TALES

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD.

ONCE upon a time there stood a pretty village of neat little cottages, with gardens gay with flowers, and beautiful corn-fields all around. In this village lived a woman who had a pretty little daughter with large dark eyes and long hair falling in golden curls all over her neck. Her cheeks were as rosy as two ripe peaches, her laugh the merriest you would hear on a summer's day; better than all, she was kind and had a gentle heart and obliging manners.

Everyone who knew her liked her; but those who loved her most were her mother and an old, old lady, her grandmother. To show how much she loved the child her granny made her a beautiful cloak of red cloth, with a hood to draw over her head, such

as ladies wore when they rode along the highway in their grand coaches. The little girl looked very nice indeed when she wore this cloak and hood, and as the neighbours saw her tripping along the street, as bright as the sunshine itself, they would say, "Here comes Little Red Riding Hood."

But the poor old grandmother fell sick, and could not go out as usual, but had to lie all alone in bed. And, as some of you know, it is very dreary to be in bed alone and ill. So the mother, who had been making some nice cakes, said to Little Red Riding Hood, "Your grandmother is ill, and I want you to take her a little present. We will find a basket, and put a clean cloth in it, and you shall carry her some of these cakes and a pot of butter."

Nothing pleased Little Red Riding Hood more than to be able to make herself useful to others, but she was specially glad to do something to help her kind grandmother. She was soon ready, and her mother gave her the butter and the little cakes.

It was not a very great way from Little Red Riding Hood's home to the village where her grandmother lived; so her mother thought she might safely send the girl alone. But she

was careful to warn her not to loiter, and to be sure to be home before sunset.

Some woodmen were at work in the forest, cutting down the great fir trees for firewood. Little Red Riding Hood was not in the least afraid of them, for she knew they would not harm her. But soon after passing them she met a great, gaunt, hungry wolf. This cruel animal was more savage than usual, for he had been without his dinner for two days: on the first he had paid a visit to a sheepfold, thinking he would like lamb for dinner, and the watch-dog had caught him and bitten him soundly; on the second day he had ventured to look in at a butcher's shop, where some tempting beef-steaks were hanging; but the butcher had caught him, and the wolf shuddered as he thought of the thrashing he had received.

Master Grizzly was trotting along, with a cunning, crafty look, determined to take advantage of anything that should come in his way, providing it looked good to eat, when who should he see but pretty, chubby Little Red Riding Hood.

Now, the wolf would have liked to spring at the little girl and begin eating her at once

“Good morning, Little Red Riding Hood,”
said the wolf, in a soft, oily way.



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but the woodmen were near, and he could distinctly hear their blows resounding through the wood, reminding him painfully of the butcher's stick. So, like the coward he was, he pretended to be quite different from his real self.

He walked daintily up to Little Red Riding Hood, wagging his head to and fro, nodding and simpering, and trying his best to look kind and innocent. On the whole he succeeded very well; only his eyes were dreadfully green, and glared in a hungry manner; and when he smiled he showed all the great white teeth in his jaws. But Little Red Riding Hood felt no fear: innocent herself, she did not suspect deceit in others.

"Good morning, Little Red Riding Hood," said the wolf, in a soft, oily way.

"Good morning, Master Wolf," answered the child.

"Pray where are you going so early?" asked the wolf, grinning and fawning, and looking more hungry than ever.

"To my granny's," replied Red Riding Hood, wondering why the wolf was so curious.

"And what have you in that basket, little girl?" asked the wolf. He sniffed and snuffed

at the basket; while his mouth and eyes both watered together.

“Some cakes and a pot of butter,” answered the child; and she drew back, thinking that for such a soft-spoken gentleman the wolf had rather rude habits.

“For your granny? The dear old lady! And pray where does she live?” asked the wolf, pretending to take the greatest interest in the matter.

“Beyond the hill,” answered innocent Little Red Riding Hood; “she lives at the first house you come to.”

“Well,” said the wolf, “I don’t mind if I go to see her as well: she will be pleased to see me, I know, the dear soul! and I am very fond of her”—(you can’t think how hungry he looked just then); “so you take this path to the right, and I’ll take the one to the left, and we’ll see which gets there first.”

Now the cunning wolf knew very well he was certain to get first to the house, for he had chosen the shortest way. Not only that, but he had a very certain idea of the wicked thing he was going to do when he got there, and it was a great pity Little Red Riding Hood had spoken to him at all, and

let him know where her poor helpless granny lived.

So long as Red Riding Hood could see him, the wolf trotted soberly along, quite at his ease; but as soon as the child was out of sight, he galloped as hard as he could.

Little Red Riding Hood loitered by the way to pick flowers and make a nosegay for her grandmamma. She stopped every now and then to sing in her light-hearted way; now chasing a butterfly, now searching around for wild strawberries.

Meanwhile the wolf reached the grandmother's cottage. He never stopped to gather flowers or to sing; his only thought was of dinner; and, sad to say, he thought of dinner and the grandmother together.

At the cottage he stopped a moment to get breath after his run; then he knocked at the door, giving two little taps, as Red Riding Hood herself might have done.

"Who's there?" cried the feeble voice of the old dame from within.

"It is your granddaughter, Little Red Riding Hood," answered the wolf; but his voice was husky, and he was out of breath with running, and the old grandmother was

deaf, so she did not understand him very well.

“Who’s there?” cried the feeble voice of the old grandmother again.

“Your granddaughter, Little Red Riding Hood,” replied the wolf. He took great pains to imitate the child’s voice, but did not succeed very well. “I have brought you some cakes and a pot of butter from my mother.”

The old grandmother, as she lay ill in bed, thought her grandchild must have a very bad cold to make her speak in that strange, hoarse voice, but answered :

“Press the latch and the door will open.”

The wolf did as he was bid without a moment’s delay, and rushed into the poor woman’s room ; he was so hungry that he gobbled her up, skin and bone, as easily as a spider would eat a fly. In five minutes there was not a bit of the old lady left, except a wig of false curls she had worn under her nightcap. But the wolf was only half satisfied, and began to long for the arrival of Little Red Riding Hood.

Having carefully shut the door, the wicked rascal dressed himself in the grandmother’s frilled nightcap and shawl, and took her place

in the bed. He pulled the nightcap well down, and drew the bed-clothes well up, so as to show as little as possible of his great hairy face and body. There he lay waiting, his green eyes glaring at the door, and his mouth watering as before.

He had not long to wait before Little Red Riding Hood came, but to the greedy wolf each minute seemed an hour. At last he heard her light footsteps outside the door, and there came a gentle "tap—tap—tap!"

"Who's there?" asked the wolf eagerly—so eagerly, indeed, that he forgot to soften his voice, and set Little Red Riding Hood thinking what a bad cold her granny must have to make her so hoarse. But she never suspected the truth, and replied :

"It is your grandchild, Little Red Riding Hood. I have brought a basket of cakes and a pot of butter from mother."

This time the wolf softened his harsh voice as much as he could, and said :

"Press the latch, my dear, and the door will open."

Little Red Riding Hood did as she was told, giving the latch a light press, as she had often done before. Directly she pressed

the latch the door stood open and she could see right into the room, with its white curtained bed, in which appeared to be an old lady snugly tucked up under the patchwork quilt.

No thought of the wolf was in her mind as she tripped into the room, fresh and rosy with her walk, her natty little basket on one arm, a great nosegay of wild flowers in the other hand.

Now, Little Red Riding Hood had never seen her grandmother except when up and dressed in her day clothes. She was, therefore, greatly surprised to see how funny the old lady looked as she lay tucked up in bed, her face nearly hidden by the frilled night-cap and the bed-clothes.

“Whatever can have made grandmamma’s eyes so green?” she thought, as she stepped forward timidly to show the old lady the cakes.

You can fancy what a tiny mouth-full a small cake appeared to the wicked creature in the bed. You might as well offer thin bread and butter to a shark. But the cunning brute was too wily to let the child see this: he simply took a cake, and nibbled it slowly, with the air of a person whose appetite was delicate.

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Presently the pretended grandmother appeared to be very ill with spasms, and moaned and kicked terribly under the bed-clothes. Little Red Riding Hood, very alarmed, asked what she could do to ease the pain, and the wolf, in a feeble voice, said, "Get into bed with your granny. I am too ill to get up and talk to you, dearie!"

To please her, Little Red Riding Hood began to undress, though she was rather surprised at being told to go to bed in broad daylight. But as she undid her cloak she could not help being puzzled again that her granny should look so strange and different.

"Granny," she said, "what great, rough arms you have!"

"The better to hug you, my dear," said the wolf in a squeaky voice.

"But, granny, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear what you say, my dear," came the voice from the bed.

"But, granny, what fierce green eyes you have!"

"The better to see you with, my dear!" said the wolf, throwing off the nightcap and grinning so that the child could see right down his throat.

“But what a big mouth you have, and what large, ugly teeth!”

“The better to gobble you up!” snarled the wolf, and, throwing off the clothes, he sprang from the bed.

Poor Little Red Riding Hood, realising her danger at last, shrieked and shrieked and ran to the farthest corner of the room.

The wolf dashed after her, and she would soon have shared the fate of her granny; but at that moment the door was dashed open, and in burst one of the woodmen she had passed as she came through the forest.

Noticing that she had not returned, and fearing the tricks of the wicked wolf, he had hastened after her and was only just in time.

Down came his great axe on the wolf's head. A single blow from that strong arm was enough, and Little Red Riding Hood was saved.

Afterwards the brave woodman took her home, and when the story had been told you can fancy how pleased her mother was to hold her in her arms. As for Red Riding Hood, she soon ceased to be “little,” but never afterwards did she speak to a wolf or any other bad character she could possibly avoid.