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Chapter 7: The Final Confrontation

Red and her grandmother prepare their small cottage for a possible intrusion by the Wolf.

Red, brave and alert, receives a lantern from her anxious grandmother, who urges her to check the window and latch discreetly.

Red’s GrandmotherHer grandmother’s voice trembles as she presses the battered lantern into Red’s hands, her grip lingering a moment too long. She huddles deeper under the patchwork blanket, eyes darting anxiously toward the rattling window, as if half-expecting something—or someone—to emerge from the darkness outside. Her grandmother’s voice trembled as she pressed the battered lantern into Red’s hands, her grip lingering a moment too long. “Quickly now, Red,” she murmured, barely above a whisper, her gaze flickering to the rattling window as the wind clawed at the panes. “Hold it steady—don’t let the flame die.” Shadows danced uneasily across the walls, and she huddled deeper into the patchwork blanket, pulling it up around her thin shoulders. The strain in her eyes betrayed more than simple anxiety; she’d seen enough hardship to recognize danger when it crept close. “The shadows have been moving strange tonight,” she went on, her voice frail but insistent, “and I need you to see if the latch is still fastened.” With a final, urgent look, she added, “Don’t let them see you, whatever you do.” Red clutches the lantern close, tiptoes toward the frosted window, and peers through the dim glass, heart pounding as she checks the latch. Red clutched the battered lantern, its metal cool against her palm, as she tiptoed across the

creaking floorboards toward the frosted window. The glass was clouded, barely letting in the pale morning light, but she pressed her nose close, scanning the woods beyond for any sign of movement. Her heart hammered in her chest—a wild, nervous rhythm she tried to steady as she checked the window’s latch, making sure it was secure. Behind her, Grandma’s voice was soft but firm, a gentle reminder wrapped in worry. Red turned, managing a small smile as she accepted the lantern. “All right, Grandma—I’ll be careful, I promise,” she said, her words meant as much to reassure herself as her grandmother, even as curiosity tugged her gaze back to the dark edge of the trees. Red’s GrandmotherHer wrinkled hand tightens on Red’s arm, her eyes darting to the dark corners of the room as she pulls the blanket closer around her shoulders. Red’s grandmother pressed her wrinkled hand more firmly against Red’s arm, her eyes flickering uneasily toward the shadowed corners of the cottage. She drew her patchwork blanket up to her chin, as if the faded squares could shield her from whatever lurked beyond the lamplight. With a trembling grip, she pressed the battered lantern into Red’s palm. “Mind your step, child,” she murmured, voice low and urgent, her gaze never resting in one place for long. “If you glimpse eyes staring back, come straight to me—don’t linger, not for a heartbeat.” The words clung to the air, heavy with the weight of nights spent watching and waiting, and Red felt the warning settle deep in her bones. Red clutches the lantern tightly and edges toward the window, her breath shallow as she listens for any sound beyond the walls. Red’s fingers tightened around the battered lantern as her grandmother, swaddled in a patchwork blanket, pressed it gently into her hands. The flickering glow painted anxious shadows across the walls. Heart hammering, Red edged closer to the window, every careful step weighted with her promise. She offered her grandmother a reassuring glance, murmuring that she wouldn’t look for long—just enough to make sure they were safe. Even as her words left her lips, she drew a steadying breath, driven by the need to protect while resisting the reckless urge to linger too long. Red assures her grandmother of her caution, then moves carefully to inspect the window, wiping away condensation and searching for danger outside.

Sensing increased threat—scraping noises and shifting shadows—Red reacts quickly, advising her grandmother to barricade the window and secure the doors.

The two work together, passing chairs and pokers, fortifying the room and coordinating their defense with urgent, tactical commands.

Red grips the edge of a rickety chair, dragging it toward the trembling window, her eyes darting between the fragile glass and her grandmother huddled in the corner. The sound of claws scraping along the outside wall cuts through the tense silence. Red’s hands tightened around the chair’s splintered edge as she hauled it across the creaking floor, her gaze flitting between the trembling window and the pale figure of her grandmother, curled up and shivering in the furthest corner. The rasp of claws outside sliced through the hush, quickening Red’s breath. “Barricade the window—quick, before it finds another way in!” she urged, her voice low but fierce, pushing the rickety wood into place as determination sharpened her features. Red’s GrandmotherShe grabs the heavy wooden chair, shoving it against the rattling window frame, her hands trembling but steady. Red’s grandmother’s hands, still shaky from her recent illness but guided by years of stubborn resilience, reached out toward the heavy wooden chair. Her voice, soft but unwavering, broke through the hush of the cottage as she said, “Hand me that chair, Red—I’ll jam it under the latch while you check the back door.” With a determined effort, she dragged the chair close, wedging it beneath the rattling window frame. Despite the tremor in her grip, her movements were deliberate, her eyes meeting Red’s with a fierce, protective urgency. Red snatches the iron poker from the hearth, glancing at the trembling door as she moves to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with her grandmother.

Red's heart hammered as she caught the faint scrape of claws against wood, the sound prickling her nerves. Without hesitation, she snatched the iron poker from its resting place by the hearth, fingers curling tight around its cool length. Her grandmother's voice, low and urgent, barely rose above a whisper as she shot Red a determined look: "I hear it scraping outside—grab the poker and stay close, we can't let it split us up."

Red nodded, moving swiftly to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with her grandmother, her jaw set with resolve. Whatever waited on the other side of that trembling door, she would not let it come between them. Red's GrandmotherShe grips the poker tightly, positioning herself between Red and the trembling door, eyes fixed on the shadow flickering beneath the frame. Red's grandmother planted herself firmly between her granddaughter and the trembling door, knuckles white around the iron poker. Her gaze locked on the shifting shadow that danced beneath the frame, voice low but steady as she whispered, "If it breaks through, aim for the eyes." She tightened her grip, resolve hardening behind her frail features. "I'll swing if you miss." Red braces her shoulder against the door, signaling her grandmother to shove the chair tighter beneath the handle as the scratching intensifies. Red pressed her shoulder hard against the creaking door, teeth clenched as the frantic scratching on the other side grew louder, more desperate. Her heart hammered, but her voice remained steady and low. "On my count—one, two, three—push!" she instructed, glancing back at her grandmother. Without hesitation, her grandmother shoved the heavy wooden chair tighter beneath the handle, both of them united in their urgent determination to hold back whatever threatened to break through. Their cooperation intensifies as Red hears the Wolf prowling just outside, prompting them to prepare for a direct confrontation.

They agree on a plan: if the Wolf breaches the door, Red will aim for its eyes, and her grandmother will back her up.

United and tense, they brace for the attack, showing resilience and resourcefulness in the face of imminent danger.

As the adrenaline of battle slowly fades, Red and her grandmother take a moment to collect themselves, the silence of the emptied cottage settling uneasily around them. While the immediate threat has passed, a sense of caution lingers in Red's mind, guiding her thoughts toward the lessons learned from this harrowing encounter. With gratitude for the help she received and resolve to protect what matters most, Red prepares to face the journey ahead, unaware that her next steps will carry her into new challenges—and new warnings.

Chapter 1: Red Receives a Warning

Red and her mother stand together at the threshold of their cottage, the morning thick with fog and uncertainty.

Instead of sending Red off alone, Red's mother insists on accompanying her daughter at least partway through the woods.

She presses a warm, herb-fragrant basket into Red's hands and keeps a protective arm around her.

As they walk together down the rutted, pine-needle strewn path, Red's mother repeatedly warns her to stay alert and not to wander off, emphasizing the importance of returning immediately if

anything strange is heard.

Red, feeling both reassured and slightly chafed by her mother's vigilance, promises to obey.

The two move cautiously into the mist-shrouded forest, the crow's caw echoing as their footsteps mark the beginning of Red's journey—with her mother at her side, rather than sending her off alone.

As the mist thickens and Red's mother's warnings linger in the air, Red's resolve to reach her grandmother swiftly grows stronger. Soon, the faint outline of the main path fades behind them, and Red's gaze drifts toward the untamed woods, where brambles twist and shadows deepen. Unbeknownst to Red, a pair of watchful eyes already prowls ahead, drawn by the promise of an unsuspecting visitor and a scent that mingles with the morning dew.

Chapter 4: The Wolf Arrives First

The Wolf, drenched from his silent trek, creeps to the cottage and tests the door, finding it latched.

He circles the cottage, sniffing at the window, and listens for movement.

Inside, Red's Grandmother, pale and weak, hears a disturbance, pulls herself from her cot, and wedges a stool against the door.

Her voice trembles as she calls out, 'Who is it?

Speak up—who's at my door at this hour?

' Hearing no answer, her anxiety grows, and she shouts again, 'Who's there?

Red's Grandmother pulls her thin shawl tighter around her shoulders, her hand trembling as she presses it to the stool wedged against the door, her eyes straining in the dim light to catch any sign of movement beyond the threshold. Red's grandmother eased herself off the creaking cot, her joints protesting with the effort. She pulled her thin shawl more tightly around her stooped shoulders, the fabric doing little to chase away the chill that had settled in her bones. With a trembling hand, she dragged the old wooden stool across the floor and wedged it firmly against the door. Her eyes, weary but sharp with worry, strained in the dim candlelight as she tried to pierce the darkness beyond the threshold. Her voice, though wavering, held a note of resolute command as she called out, "Who is it? Speak up—who's at my door at this hour?" I know someone's in this room—show yourself at once!

Red's GrandmotherShe clutches her shawl tighter around her shoulders, eyes darting nervously toward the shadowy corner of the room, her voice trembling with a mix of fear and resolve. Red's grandmother clutched her shawl tighter around her thin shoulders, the wool bunched in her trembling hands. Her gaze flickered anxiously toward the shadowed corner of the dim cottage, heart pounding with a familiar, creeping dread. Yet even as fear threatened to seize her, a thread of stubborn resolve stiffened her spine. "Who's there?" she called out, her voice wavering but still clear. "I know someone's in this room—show yourself at once!" ' The Wolf, voice low and gravelly, mimics a hoarse whisper: 'Grandmother, it's me. your sweet granddaughter.

The Wolf presses closer to the door, his shadow stretching across the threshold, while his voice trembles with an unnatural rasp, betraying a hint of impatience beneath the feigned concern. The Wolf pressed his paw lightly against the rickety door, angling his snout just so to muffle the guttural edge of his voice. “Grandmother, it’s me. Your sweet granddaughter,” he called, shaping each word with a syrupy tenderness that belied the hunger in his amber eyes. He leaned closer, letting the faint scent of violets on Red’s cloak cling to his fur, and softened his tone further. “I’ve come to bring you comfort, just as you wished. Won’t you let me in?” The question hung in the dim corridor, patient and coaxing, as his claws traced idle patterns in the weathered wood, betraying none of the menace that simmered beneath his gentle facade. I’ve come to bring you comfort, just as you wished.

Won’t you let me in?

’ The Grandmother, unconvinced, tightens her shawl and searches for something to defend herself with, determined not to be fooled.

The Wolf, patience thinning, circles to the rear window, preparing to force his way inside as darkness falls.

Outside, the evening deepens, casting long shadows across the tangled forest path. As Red’s anxious calls echo within the troubled cottage, another presence stirs among the trees, drawn by the tension mounting within. Unbeknownst to Red, the danger she faces inside is not the only threat lurking nearby. The forest, restless and watchful, is about to reveal yet another sinister encounter, one that will change the course of her journey forever.

Chapter 2: A Sinister Encounter on the Path

Red steps carefully along the winding path, basket on her arm, pausing to adjust her cloak.

She encounters the Wolf, whose unsettling gaze lingers on her and her basket.

The Wolf speaks smoothly, questioning her purpose and subtly implying concern for her safety.

Red, brave but now more openly wary, offers him bread out of compassion but clarifies it is for her grandmother.

As the Wolf continues his manipulative conversation, Red asserts her fearlessness, revealing she has faced dangers before and refuses to be intimidated.

Red forces a shaky smile, edging the basket closer to her chest, her eyes darting between the Wolf’s mouth and the path behind him, calculating her chances if she needs to run. Red paused mid-step, tightening her grip on the woven handle of her basket. The man ahead—strangely motionless among the shifting shadows—kept his gaze fixed not on her face, but on the bundle of bread and cheese peeking from beneath a linen cloth. Something in his intent stare sent a prickle along her arms, but curiosity edged out her caution. “Is something wrong, sir?” she ventured, her voice gentle but steady. He didn’t answer, just continued to eye the basket, and Red shifted her weight, uncertain. “You keep staring at me—at my basket, I mean.” A flicker of worry crossed her features as she remembered her mother’s warnings, but compassion won out. “Are you hungry?” she asked, genuine concern in her tone. “I have some bread if you’d like, but it’s for my grandmother.” Even

as she offered, she hugged the basket a little closer, torn between her desire to help and her duty to protect what little she carried. However, unlike the original plot, Red now becomes more vocal about her suspicions, noting the Wolf's odd behavior and repeatedly questioning her own trust in him.

She debates whether to trust the Wolf, expressing unease about his intentions and the possibility he is leading her astray, but ultimately remains determined to continue to her grandmother's cottage.

The Wolf, still cunning, feigns interest in the wildflowers, maintaining his deceptive demeanor.

Red's heightened suspicion drives her to further caution, and her resolve to warn her grandmother is strengthened as she quickens her pace, her mind racing with uncertainty about the Wolf's true motives.

The Wolf steps out from behind a gnarled tree, his eyes glinting with a sly, hungry curiosity as he circles the girl, keeping just out of arm's reach. From the shadow-dappled undergrowth, the Wolf emerged with a languid grace, his eyes glinting with a predatory amusement as they fixed upon the unsuspecting traveler. He tilted his head, a mocking smile curling at the edges of his jaws. "My, my, what a surprise to find someone as sweet as you wandering these woods all alone," he purred, his voice thick with feigned concern. Circling closer, he let his gaze drift meaningfully along the winding path behind her, as if measuring the danger she did not yet perceive. "Are you sure you know the way?" he continued, his tone low and coaxing, the menace barely concealed beneath his silky words. "The forest can be so... unforgiving to those who stray from the path."

As Red hurries onward, the shadows of the forest seem to deepen, every rustle and whisper fueling her unease. Though the encounter with the Wolf lingers in her thoughts, she presses forward, determined to reach her grandmother's cottage. What she does not realize is that the Wolf's cunning has set events in motion, and a far more unsettling confrontation awaits her beyond the cottage door.

Chapter 5: Red Faces the Impostor

Red pauses on the cottage threshold, noticing muddy paw prints smeared across the doorstep and a faint scratch on the doorframe.

She knocks, clutching her basket, and hears a raspy voice beckon her inside.

Red steps hesitantly across the threshold, peering into the dim room, her grip tightening on the basket as she searches for the familiar figure of her grandmother. Red hesitated at the cottage door, her knuckles white around the basket's handle. She pushed inside, the familiar scent of herbs and firewood wrapping around her like a promise of safety despite the gloom. "Grandmother?" she called, her voice gentle but edged with concern. "It's me, Red." She stepped closer to the

bed, the basket swinging lightly at her side, and placed it on the worn quilt. “I brought you some bread and honey.” Red’s eyes searched the shadowed face on the pillow, her brow furrowing with worry. “Are you feeling alright?” she asked, unable to hide the tremble of compassion and anxiety in her words. The Wolf coughs lightly from beneath the covers, keeping his face turned away and gesturing weakly toward the door. A thin, rasping cough slipped from beneath the mound of blankets on the bed. The figure hidden there kept his face carefully angled away from the shaft of afternoon light spilling through the doorway. One large, claw-tipped hand emerged, trembling just enough to seem frail as it gestured her closer. “Oh, my dear, do come in,” he called out, his voice roughened and strange, wrapped in feigned weakness. “The chill has made my voice quite strange today.” Red steps cautiously into the dim cottage, her eyes searching for her grandmother in the shadows. Red hesitated on the threshold, clutching her basket close, the familiar scent of herbs and bread mingling with the damp air. The cottage seemed even darker than usual, shadows stretching long across the floorboards. She knocked softly, her knuckles echoing against the worn door. A raspy voice beckoned her inside, rougher than she remembered, and Red stepped cautiously over the creaking threshold, her eyes scanning the gloom for her grandmother’s familiar shape.

Her brow furrowed in concern as she peered toward the bed, the outline beneath the quilt barely stirring. “Your voice does sound different,” Red said quietly, a note of worry threading through her words as she edged closer. “Are you sure you’re not coming down with something?” The question lingered in the stillness, her heart thumping with the vague unease that always lurked at the edge of the woods—and now, it seemed, within the cottage too. The Wolf shifts beneath the covers, pulling the shawl tighter around his face as Red hesitates in the doorway. The Wolf shifted beneath the heavy covers, his movements slow and deliberate, pulling the shawl tighter to shadow more of his face. Red lingered uncertainly in the doorway, clutching her basket to her chest as if it might shield her from whatever waited within. A low, ragged cough rasped from the bed, followed by the Wolf’s voice—hoarse yet coaxing—from behind the folds of wool. “Just a little cough, child—come closer, let me see you properly in this dim light.” The invitation hung in the air, gentle on the surface but threaded with something darker, urging her to step nearer despite the uneasy prickle at the back of her neck. Red steps hesitantly into the room, glancing around for signs of illness or something amiss. Red stepped hesitantly into the dim room, the basket pressed tightly against her chest. Shadows clung to the corners, and the air felt heavy with the scent of herbs and something she couldn’t quite name. Her eyes flickered over Grandmother’s form, searching for any sign of illness or danger. Swallowing the knot of worry in her throat, Red moved quietly to the bedside and set the basket down with gentle care. “Alright, Grandmother,” she said softly, her voice steady despite the uncertainty prickling her skin, “I’ll set the basket right here for you. Do you need anything else?” The question lingered in the air, her compassion unmistakable as she studied the frail figure beneath the blankets, ready to spring into action if needed. The Wolf pats the bed covers with a clawed hand hidden beneath the quilt, his eyes watching Red intently from the shadows. Concealed beneath the quilt, the Wolf’s clawed hand moved in a slow, inviting pat atop the bed covers, the gesture oddly gentle despite the glint of menace in his eyes. From the shadowy recesses of the room, he watched the girl clutching her basket at the threshold, his gaze never wavering. In a voice rasped thin by false frailty, he beckoned her closer, murmuring, “Just sit beside me a while, dear, so I can hold your hand and feel a bit less lonely.” The words, sweetened with practiced sorrow, curled through the dim air, an invitation laced with patient hunger. Red hesitantly sits on the edge of the bed, glancing at the Wolf’s large, clawed hands with growing uncertainty. Red hesitated at the threshold, her knuckles whitening around the handle of her wicker basket. The familiar scent of herbs and old linen didn’t greet her as she pushed

open the door; instead, a strange musk lingered in the air. She heard the raspy voice beckon her in—Grandmother’s, but not quite.

With careful steps, Red approached the bedside, her heart thumping a little faster than usual. She perched on the edge, casting a furtive glance at the gnarled, clawed hands folded atop the quilt. They looked different, somehow—coarser, larger, and she couldn’t help but reach out, curiosity overcoming her caution.

Her fingers hovered just above those strange hands as she murmured, “Your hands feel so rough today, Grandmother—did you spend all morning in the garden?” The question came out both gentle and uncertain, her gaze never leaving the shifting shadows between the wolfish knuckles. The Wolf pats the bed covers beside him, glancing hungrily at Red with gleaming eyes half-hidden in shadow. The Wolf’s paw, heavy and deliberate, pressed into the bed covers, smoothing the fabric with a slow, inviting gesture. His eyes, gleaming and half-veiled by the shadows pooling in the corners of the cramped cottage, followed Red’s hesitant form as she lingered at the threshold, basket clutched protectively to her chest. The air trembled with a hunger barely concealed behind his smile.

“Ah, yes, the thorns were terribly sharp this morning—won’t you come a bit nearer, child?” he crooned, his raspy voice curling around the words like smoke, coaxing her closer with a patience born of many successful hunts. Red hesitates, her hand hovering above the Wolf’s, peering closely at his shadowed face. Red hesitated at the threshold, knuckles still tingling from her gentle knock, the basket’s weight pulling at her wrist. The dim room beyond seemed to swallow her as she peered in, her gaze catching on the familiar figure half-shrouded in bedclothes. Yet something prickled at her instincts—a subtle wrongness she couldn’t name. Her hand hovered uncertainly above the Wolf’s, fingertips inches from the coarse fur that peeked from beneath the blanket. She forced herself to step closer, curiosity and duty warring within her chest, and studied his shadowed face until her voice, softer than she intended, broke the hush: “Of course, Grandmother, but your eyes—they seem so much larger than usual.” The Wolf leans forward in the bed, his eyes glinting strangely in the half-light, fixing Red with an intense gaze. The Wolf shifted beneath the heavy quilt, his hulking form creating unnatural shadows against the faded wallpaper. As Red stepped hesitantly across the threshold, basket clutched tight to her chest, his gaze locked onto her with a predatory intensity. Eyes glinting in the half-light, he leaned forward ever so slightly, the movement deliberate and unsettling. “All the better to see you with, my dear,” he murmured, the words slipping from his lips in a low, raspy cadence that seemed to wrap around her, inviting and menacing all at once. Red leans in with a puzzled frown, her gaze flickering from the covers to the shadowy figure in the bed. Red hesitated on the threshold, her knuckles still tingling from the knock, before pushing the door open. She clutched her basket tighter as the raspy summons guided her inside, the familiar scent of herbs and old quilts mingling with something strange in the air. With a puzzled frown, she edged closer to the bed, her gaze flickering uncertainly from the tangled covers to the shadowy figure nestled within them. Something felt off, unsettling in a way she couldn’t quite name. Leaning in, her curiosity overriding caution, Red’s voice trembled with confusion and concern as she murmured, “And your ears, Grandmother—they look so big and pointed now.” The Wolf leans forward slightly, his sharp gaze fixed on Red as he tries to keep his voice gentle. The Wolf leaned forward slightly, his sharp gaze never leaving Red, though he made an effort to soften his tone. “All the better to hear you with, my dear,” he murmured, each word coated with deceptive warmth as he beckoned her closer. The rasp in his voice threaded through the tension of the small, shadowy room, a subtle invitation that played at gentleness even

as his hungry eyes betrayed his true intent. Red hesitates, inching backwards, her eyes widening as she peers at the figure under the blankets. Red hesitated on the threshold, the handle of her basket digging into her palm as she stepped cautiously into the dim room. Shadows pooled in the corners, thick and uncertain, but her concern for her grandmother pressed her forward. She inched closer to the bed, heart thudding, her breath quickening as she took in the shape beneath the blankets. Something was wrong—she could feel it in her bones. Her eyes widened, curiosity and dread mingling as she stared at the face turned toward her. The teeth, gleaming and unnaturally long, caught the meager light. Unable to suppress her alarm, Red’s voice trembled as she asked, “And your teeth—Grandmother, why are they so sharp and long?” The Wolf lunges from the bed, baring his gleaming fangs as Red gasps and stumbles backward, her basket tumbling to the floor. The wolf sprang from the bed in a blur of dark fur and gleaming teeth, his muzzle twisted into a sinister grin. Red staggered back, her heart hammering, and the basket slipped from her trembling fingers, scattering its contents across the wooden floor. The wolf’s eyes burned with hungry intent as he advanced, lips curling to reveal fangs sharp and white. His voice slithered through the tense air, each word coated with menace: “All the better to eat you with, my dear.” As she steps into the dimly lit room, Red scans the shadows, noting the unfamiliar rumpled blanket on her grandmother’s bed.

The Wolf, half-concealed beneath the covers, adjusts a lacy cap with one paw and turns his snout toward her, eyes glinting.

He croaks, ‘Come closer, child,’ mimicking her grandmother’s tone, though the words sound forced.

Red inches forward, setting her basket on the table, and asks, ‘Are you feeling better, Grandmother?’

‘The Wolf fumbles with a teacup, spilling some onto the quilt, then replies, ‘Much better, my dear. Sit with me.

‘Red hesitates, glancing at the creature’s unusually large hands gripping the cup, and edges closer to the window, ready to bolt if needed.

Her suspicion grows as she studies the figure’s twitching nose and jagged teeth, but she moves slowly, trying to keep the impostor talking while she looks for signs of her real grandmother.

As the echoes of the struggle fade and Red steadies her breath amid the chaos, she realizes escape is her only chance. Driven by urgency, she throws open the cottage door, leaving behind the shattered quiet and the wounded wolf. Fleeing into the shadowed woods, Red is forced to choose a path she has never taken before—one that leads her away from safety and into the heart of uncertainty.

Chapter 3: Red’s Fateful Detour

Red adjusted the basket on her arm, her boots pressing into the soft mud as she paused at the fork in the path.

The Wolf stepped out, his fur streaked with mud and his eyes glinting.

He spoke in a smooth, coaxing tone, attempting to lure Red off the main path by hinting at hidden wonders in the forest.

However, Red, recalling her mother's warnings and displaying a cautious bravery, politely refused the Wolf's invitation, choosing to remain on the sunlit main trail.

The Wolf, frustrated but masking his disappointment, tried one last time to entice her, but Red stood firm.

Ultimately, the Wolf was forced to reconsider his approach and slipped away into the shadows, perhaps plotting a new strategy to reach Red's grandmother's cottage before Red arrived.

The Wolf lowers his voice and leans in, his eyes glinting as he motions invitingly toward the shadowy undergrowth, his tail flicking with anticipation. The Wolf's voice slipped into a conspiratorial hush as he edged nearer, his breath warm and unsettling against the cool forest air. His eyes glinted with a predatory promise, never leaving Little Red as he flicked his tail and gestured with a casual sweep of his paw toward the tangled brambles. "You know, little Red," he murmured, his tone thick with false intrigue, "there's something quite fascinating hidden just beyond those brambles." His lips curled in an inviting, dangerous smile. "Have you ever wondered what secrets the forest keeps from prying eyes?" Red tightens her grip on her basket, eyes flicking between the Wolf and the shadowy undergrowth, her feet rooted but curiosity piqued. Red tightened her grip on the basket's worn handle, the familiar weight grounding her as she eyed the Wolf warily. His tail flicked, a subtle invitation, as he edged closer and swept a paw toward the tangled shadows beneath the trees. Her feet remained rooted to the mossy path, but curiosity fluttered in her chest, undeniable and insistent. "I suppose I have," she admitted, voice steady despite her racing heart. Still, she remembered her mother's warnings, the stern insistence never to stray. "But Mother says not to stray from the path—what is it you think I'll find there?" Her gaze flicked from the undergrowth to the Wolf, measuring both the promise and the peril that shimmered just beyond the trail's edge. The Wolf lowers his voice to a conspiratorial whisper, his amber eyes gleaming as he edges a step nearer to the shadowy undergrowth. The Wolf's tail flicked with calculated nonchalance as he circled ever closer, his amber eyes glinting beneath the dappled shadows. He gestured toward the tangled undergrowth with a languid sweep of his paw, lowering his voice to a sly, conspiratorial whisper. "Oh, only wonders that even your mother has never dreamed of—rare blossoms, gentle streams, perhaps a nest of golden eggs—if you're brave enough to see for yourself." The promise lingered in the air, sweet and venomous, as he edged nearer, his presence pressing in on the hush of the forest. Red tightens her grip on her basket and steps back, eyeing the Wolf with guarded suspicion. Red's fingers tightened around the wicker handle of her basket as she took a cautious step backward, her gaze fixed on the Wolf. He flicked his tail and began to circle her, gesturing with a lazy paw toward the shadowy, tangled undergrowth that bordered the sunlit path. Red's heart thudded, but her voice stayed steady as she eyed him with suspicion. Brave, perhaps, but not foolish—she'd learned enough from her mother to know when to trust her instincts. She lifted her chin, keeping herself anchored in the warm patch of sunlight, and made it clear she wasn't going anywhere near those shadows. She would stay where the sunlight reached, thank you. The Wolf lowers his head, eyes glinting, and nudges aside a branch to reveal a glimmer of something hidden in the gloom. The Wolf lowered his head, eyes glinting with sly amusement as he nudged aside a drooping branch, revealing a faint gleam hidden deep in the gloom. He flicked his tail, circling closer to Little Red, and gestured with a languid paw toward the tangled undergrowth. "Ah, but sunlight can be so revealing, little Red—sometimes shadows are where the true marvels sleep, waiting for someone clever enough to find them." The words slithered from his tongue with

patient menace, an invitation and a warning entwined, as he watched her for any sign of curiosity—or fear. Red tightens her grip on her basket, taking a cautious step back while watching the Wolf’s every move. Red tightened her grip on her basket, her knuckles whitening as she took a cautious step back, never letting the Wolf out of her sight. The Wolf flicked his tail, circling closer, his eyes glinting as he gestured with a lazy paw toward the tangled undergrowth. Red’s heart thudded, but her voice remained steady—brave, despite the tremor she felt inside. “Maybe so,” she said, keeping her gaze fixed on the shifting shadows, “but I’d rather not wake anything that prefers the dark to begin with.” Red continued along the main path, her curiosity piqued but overridden by her desire to prove her maturity and heed her mother’s caution.

Unbeknownst to Red, danger was already lying in wait behind her grandmother’s familiar door. As she drew closer to the cottage, the forest seemed to hush, as if holding its breath for what would come next. What began as an ordinary visit was about to shift into a struggle for survival—one that would test Red’s courage in ways she could never have imagined.

Chapter 6: Red’s Desperate Escape

Red bursts into her grandmother’s cottage to find her grandmother coughing weakly in bed, complaining of a tight chest and chills.

The air is thick with smoke and Red quickly realizes the seriousness of the situation.

As Red fetches water and speaks soothingly to her grandmother, she resolves to call for the doctor and keep her grandmother calm.

The immediate threat seems to be illness and smoke, not a direct confrontation with the Wolf.

Red’s focus shifts toward caring for her grandmother and seeking help, rather than direct physical conflict or escape from a predatory Wolf.

As dawn broke through the smoky haze, Red sat by her grandmother’s side, hope flickering like the morning light, certain that together they would weather whatever darkness remained.