

Little Red Cap

*Germany*³⁰

Once upon a time there was a sweet little girl. Everyone who saw her loved her, especially her grandmother who just couldn't give the child enough. Her grandmother once gave her a little cap of red velvet. It suited her so well and she wore it so often, she was called Little Red Cap.

One day her mother said to her, "Come, Little Red Cap, here is a piece of cake and a bottle of wine. Take them over to Grandmother. She is sick and weak and they will make her feel better. Be good, be polite, and say hello from me. Go the way you're supposed to and don't leave the path, or you'll fall and break the bottle and Grandmother will have nothing." Little Red Cap promised to be good.

The grandmother lived in the forest, half an hour from the village. In the woods a wolf came up to Little Red Cap. She didn't know what an evil animal he was and she wasn't afraid of him.

"Good day, Little Red Cap."

"Thank you and you too, Wolf."

"Where are you going so early, Little Red Cap?"

"To grandmother's house."

"What are you carrying under your apron?"

"My grandmother is sick and weak. To help her get stronger I'm taking her some wine and some cake we baked yesterday."

"Little Red Cap, where does your grandmother live?"

"Further into the forest another fifteen minutes or so. Her house is next to some hazelnut bushes under the three large oak trees. Surely you know the place," said Little Red Cap.

The wolf thought to himself, This is my lucky day! But how can I manage this so that I trap her. He said, "Little Red Cap, haven't you seen how lovely the flowers are here in the woods? Why aren't you looking around? Why, I don't think you even hear how sweetly the little birds are singing. You're marching straight ahead as if you were going to school in the village, but it's so beautiful out here in the forest."

Little Red Cap opened up her eyes and saw how the sunbeams broke through between the trees and beautiful flowers blossomed everywhere. She thought, If I brought Grandmother a bouquet of fresh flowers, she'd like that. It's so early in the day, I'll still arrive in plenty of time. She ran

into the forest and searched for flowers. As she picked one flower, it seemed that another prettier one was growing further off and she ran to pick that one, going deeper, always deeper into the forest. The wolf, however, went straight to the grandmother's house and knocked on the door.

"Who is there?"

"It's Little Red Cap. I'm bringing you cake and wine, let me in."

"Just push the handle down," called the grandmother, "I am too weak and can't get up."

The wolf pushed the handle down. The door swung open. He entered, went straight to the grandmother's bed and swallowed her up. He then put on her clothes, put on her cap, lay in her bed and pulled the curtains closed.

Little Red Cap skipped here and there picking flowers. She picked flowers until she had so many she couldn't hold any more. Only after that did she set off toward grandmother's house. Little Red Cap found it odd that the door stood open. As she stepped into the room, it seemed so eerie she thought, Oh, my goodness, how frightened I feel and usually I love to be with Grandmother! Little Red Cap went to the bed and pulled back the curtains. There lay the grandmother with her cap pulled low over her face. She looked so strange. "Oh, Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with."

"Oh, Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"The better to see you with."

"Oh, Grandmother, what big hands you have!"

"The better to grab you with!"

"But, Grandmother, what a horribly big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with!" At that the wolf leaped out of the bed and swallowed poor Little Red Cap.

Satisfied, the wolf lay back down in bed, fell asleep and began to snore very loudly. A hunter walked past the house and thought, How the old woman is snoring! I'd better see if she's okay. He stepped into the room and walked over to the bed. There he saw the wolf he'd long been searching for. The hunter thought, The wolf's definitely eaten the grandmother, but maybe she can still be saved, I won't shoot. Then, he took some scissors and cut open the wolf's stomach. After he had made a couple of snips, he saw a little red cap shining, a few more snips and the girl sprang out and shouted, "Oh, how frightened I was. How dark it was inside the wolf's body!" Then the old grandmother also came out alive.

Little Red Cap fetched large, heavy stones to put into the wolf's stomach. When the wolf awoke, he tried to leap up and run away but the

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stones were so heavy that he fell right back down dead. Then all three were happy. The hunter took the wolf's skin. The grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine which Little Red Cap had brought. Little Red Cap thought, Never again will I go off the path and run into the forest all alone when Mother has forbidden it.


It is also said that Little Red Cap took cake to her old grandmother again. When another wolf spoke to her and wanted to lure her off the path, Little Red Cap was on her guard. She walked straight ahead. She told her grandmother that she had seen a wolf. He had wished her good day, but his eyes had stared so wickedly that, "If I hadn't been out in the open on the road, he would have gobbled me up."

"Come," said the grandmother, "We'll lock the door, so he can't get in."

Shortly thereafter the wolf knocked on the door and called out, "Open up Grandmother, it's Little Red Cap. I'm bringing you some cake."

The grandmother and Little Red Cap kept still and didn't open the door. Then the wicked wolf prowled around the house a few times and finally leaped up onto the roof. He planned to wait until Little Red Cap went home in the evening. Then he would sneak after her and, in the darkness, devour her. However, the grandmother knew what the wolf had in mind.

Now, in front of the house stood a large stone trough. "Get the bucket, Little Red Cap. Yesterday I cooked sausages. Carry the water in which they were cooked and pour it into the trough." Little Red Cap carried water until the big, big trough was completely full. The aroma of sausages wafted up into the wolf's nose. He sniffed and peered down. Finally he stretched so far out that he could no longer hold on and he began to slip. He slid down off the roof into the large trough and he drowned. Then Little Red Cap went home safely and merrily.

 This version of "Little Red Riding Hood" keeps the ending from the first edition of Grimms' *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (1812) where Little Red Cap goes through the woods a second time. This time, she recognizes the danger and doesn't speak to the wolf. She asks her grandmother's advice. She carries water until the big, big trough is completely full. These paragraphs change Little Red Riding Hood from a victim into a heroine. This Little Red Riding Hood is different from the others who just get eaten and rescued and admonished not to talk to strangers. In the complete Grimms' folktale, Little Red Cap goes home "safely and merrily" not because the hunter rescues her, but because she has learned to recognize and deal with danger.

One of the strengths of oral literature is that over centuries the stories are worked

out between the storytellers and the audiences. Once folktales are written down, an editor can change details, story lines, and even story endings, to conform to the editor's ideas without reference to the audience. In the case of Grimms' "Little Red Cap," editor after editor of children's books has chosen not to include the Grimms' ending. In the twenty different picture book editions in seventy libraries in my local area, not one included the key ending paragraphs. To a male editor, this ending might seem like an anti-climax since he's already eaten the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood and then rescued them as the hunter. Maybe female editors were too used to the story as they had heard it in their own childhood. When I told my three-year-old daughter the complete Grimms' story, she was so excited she acted out many times the way Little Red Riding Hood confidently walked past the second wolf without speaking to him. This is precisely the part that has been edited out! To a live, vocal, female, three-year-old audience, this ending made all the difference.³¹

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