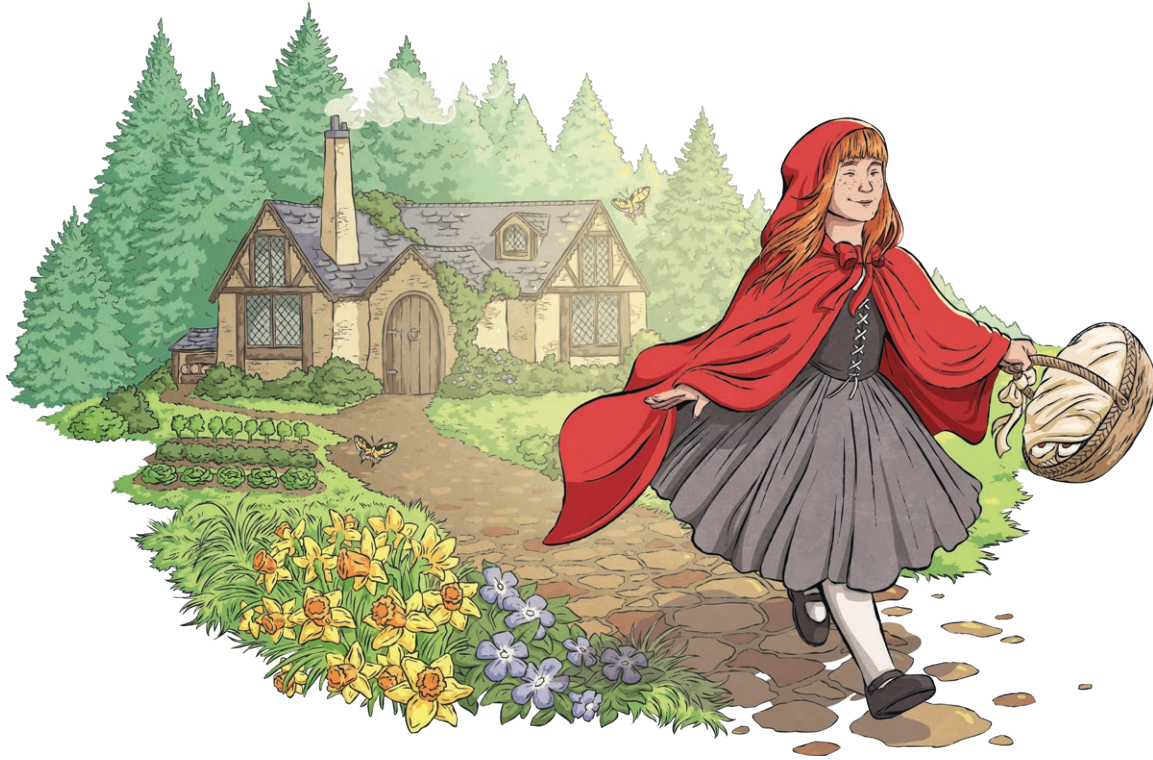


Twist the Text: The Little Red Riding Hood Collection

Traditional Tale



Once upon a time (and a very fine time it was), a girl called Red lived with her mother, in a cottage on the outskirts of a great forest.

On this particular spring day, Mother took a batch of fresh cupcakes from the oven and placed them on the table, where they steamed gently.

“Little Red!” shouted Mother, banging her rolling pin on the table. “Little Red! Time to get up.”

It was nearly noon and Red had only just woken up. She leapt out of bed, knowing that her mother would be cross. “Coming, Mother!” she called as she hurtled down the stairs.

Red smelt the cupcakes before she saw them: sweet, buttery and delicious. As she bounced into the kitchen, she imagined sinking her teeth through the soft sponge for a huge bite. She reached out to take one, but her mother stilled her hand with one look.

“These smell delicious,” said Red, backing away. “You’ve been busy, Mother. Who are they for?”

“They’re for Granny, so keep your mucky fingers off. I didn’t raise you to steal from little old ladies. Why, your poor granny lives alone in the forest, surrounded by fearsome creatures. The least I can do is bake her a cupcake or two every now and then.”

“I wouldn’t dream of touching Granny’s cupcakes,” Red reassured her mother, but her stomach rumbled greedily.

Red was always hungry. She thought that it might have something to do with the way that she was growing. She knew that she was getting taller from one week to the next, because of

the hooded cape that her granny had knitted her. The cape was red – just like her name. Each time she put it on, the cape's hem hung a little higher on her legs.

Mother huffed and put her hands on her hips.

"Now, you're to take the cupcakes straight to Granny's," she said, piling them into a wicker basket. "No dilly-dallying, keep to the path, and never ever talk to strangers. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Mother." With a sigh, Red took the basket and hurried from the kitchen into the glorious spring sunshine.



As she skipped merrily through the sun-dappled forest, Little Red's hazel eyes sparkled and her bright red cape swung just above her ankles. Her red hair shone in the afternoon sun and her small, freckled nose wrinkled as she smiled cheerfully at her woodland friends: the rabbits and birds. The birds flitted about, carrying sticks for their nests, and the bluebells beside the path nodded contentedly to themselves. Occasionally, Red would pause and lightly touch the petals of the wildflowers with her dainty fingers as she stopped to smell them. It was a warm day, nearly summer, and it was hard to believe that anything fearsome lived in these woods.

A soft breeze blew and the blossom shook on the trees. It was the perfect day for a picnic. Red thought longingly of the cupcakes in her basket.

In fact, she was so busy thinking about cupcakes that she didn't spot a shadowy figure leaning against a tree trunk.

"Hello, little girl," oozed a silky voice.

Red jumped. "Who are you?"

"I'm Mr Wolf," replied the wolf. He was a very fine-looking gentleman with thick hair, bright eyes and very big, white teeth. "My, what a gorgeous day it is. Don't you just love the fragrant smell of the flowers? The twittering of the birds?"

Red blushed. Suddenly, her cape felt too tight around her neck. "I didn't think that wolves would like birds and flowers," she stammered.

"My dear, I simply adore them! I am a wolf of great taste, you know. Where might you be off to on this fine morning?"

"I'm visiting my granny." Red felt flustered. Mother had told her not to speak to strangers, but Mr Wolf seemed a very respectable and charming sort of person.

"Oh, yes, I know your granny," said the wolf. "Old woman? Stooped? Grey hair?"

"That's her," breathed Red, sighing with relief. If Mr Wolf knew Granny, then he wasn't a stranger after all.

"Yes, she lives in a..." Mr Wolf waved a claw in the air as if it were just on the tip of his tongue.

"Wooden cottage," suggested Red, to help him out.

"That's right, next to the..."

"Horse chestnut tree."

"Of course, not far from the..."

"Stream," Red finished. She was impressed. Mr Wolf must have visited Granny's many times to remember so much about it. "I'm meant to be bringing her this basket of cakes, but they do smell so delicious, and it's so hard not to simply gobble them all up."

"I know that feeling," smiled the wolf.

"After all, I haven't had any breakfast yet."

"Well, why don't you stop for a picnic?" asked Mr Wolf. "There's a lovely spot over there." He pointed to a sunny clearing, crowded with daffodils.

"But they're meant to be for Granny," explained Red. "Anyway, Mother told me not to dilly-dally, or to leave the path."

"Oh, that clearing's quite safe," the wolf assured her. "I'm sure that your granny won't mind. Not if you pick her a big bunch of flowers to make up for it."

Red's stomach gurgled. The thought of eating cupcakes in the sun was too tempting to resist.

"Yes, you're right," agreed Red. "Thank you, Mr Wolf. I never knew that wolves were so kind."

"My pleasure," growled the wolf, and with a bow, he stalked off down the path.

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As he stalked, Mr Wolf licked his lips. That plump, foolish child had fallen for his trick. As soon as she was out of sight, he raced along the path to the wooden cottage, next to the horse chestnut tree, not far from the stream. His belly rumbled greedily. He was getting double helpings today.



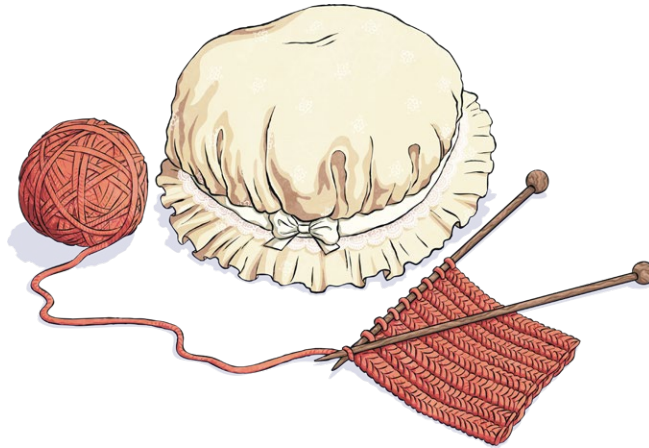
The wolf scurried up to the cottage door on tiptoes, so as not to alarm Granny.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Who is it?” quavered a frail voice from inside.

“It’s me, Granny! It’s your granddaughter,” said Mr Wolf in a high, squeaking voice.

“The door’s unlocked, dear,” Granny called out. The wolf lifted the latch.



Granny didn’t have time to scream. She didn’t even have time to drop her knitting. The wolf leapt, and with a snap and a gulp, he swallowed her whole.

Red sat down amid the daffodils to eat. She ate one cupcake, and it was just as delicious as she had hoped. Then, before she could stop herself, she had reached for another and taken a big bite.

After polishing off three cupcakes, Red gathered a huge bunch of flowers, tucked them into her basket and carried on down the path.

At last, she saw Granny’s wooden cottage. She dashed up the path and skidded to a stop outside the door.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Who is it?” quavered a frail voice from inside.

“It’s me, Granny. It’s your granddaughter.”

“The door’s unlocked, dear.”

Red lifted the latch and hurried in.

Inside, Granny’s cottage looked much as it always did: an empty cup of tea sat on the table and some half-finished knitting lay draped over her rocking chair. But one thing was not the same. Instead of bustling by the sink or click-clacking her knitting needles, Granny was tucked up in bed.

"Granny!" gasped Red, dropping the basket and running to the bedside. "You're sick."

Granny was so ill that the quilt was drawn right up over her nose, and her nightcap was pulled right down almost to her eyes. Her fingers gripped the top of the quilt like they were clinging on for dear life.

"Terribly sick. Come closer, my dear, and kiss your poor old granny."

So Red approached the bed and bent to kiss her grandmother... but something stopped her.

"Oh, Granny, what big eyes you have!" remarked Red, and it was true. They were huge and round and strangely yellow. Red was sure that her granny must be very ill.

"All the better to see you with, my dear," croaked Granny from under the quilt – and that's when one long ear popped out from under her nightcap.

"Oh, Granny, what big ears you have!" said Red. She wondered if she should call for the doctor at once.

"All the better to hear you with," croaked Granny, and this time, the quilt slipped down to reveal a muzzle with long, sharp teeth. Red trembled.

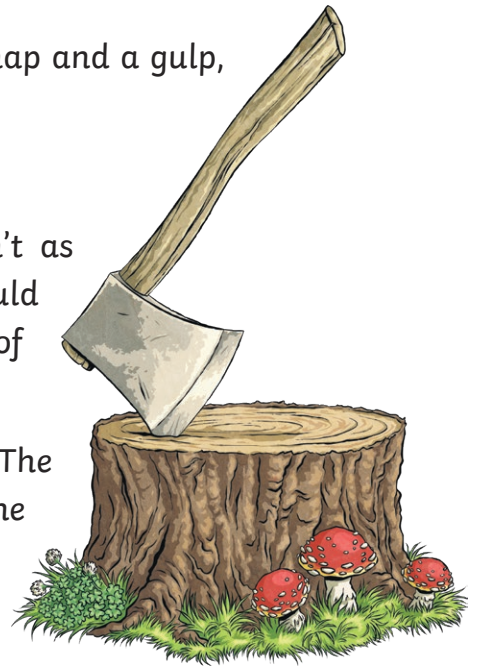
"Oh, Granny, what big teeth you have!" stuttered Red.

"All the better to *eat you with!*" roared the wolf, and with a snap and a gulp, he swallowed her whole.

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The woodcutter was getting on in years. Although he wasn't as spry as he once was and his joints creaked as he walked, he could still swing an axe, still whistle a tune, and still feel flutters of affection in his heart when he saw a pretty face.

One pretty face made his heart flutter more than any other. The lovely lady in question was a widow who lived alone in the forest. She loved to knit and baked the most delicious cakes, and though she was no spring chicken herself, to the woodcutter, her beauty was timeless. He would find any excuse he could to pay her a visit.



The woodcutter straightened his shirt, shouldered his axe and stepped up to the cottage door. *Knock, knock, knock.*

He waited. Any moment he would hear, as he always did, her musical voice call, 'Who is it?' But he heard only silence.

All at once, he was struck with fear. What if something had happened to her? He lifted the

latch and threw the door open.

"Anyone home? It's only me, the woodcutter!"

For a moment, he stared at the scene inside. Everything looked much as it always did. There was even a basket of cakes and flowers, as if the lady's granddaughter, Red, had paid her a visit. But one thing was very, very wrong.

On the bed lay a figure in a frilly nightgown and cap. It had big ears and furry hands and sharp, white teeth.

It only took the woodcutter a moment to work out what had happened.

"You beast!" he roared, raising his axe. The wolf's eyes shot open, but before he had time to scream or roll away, the woodcutter's axe swished down and sliced his belly open.



Out jumped Granny and Red.

"You saved us!" they cried, and they threw their arms around the woodcutter. Granny even gave him a kiss on the cheek, which made him blush.

The woodcutter held the wolf down while Red filled his belly with rocks. Finally, Granny sewed him up. The stones rattled inside the wolf as he stood up.

"How am I supposed to eat?" cried the wolf. "The whole forest will hear me coming!"

"That'll teach you to eat an old lady," Granny muttered to the groaning wolf. "Now, be off with you, and don't come back."

The wolf, clutching onto his full belly, limped from the cottage as quickly as he could. He hobbled out into the forest without a second glance back at Granny's cottage.

"What I want to know is, how on earth did he find you?" asked the woodcutter, cleaning his axe.

"I met him in the forest," explained Red, and she explained all about how the wolf had tricked her into telling him where Granny lived.

"But, Red, hasn't your mother ever told you not to speak to strangers?" asked Granny in disbelief.

"Oh, mother tells me all sorts of things. Not to dilly-dally... not to leave the path... I don't know what she thinks might happen."

"Perhaps she thinks that you'll be eaten by a wolf," remarked the woodcutter.

"Oh!" said Red, as it dawned on her that the woodcutter was right. "I suppose she might have a point. Oh, Granny, I almost forgot! Mother sent you a basket of cupcakes."

So, Granny boiled the kettle and between them, Red, Granny and the woodcutter ate up the delicious cupcakes that Red's mother had baked...

...and they all lived happily ever after.

