

## **The Wolf's Tale**

Yesterday I was mooching round the outskirts of the village hoping something tasty might be lying about. I disliked going near the place, but I am old now, so hunting is difficult, and I am not above taking someone's leftovers. I had just found a nice piece of chicken when I heard through an open window, a father reading to his daughter. The story? Little Red Riding Hood of course. As I listened to that tissue of lies, something snapped, and I decided that it was more than time for the true story to be told.

It is a long time ago now. I was young and trying to find my feet in the forest. My mother had been killed when I was still a cub and I had been fostered by the rest of the pack. I became independent which, together with my strange ability to speak human language, made me an outsider – I became the proverbial lone wolf. This meant I got few shares of the packs' kills, but I was strong and killed carefully. Despite being able to understand them, I kept away from humans and the village on the edge of the forest, but I was intrigued by a nice-looking old woman who lived by herself in a cottage further into the forest. She fed the birds and the small animals that came to her pretty garden, happily sharing her excellent vegetables. One day while I was watching from behind a tree so as not to frighten her, I saw that she had fallen and got her foot stuck under a branch. She was distressed and afraid that no one would find her, so I jumped over the fence and said quickly: 'Do not be afraid, I have come to help you'. She did not seem at all surprised and said gratefully, 'Oh could you Wolf? I am not strong enough to free my foot'. I set too and managed with a lot of effort to tug the branch away and sat with her while she rubbed her ankle and collected herself together. She got to her feet by leaning

on me and asked me into the house. She made herself a cup of tea and gave me a bowl of milk and a piece of delicious bread.

After this, I would visit her regularly; I told her about the pack, we talked about the other creatures of the forest and she told me stories about her family, in particular her granddaughter, who was known to everyone as 'Little Red Riding Hood' on account of a hooded cloak she had made for her. The dear child, she said, would come and see her from time to time, but I could see that the family did not visit often enough. I loved this woman, so when, one day, there was no sign of her in the garden, I was worried. I pushed open the door she never locked. It did not take me long to find her in her bed, still and cold – she must have died peacefully in her sleep. I sat and howled for a long time, but there was no one to hear me and after a while I wandered off without really looking where I was going. I had not gone very far when I heard a childish voice singing nursery rhymes and there in a clearing, was my friend's red-hooded granddaughter. 'Little Red Riding Hood, what are you doing alone in the forest?' I asked. She appeared unsurprised by my question and said cheerfully 'I am on my way to see grandma with some treats in my little basket. Mummy says she hasn't been very well and I thought I would pick her some of these pretty flowers'. 'It is not safe for you to go any further' I said. 'You must go back at once', but she insisted that she would be quite safe and had to see her grandma. I tried everything I could think of, but could not quite bring myself to show my teeth and scare her. Thinking that it would be a horrid shock for her to discover her dead grandmother on her own, I hatched a stupid plan. I raced ahead of her, went into the little house, tugged my poor friend out of her bed and hid her body behind a chair. By the time Red Riding Hood arrived, I was under the bed covers with my head almost entirely wrapped in a shawl. I called hoarsely to her to come in, croaked that my throat was dreadfully sore,

and begged her to go and fetch her parents. She hesitated, but I must have allowed something of myself to appear for she became scared, quickly turned tail and fled. I leapt up and tried to get the body back into the bed, but it was beyond me so I straightened her tidily where she would be seen and left. Sadly, I was spotted by the blasted woodcutter who cursed me whenever he set eyes on me so I might have known that he would tell the world that I had killed my friend, had eaten her and Little Red Riding Hood, with them both being rescued from my stomach by his brave self. I do not altogether blame Red Riding Hood, she was young and with everyone calling her a heroine, it must have been a confusing and stressful time for her, but she was a tiresome brat, and she could have done more to tell the real story. The pack protected me and though I had to endure a lot of jokes about the capacity of my stomach, and I became less of a loner, but I have never stopped missing my dear friend.

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