





*It's cold and gloomy outside, but in the attic it is cosy, warm and safe. With piping hot tea and a plate of scones, the day seems brighter in here somehow. Best of all, there are many books, stacked in tall, higgledy piles – so many places to explore.*

*This old book, a collection of classic tales, is my favourite. I love dressing up and acting out the stories: tiny Thumbelina flying on a bird's back, Alice taking on the Queen of Hearts, dear Little Red venturing out into the forest... No matter how many times I've read these stories before, I still feel as if I'm reading them for the first time, with me in the main role ... out in the woods, deep in the story.*

*Ah, and first is the story of Little Red Riding Hood. The forest is a wonderful place, alive with trees and flowers and birds. But there's a sense of danger there, too. Maybe that's what I find so intriguing about this tale...*





*Little Red*





nce upon a time there was a sweet little girl who lived with her father and mother in a pretty cottage surrounded by flowers at the edge of a large forest. At the farthest end of the wood was another cottage. This one was covered in glossy ivy; birds fluttered at its windows, and daisies grew in the front garden. It was here that the girl's grandmother lived.

The little girl was loved by all, for she smiled often, and was generous and kind. Grandmother surely loved her more than anyone, and gave her many pretty things. She sewed her granddaughter a beautiful red cloak with a hood that the girl always wore, so people called her Little Red Riding Hood, or Little Red for short.



One morning, Little Red's mother said to her, "Put on your cloak and take this basket to Grandmother. She is ill, so I've made her some cakes, bread, butter and jam. Go now, and take care in the wood. Stick to the path between the trees."

"I will take great care," promised Little Red.

It was a bright and sunny morning. Little Red Riding Hood was happy to have a chance to walk through the wood. She loved the flowers and birds and woodland creatures. A friendly fox swished his bushy tail at her ankles as she stopped to pick a bunch of wildflowers for her grandmother. The flowers along the path were trampled, but Little Red spotted some especially beautiful ones between the trees beyond.



Little Red had stooped to pick a pretty flower when she heard a gruff voice behind her: "Good morning, Little Red Riding Hood."

Little Red turned around and saw a great big wolf! He had long sharp teeth, large black eyes and a very shaggy coat. But



Little Red did not know what a wicked beast the wolf was, so she was not afraid.

“What have you got in that basket, Little Red Riding Hood?” the wolf enquired. When he spoke, it sounded like a deep growl.

“Cakes, bread, butter and jam,” answered the little girl sweetly. She lifted the cloth covering the basket to show him.

“Where are you going with them, my dear?” asked the wolf.

“I am going to visit my grandmother, who is ill,” she replied.

“Where does your grandmother live, Little Red Riding Hood?” What a curious wolf he was!

“Along that path, past those wild poppies, then through the gate at the end of the wood. She lives in the pretty little cottage with ivy growing on it and daisies by the door.”



*This girl is such a tender young creature!* the wolf thought to himself. *She will be better to eat than the dry old woman. I must act craftily so as to catch both.*

He walked a short while beside Little Red and then said, “There are even prettier flowers over there beyond that tree.



You must look further if you would like to pick the best ones.” The wolf then said, “Good morning,” and set off for Grandmother’s cottage.

Little Red continued her search for flowers, and on the wolf’s advice went deeper and deeper into the wood. She did



indeed want to take dear Grandmother the loveliest bouquet. After a while, though, she felt tired, so she sat down on a tree stump. Her grandmother’s little grey cat appeared through the trees and jumped onto her lap.

Meanwhile, at the farthest edge of the wood, the wolf had reached Grandmother’s house. It matched Little Red’s description exactly. He banged on the front door.

“Who is it?” called the grandmother.

The wolf tried to speak as sweetly as he could. “It’s Little Red Riding Hood, Grandmother.”

“Come in, my dear,” said the grandmother. “I am too ill to get out of bed.”



The wolf stepped inside and found the grandmother in her bedroom. When she saw the wolf, Grandmother became very frightened. She jumped out of bed, dropping her nightcap, and tried to run away. But the wolf was too quick, and he gobbled her up!

The wolf put on the nightcap, crept under the bedclothes, and waited...

In a short while, Little Red Riding Hood arrived at her grandmother's cottage. As the girl crossed the lawn, she saw some striped socks hanging on the washing line. By the front door, she noticed that some of Grandmother's pretty daisies had been trampled.



Little Red knocked on the door, but there was no answer, so she went inside. "Good morning, Grandmother," she said. "I have brought you cakes, bread, butter and jam, and here are some flowers I gathered in the wood."

A croaky voice called, "Come here, my dear, for I am too ill to get out of bed."



When Little Red Riding Hood saw her grandmother, she said, “What big ears you have!”

“All the better to hear you with, my dear.”

“What big eyes you have, Grandmother!”

“All the better to see you with, my dear.”

“But, Grandmother, what a big nose you have!” said the startled girl.

“All the better to smell you with, my dear.”

“But, Grandmother, what a big mouth you have!”

“All the better to eat you up with, my dear!” the wolf cried as he sprang at Little Red. He swallowed her down in one large gulp.

His appetite appeased, the wolf lay down again on the bed. Soon he was asleep and snoring very loudly, very content.

It happened that a huntsman passed by the house. He heard the wolf’s snoring and, thinking it was the poor, sick grandmother, knocked on the door to see if she needed anything. He tried the door and it was unlocked, so he went inside. There he saw the wolf lying in the grandmother’s bed.



“What do we have here?” he wondered. He knew immediately that the wolf was a very wicked creature. “You have eaten that dear, sweet grandmother. You have gobbled her up!”

The wolf, who was very tired after his heavy meal, did not stir. The huntsman took up a pair of scissors and carefully cut open the stomach of the sleeping wolf so that the grandmother might be saved. He made two snips, and out popped Little Red.

“Oh, how frightened I have been,” she said. “That wolf swallowed me in one big bite. How dark it was inside his belly!”

The huntsman made two snips more, and out came Little Red’s dear grandmother. She was shaken, but Little Red comforted her with some of the sweet treats she had brought along.

The grandmother recovered her spirits and then hugged Little Red tight, for her dearest granddaughter was safe.

When Little Red was sure that Grandmother was well, she went outside and collected six large mushrooms. She carried them to the huntsman, who was standing guard by the sleeping wolf.





“Put these inside his belly,” Little Red said to the huntsman.  
“And sew him up. Then he will not know that we are free.”

The huntsman did as Little Red bid.

No sooner had he sewn the last stitch than the wolf awoke. Little Red hid so the wolf would not see her. The huntsman waved his axe and the wolf growled before leaping out of the window and disappearing into the forest.

Little Red did not know that the mushrooms she had picked were poisonous. Soon the wicked wolf sickened and died.

In the cottage, the huntsman, Little Red and her grandmother all sat down to celebrate and enjoy the cakes and bread that Little Red’s mother had sent. As they ate, Little Red thought to herself, *I will never leave the path to run into the wood when my mother has forbidden me to do so.*

Little Red visited her grandmother many times from that day on, but she always stuck to the path.

THE END





*Oh, what a wonderful story, and so deliciously frightening.  
In this world of varied dangers, we are all Little Reds,  
and we are wise to beware...*