

Little Red Riding Hood (1697)

By Charles Perrault¹ (France)

Translated from the French by Maria Tatar

Once upon a time there was a village girl, the prettiest you can imagine. Her mother adored her. Her grandmother adored her even more and made a little red hood for her. The hood suited the child so much that everywhere she went she was known by the name Little Red Riding Hood.

One day, her mother baked some cakes and said to her: "I want you to go and see how your grandmother is faring, for I've heard that she's ill. Take her some cakes and this little pot of butter."

Little Red Riding Hood left right away for her grandmother's house, which was in another village. As she was walking through the woods she met old Neighbor Wolf, who wanted to eat her right there on the spot. But he didn't dare because some woodcutters were in the forest. He asked where she was going. The poor child, who did not know that it was dangerous to stop and listen to wolves, said: "I'm going to see my grandmother and am taking her some cakes and a little pot of butter sent by my mother."

"Does she live very far away?" asked the wolf.

"Oh, yes," said Little Red Riding Hood. "She lives beyond the mill² that you can see over there. Hers is the first house you come to in the village."

"Well, well," said the wolf. "I think I shall go and see her too. I'll take the path over here, and you take the path over there, and we'll see who gets there first."

The wolf ran as fast as he could on the shorter path, and the little girl continued on her way along the longer path. She had a good time gathering nuts, chasing butterflies, and picking bunches of flowers that she found.



illustration by Gustave Doré (1867)

¹ Though the text is by Perrault, he is not the originator of the story. This is the first complete printed version, but variants of the story are known to have circulated in France as early as the late Middle Ages. Like all the stories in Perrault's *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals* (*Histoires ou Contes du Temps passé*)-- subtitled *Tales of Mother Goose* (*Les Contes de ma Mère l'Oye*), "Little Red Riding Hood" is an adaptation of a story from the French oral tradition.

² a building equipped with machinery for grinding grain into flour

The wolf did not take long to get to Grandmother's house. He knocked: Rat-a-tat-tat.

"Who's there?"

"It's your granddaughter, Little Red Riding Hood," said the wolf, disguising his voice. "And I'm bringing you some cake and a little pot of butter sent by my mother."

The dear grandmother, who was in bed because she was not feeling well, called out: "Pull the bolt and the latch will open."

The wolf pulled the bolt, and the door opened wide. He threw himself on the good woman and devoured her in no time, for he had eaten nothing in the last three days. Then he closed the door and lay down on Grandmother's bed, waiting for Little Red Riding Hood, who, before long, came knocking at the door: Rat-a-tat-tat.

"Who's there?"

Little Red Riding Hood was afraid at first when she heard the gruff voice of the wolf, but thinking that her grandmother must have caught cold, she said: "It's your granddaughter, Little Red Riding Hood, and I'm bringing you some cake and a little pot of butter sent by my mother."

The wolf tried to soften his voice as he called out to her: "Pull the bolt and the latch will open."

Little Red Riding Hood pulled the bolt, and the door opened wide. When the wolf saw her come in, he hid under the covers of the bed and said: "Put the cakes and the little pot of butter on the bin and climb into bed with me."

Little Red Riding Hood took off her clothes and climbed into the bed. She was astonished to see what her grandmother looked like in her nightgown.

"Grandmother," she said, "What big arms you have!"

"The better to hug you with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big legs you have!"

"The better to run with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big ears you have!"

"The better to hear with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big eyes you have!"

"The better to see with, my child."

"Grandmother, what big teeth you have!"

"The better to eat you with!"

Upon saying these words, the wicked wolf threw himself on Little Red Riding Hood and gobbled her up.



illustration by Gustave Doré (1867)

Moral:

From this story one learns that children,
Especially young girls,
Pretty, well-bred, and genteel,
Are wrong to listen to just anyone,
And it's not at all strange,
If a wolf ends up eating them.
I say a wolf, but not all wolves
Are exactly the same.
Some are perfectly charming,
Not loud, brutal, or angry,
But tame, pleasant, and gentle,
Following young ladies
Right into their homes, into their chambers,
But watch out if you haven't learned that tame wolves
Are the most dangerous of all.



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