

Little Red Riding Hood

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"**Little Red Riding Hood**", or "**Little Red Ridinghood**", also known as "**Little Red Cap**" or simply "**Red Riding Hood**", is a European fairy tale about a young girl and a Big Bad Wolf.^[1] The story has been changed considerably in its history and subject to numerous modern adaptations and readings. The story was first published by Charles Perrault.^[2]

This story is number 333 in the Aarne-Thompson classification system for folktales.^[3]



Little Red Riding Hood (1881) by Carl Larsson

Contents

- 1 Tale
 - 1.1 Relationship to other tales
- 2 Tale's history
 - 2.1 Earliest versions
 - 2.2 Charles Perrault
 - 2.3 Grimm Brothers
 - 2.4 After the Grimms
- 3 Interpretations
 - 3.1 Natural cycles
 - 3.2 Rite
 - 3.3 Rebirth
 - 3.4 Norse myth
- 4 Modern uses and adaptations

Little Red Riding Hood

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The version found in *The Book of Fables and Folk Stories* by Horace E. Scudder.

Problems playing this file? See media help.

- 5 See also
- 6 References
- 7 External links

Tale

The story revolves around a girl called Little Red Riding Hood. In the Grimms' and Perrault's versions of the tale, she is named after the red hooded cape/cloak that she wears. The girl walks through the woods to deliver food to her sickly grandmother (wine and cake depending on the translation). In the Grimms' version, she had the order from her mother to stay strictly on the path.

A Big Bad Wolf wants to eat the girl and the food in the basket. He secretly stalks her behind trees, bushes, shrubs, and patches of little and tall grass. He approaches Little Red Riding Hood and she naïvely tells him where she is going. He suggests that the girl pick some flowers; which she does. In the meantime; he goes to the grandmother's house and gains entry by pretending to be the girl. He swallows the grandmother whole (in some stories, he locks her in the closet) and waits for the girl, disguised as the grandma.

When the girl arrives, she notices that her grandmother looks very strange. Little Red then says, "What a deep voice you have!" ("The better to greet you with"), "Goodness, what big eyes you have!" ("The better to see you with"), "And what big hands you have!" ("The better to hug/grab you with"), and lastly, "What a big mouth you have" ("The better to eat you with!"), at which point the wolf jumps out of bed, and eats her up too. Then he falls asleep. In Charles Perrault's version of the story (the first version to be published), the tale ends here. However, in later versions the story continues generally as follows:

A woodcutter (in the French version but in the Brothers Grimm and traditional German versions, it was a hunter) comes to the rescue and with his axe cuts open the sleeping wolf. Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother emerge unharmed. They then fill the wolf's body with heavy stones. The wolf awakens and tries to flee, but the stones cause him to collapse and die (Sanitized versions of the story have the grandmother shut in the closet instead of eaten, and some have Little Red Riding Hood saved by the lumberjack as the wolf advances on her rather than after she is eaten where the woodcutter kills the wolf with his axe).^[4]

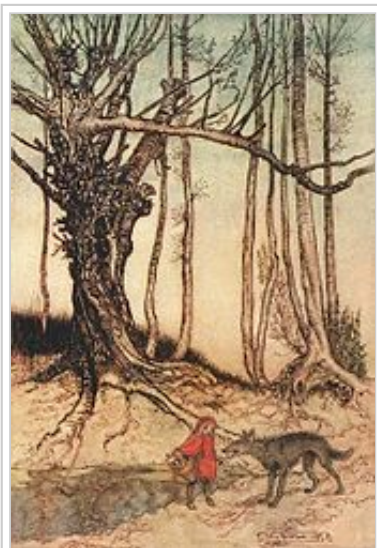
The tale makes the clearest contrast between the safe world of the village and the dangers of the forest, conventional antitheses that are essentially medieval, though no written versions are as old as that.

It also warns about the dangers of not obeying one's mother (at least in the Grimms' version).

Relationship to other tales



Little Red Riding Hood, illustrated in a 1927 story anthology



"Little Red Riding Hood"
illustration by Arthur
Rackham.^[5]

A very similar story also belongs to the North African tradition, namely in Kabylia, where a number of versions are attested.^[6] The theme of the little girl who visits her (grand-)dad in his cabin and is recognized by the sound of her bracelets constitutes the refrain of a well-known song by the modern singer Idir, *A Vava Inouva*:

*Ƨxil-ik lli-yi-n tebburt a
baba-inu ba.
Ččen-ččen tizebgatin-im a
yelli Ƨriba.
Ug^wadeƧ lwehc l_lƧaba a
baba-inu ba.
Ug^wadeƧ ula d nekkini a
yelli Ƨriba.*

'I beseech you, open the door for
me, father.
Jingle your bracelets, oh my
daughter Ghriba.
I'm afraid of the monster in the
forest, father.
I, too, am afraid, oh my daughter
Ghriba.'^[7]

The theme of the ravening wolf and of the creature released unharmed from its belly is also reflected in the Russian tale *Peter and the Wolf*, and the other Grimm tale *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, but its general theme of restoration is at least as old as *Jonah and the Whale*. The theme also appears in the story of the life of Saint Margaret, where the saint emerges unharmed from the belly of a dragon, and in the epic "The Red Path" by Jim C. Hines.

The dialogue between the Big Bad Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood has its analogies to the Norse *Prymskviða* from the *Elder Edda*; the giant Prymr had stolen Mjölner, Thor's hammer, and demanded Freyja as his bride for its return. Instead, the gods dressed Thor as a bride and sent him. When the giants note Thor's unladylike eyes, eating, and drinking, Loki explains them as Freyja not having slept, or eaten, or drunk, out of longing for the wedding.^[8]

Tale's history

Earliest versions

The origins of the Little Red Riding Hood story can be traced to versions from various European countries and more than likely preceding the 17th century, of which several exist, some significantly different from the currently known, Grimms-inspired version. It was told by French peasants in the 10th century.^[1] In Italy, the Little Red Riding Hood was told by peasants in fourteenth century, where a number of versions exist, including *La finta nonna* (The False Grandmother).^[9] It has also been called "The Story of Grandmother". It is also possible that this early tale has roots in very similar Oriental tales (e.g. "Grandaunt Tiger").^[10]

These early variations of the tale differ from the currently known version in several ways. The antagonist is not always a wolf, but sometimes an ogre or a 'bzou' (werewolf), making these tales relevant to the werewolf-trials



"The better to see you with":
woodcut by Walter Crane

(similar to witch trials) of the time (e.g. the trial of Peter Stumpp).^[11] The wolf usually leaves the grandmother's blood and meat for the girl to eat, who then unwittingly cannibalizes her own grandmother. Furthermore, the wolf was also known to ask her to remove her clothing and toss it into the fire.^[12] In some versions, the wolf eats the girl after she gets into bed with him, and the story ends there.^[13] In others, she sees through his disguise and tries to escape, complaining to her "grandmother" that she needs to defecate and would not wish to do so in the bed. The wolf reluctantly lets her go, tied to a piece of string so she does not get away. However, the girl slips the string over something else and runs off.

In these stories she escapes with no help from any male or older female figure, instead using her own cunning. Sometimes, though more rarely, the red hood is even non-existent.^[13]

In other tellings of the story, the wolf chases after Little Red Ridinghood. She escapes with the help of some laundresses, who spread a sheet taut over a river so she may escape. When the wolf follows Red over the bridge of cloth, the sheet is released and the wolf drowns in the river.^[14]

Charles Perrault

The earliest known printed version^[15] was known as *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* and may have had its origins in 17th-century French folklore. It was included in the collection *Tales and Stories of the Past with Morals. Tales of Mother Goose* (*Histoires et contes du temps passé, avec des moralités. Contes de ma mère l'Oye*), in 1697, by Charles Perrault. As the title implies, this version^[16] is both more sinister and more overtly moralized than the later ones. The redness of the hood, which has been given symbolic significance in many interpretations of the tale, was a detail introduced by Perrault.^[17]



French images, like this 19th-century painting, show the much shorter red chaperon being worn

The story had as its subject an "attractive, well-bred young lady", a village girl of the country being deceived into giving a wolf she encountered the information he needed to find her grandmother's house successfully and eat the old woman while at the same time avoiding being noticed by woodcutters working in the nearby forest. Then he proceeded to lay a trap for the Red Riding Hood. Little Red Riding Hood ends up being asked to climb into the bed before being eaten by the wolf, where the story ends. The wolf emerges the victor of the encounter and there is no happy ending.

Charles Perrault explained the 'moral' at the end so that no doubt is left to his intended meaning:

From this story one learns that children, especially young lasses, pretty, courteous and well-bred, do very wrong to listen to strangers, And it is not an unheard thing if the Wolf is thereby provided with his dinner. I say Wolf, for all wolves are not of the same sort; there is one kind with an amenable disposition – neither noisy, nor hateful, nor angry, but tame, obliging and gentle, following the young maids in the streets, even into their houses. Alas! What does

streets, even into their homes. Alas! Who does not know that these gentle wolves are of all such creatures the most dangerous!

This, the presumed original, version of the tale was written for late seventeenth-century French court of King Louis XIV. This audience, whom the King entertained with extravagant parties, presumably would take from the story the intended meaning.

Grimm Brothers

In the 19th century two separate German versions were retold to Jacob Grimm and his younger brother Wilhelm Grimm, known as the Brothers Grimm, the first by Jeanette Hassenpflug (1791–1860) and the second by Marie Hassenpflug (1788–1856). The brothers turned the first version to the main body of the story and the second into a sequel of it. The story as *Rotkäppchen* was included in the first edition of their collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales (1812)).^[18]

The earlier parts of the tale agree so closely with Perrault's variant that it is almost certainly the source of the tale.^[19] However, they modified the ending; this version had the little girl and her grandmother saved by a huntsman who was after the wolf's skin; this ending is identical to that in the tale *The Wolf and the Seven Young Kids*, which appears to be the source.^[20]

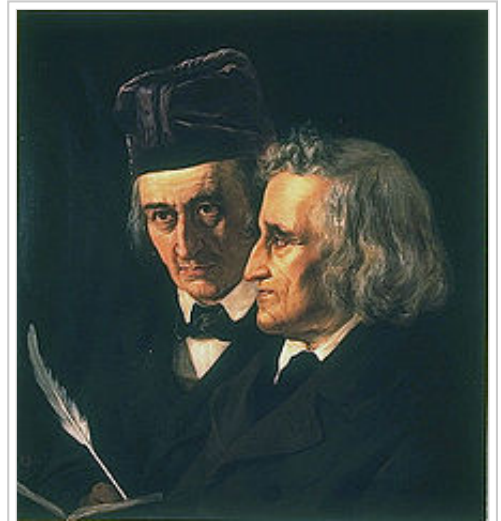
The second part featured the girl and her grandmother trapping and killing another wolf, this time anticipating his moves based on their experience with the previous one. The girl did not leave the path when the wolf spoke to her, her grandmother locked the door to keep it out, and when the wolf lurked, the grandmother had Little Red Riding Hood put a trough under the chimney and fill it with water that sausages had been cooked in; the smell lured the wolf down, and it drowned.^[21]

The Brothers further revised the story in later editions and it reached the above-mentioned final and better-known version in the 1857 edition of their work.^[22] It is notably tamer than the older stories which contained darker themes.

After the Grimms

Numerous authors have rewritten or adapted this tale.

Andrew Lang included a variant called "The True History of Little Goldenhood"^[23] in *The Red Fairy Book* (1890). He derived it from the works of Charles Marelles,^[24] in *Contes of Charles Marelles*. This version explicitly states that the story had been mistold earlier. The girl is saved, but not by the huntsman; when the wolf tries to eat her, its mouth is burned by the golden hood she wears, which is enchanted.



Wilhelm (left) and Jacob Grimm (right) from an 1855 painting by Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann.



An engraving from the *Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor*.

James N. Barker wrote a variation of Little Red Riding Hood in 1827 as an approximately 1000-word story. It was later reprinted in 1858 in a book of collected stories edited by William E Burton, called the *Cyclopaedia of Wit and Humor*. The reprint also features a wood engraving of a clothed wolf on bended knee holding Little Red Riding Hood's hand.

In the 20th century, the popularity of the tale appeared to snowball, with many new versions being written and produced, especially in the wake of Freudian analysis, deconstruction and feminist critical theory. (See "Modern uses and adaptations" below.) This trend has also led to a number of academic texts being written that focus on Little Red Riding Hood, including works by Alan Dundes and Jack Zipes.

Interpretations

Besides the overt warning about talking to strangers, there are many interpretations of the classic fairy tale, many of them sexual.^[25] Some are listed below.

Natural cycles

Folklorists and cultural anthropologists such as P. Saintyves and Edward Burnett Tylor saw "Little Red Riding Hood" in terms of solar myths and other naturally occurring cycles. Her red hood could represent the bright sun which is ultimately swallowed by the terrible night (the wolf), and the variations in which she is cut out of the wolf's belly represent by it the dawn.^[26] In this interpretation, there is a connection between the wolf of this tale and Sköll, the wolf in Norse myth that will swallow the personified Sun at Ragnarök, or Fenrir.^[27] Alternatively, the tale could be about the season of spring, or the month of May, escaping the winter.^[28]



A depiction by Gustave Doré, 1883.

Rite

The tale has been interpreted as a puberty rite, stemming from a prehistoric origin (sometimes an origin stemming from a previous matriarchal era).^[29] The girl, leaving home, enters a liminal state and by going through the acts of the tale, is transformed into an adult woman by the act of coming out of the wolf's belly.^[30]

Rebirth

Bruno Bettelheim, in *The Uses of Enchantment*, recast the Little Red Riding Hood motif in terms of classic Freudian analysis, that shows how fairy tales educate, support, and liberate the emotions of children. The motif of the huntsman cutting open the wolf, he interpreted as a "rebirth"; the girl who foolishly listened to



Red Riding Hood by George Frederic Watts

the wolf has been reborn as a new person.^[31]

Norse myth

The poem *Prymskviða* from the *Poetic Edda* mirrors some elements of Red Riding Hood. Loki's explanations for "Freyja's" (actually Thor disguised as Freya) strange behavior mirror the wolf's explanations for his strange appearance.

The red hood has often been given great importance in many interpretations, with a significance from the dawn to blood.^[32]

Modern uses and adaptations

- Charles Perrault's "Le Petit Chaperon rouge" (Little Red Riding Hood) is centered on an erotic metaphor.^[33] The

song "How Could Red Riding Hood (Have Been So Very Good)?" by A.P. Randolph in 1925 was the first song known to be banned from radio because of its sexual suggestiveness. The 1966 hit song "Lil' Red Riding Hood" by Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs takes the Wolf's point of view, implying that he wants love rather than blood. In the short animated cartoon *Red Hot Riding Hood* by Tex Avery, the story is recast in an adult-oriented urban setting, with the suave, sharp-dressed Wolf howling after the nightclub singer Red. Avery used the

same cast and themes in a subsequent series of cartoons.^[34] Allusions to the tale can be more or less overtly sexual, as when the color of a lipstick is advertised as "Riding Hood Red".^[35]



Gustave Doré's engraving of the scene: "She was astonished to see how her grandmother looked"

- In 1937 there was the Soviet black-and-white animated film of sisters Brumberg, "grandmothers of the Russian animation", from a film studio the "Soyuzmultfilm" executed in classical style. The plot differs from the original fairy tale a little. The animated film was issued on videotapes in different collections in the 1980th years in SECAM system, and in the 1990th — in PAL system in collections of animated films of a videostudio "Soyuz" (since 1994).
- Also in the USSR based on the fairy tale in 1958 other animated film of the same studio by directors Boris Stepantsev and Evgeny Raykovsky under the name "Petya and Little Red Riding Hood" according to Vladimir Suteev's scenario was shot. On a plot, the main character boy Petya Ivanov incidentally gets to the animated film about the Little Red Riding Hood. Seeing as the Grey Wolf deceived the trustful girl, Petya, risking life, rescues the grandmother and the granddaughter from inevitable death, having arrived, as the real pioneer. Now the animated film is considered cult, many phrases became familiar, and in 1959 and 1960 was awarded at festivals in Kiev and Ansi. In Russia it is repeatedly republished on DVD in collections of animated films.
- "Little Red Riding Hood" can be seen in Angela Carter's, short story "The Company of Wolves" which was later adapted to film by Neil Jordan in 1984. "The Company of Wolves" was published in



Works Progress Administration poster by Kenneth Whitley, 1939.

1979 in her collection *The Bloody Chamber*, a collection of “dark, feminist fables” filled with “bestial and ferocious” heroines. [36] In her revision of the classic, Carter examines female lust, lust that according to author Catherine Orenstein is “healthy, but also challenging and sometimes disturbing, unbridled and feral lust that delivers up contradictions.” [37] As Orenstein points out, Angela Carter does this by unravelling the original tale’s “underlying sexual currents” and by impregnating the new Little Red Riding Hood (Rosalee played by Sarah Patterson) with “animal instincts” that lead to her transformation. [38]

Given the flexibility and complex subnarratives, in addition to its global audience, it can be seen as a natural progression for “Little Red Riding Hood” to be transformed for the big screen. The story itself is naturally violent, with allusions to rape and bestiality. Jordan’s film version of *The Company of Wolves* is about the journey of a young girl into womanhood, which can be interpreted as her menstruating for the first time (at the start of the tale, she is in bed with a stomach ache, according to her sister) but also of sexual awakening (in it, she wears red lipstick in bed). The wolf in the this version of the tale, is in fact a werewolf, and comes to the newly menstruating Red Riding Hood in the forest in the form of a

charming hunter. He turns into a wolf and eats her grandmother, and is about to devour her as well, when she is equally seductive and ends up lying with the wolf man. [39]

In Michelle Augello-Page's story “Wolf Moon”, [40] Little Red is an adult who has been irrevocably changed by the events in her childhood, and it is the hunter who saves her “once upon a time, and again” in this tale of sexual awakening, bdsm, relationships, female rites and rebirth.

- Such tellings bear some similarity to the “animal bridegroom” tales, such as *Beauty and the Beast* or *The Frog Prince*, but where the heroines of those tales transform the hero into a prince, these tellings of *Little Red Riding Hood* reveal to the heroine that she has a wild nature like the hero's. [41] These interpretations refuse to characterize Little Red Riding Hood as a victim; these are tales of female empowerment.
- A sexual analysis of the tale may also include negative connotations in terms of rape or abduction. In *Against Our Will*, Susan Brownmiller described the fairy tale as a description of rape. [42] However, many revisionist retellings choose to focus on empowerment, and depict Little Red Riding Hood or the grandmother successfully defending herself against the wolf. [43]
- Little Red Riding Hood is also one of the central characters in the 1987 Broadway musical *Into the Woods* by Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine. In the song, “I Know Things Now” she speaks of how the wolf made her feel “excited, well, excited *and* scared”, in a reference to the sexual undertones of their relationship. Red Riding Hood's cape is also one of the musical's four quest items that are emblematic of fairy tales. [44]
- The pilot episode of N.B.C.'s *Grimm* reveals that the Red Riding Hood stories were inspired by fabled blutbaden attacks, werewolf-like beings who have a deeply ingrained bloodlust and a weakness for victims wearing red.
- Red Riding Hood is a character in ABC's *Once Upon a Time*. In this version of the tale, Red is a werewolf, and her cape is the only thing that can prevent her from turning during a full moon. Her

Storybrooke persona is Ruby. She is portrayed by Meghan Ory.^[45]

- The film *Red Riding Hood* (2011) was loosely based upon this tale.^[46]
- The wolf appears in the *Shrek* franchise of films. He is wearing the grandmother's clothing as in the fairytale, though the films imply he merely prefers wearing the gown and is not dangerous.^[47]
- Red Riding Hood also appears in *Shrek 2*, albeit in a short appearance where she is frightened by Shrek and Fiona and runs off. In the *Shrek 2* video game, she is playable and appears as a friend of Shrek. She joins him, Fiona and Donkey on their journey to Far Far Away, despite not knowing Shrek or his friends in the film.
- Anne Sexton wrote an adaptation as a poem called "Red Riding Hood" in her collection *Transformations* (1971), a book in which she re-envisions sixteen of the *Grimm's Fairy tales*.^[48]
- The character of "Ruby Rose" from Rooster Teeth's animated web series "RWBY" is based, at least aesthetically, off little red riding hood.



John Thomas Peele's *Little Red Riding Hood*, of 1851, now in a private collection

See also

- Big Bad Wolf
- *Hoodwinked!*
- Ladle Rat Rotten Hut
- Into the Woods
- Little Red Cap (poem)
- *Freeway* (1996 film)
- *Once Upon a Time*
- The Path (video game)
- Hard Candy (2005 film)
- 'Sunny's' concept photo for Girls' Generation's third studio album *The Boys* was inspired by 'Little Red Riding Hood'.
- <https://soundcloud.com/datweekaz/da-tweekaz-little-red-riding-hood> Da Tweekaz - Little Red Riding Hood (Hardstyle, Raw Hardstyle)

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25. Jane Yolen, *Touch Magic* p 25, ISBN 0-87483-591-7
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40. Michelle Augello-Page, *Into the Woods*, p59-66, ISBN 978-1-291-75208-3
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External links

- Terri Windling's 'The Path of Needles or Pins: Little Red Riding Hood' (<http://www.endicott-studio.com/articleslist/the-path-of-needles-and-pinsby-terri-windling.html>) – a thorough article on the history of Little Red Riding Hood.
- The Little Red Riding Hood Collection (<http://search.lib.virginia.edu/catalog/u6134166>) at the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia contains hundreds of editions of the story, as well as ephemera, artifacts, and original artworks
- Read Little Red Riding Hood (<http://fairytalez.com/little-red-riding-hood/>) by Charles Perrault (sad ending), or Little Red Cap (<http://fairytalez.com/little-red-cap-little-red-riding-hood-grimms-version/>) by Brothers Grimm (happy ending)
- A Translation of Grimm's Fairy Tale *Little Red Cap* (<http://www.fairytalechannel.com/2008/11/grimms-fairy-tale-no-26-little-red.html>)



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