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Chapter 1: Red Receives a Mysterious Invitation

Red Riding Hood tightens the red cloak around her shoulders as she steps onto the creaking porch, wicker basket in hand.

Her mother stands by the doorway, glancing nervously toward the shadowed tree line, and presses a sealed envelope into Red’s gloved palm.

Her mother is especially insistent and anxious, repeating her instructions with heightened urgency: ‘Go straight to your grandmother’s house—no stopping, no talking to anyone, and absolutely no wandering off the path.

This is important, do you understand?

Red’s MotherShe presses the basket into Red’s hands, her eyes stern and fixed on her daughter’s face, making sure Red grasps the seriousness of her words. Red’s mother pressed the basket firmly into her daughter’s hands, her gaze unwavering, full of anxious love and unyielding resolve. She leaned in close, her voice dropping to a brisk whisper. Red could feel the weight of the moment settle between them. “Go straight to your grandmother’s house,” she instructed, her words clipped and urgent. “No stopping. No talking to anyone. And absolutely no wandering off the path.” Her eyes searched Red’s face, making sure the message took root, her tone underscoring just how important this was. Red’s MotherShe clasps Red’s shoulders firmly, searching her daughter’s eyes for understanding. Red’s mother clasped her daughter’s shoulders with steady hands, her grip firm enough to communicate both love and warning. She leaned in, her voice dropping to a brisk whisper as if the shadows themselves might be listening. Searching Red’s eyes for a promise deeper than words, she said, “Promise me now, Red—no matter what you see or hear, you go directly

there and nowhere else.” There was a rare urgency in her mother’s gaze, a mixture of caution and something unspoken, as she pressed the folded letter into Red’s palm. Promise me now, Red—no matter what you see or hear, you go directly there and nowhere else.

’ Red inspects the unfamiliar wax seal, running her thumb over its raised design, nods solemnly, and tucks the letter securely in her basket.

She strides down the stone path, her boots crunching on wet leaves.

Her mother lingers by the gate, watching Red disappear into the mist, her hand gripping the fence with white knuckles.

Unseen by both mother and daughter, the morning mist thickens, curling between the trees as Red makes her way deeper into the woods. With every step, the path grows quieter, the world narrowing to the steady rhythm of her footsteps and the secret tucked safely at her side. Yet, as the forest closes in around her, Red is unaware that something—or someone—awaits just beyond the bend, ready to turn her journey into something far more complicated than a simple delivery.

Chapter 2: An Encounter with the Charming Stranger

Red Riding Hood steps carefully over a tangle of roots, her basket swinging from her arm, eyes scanning the shaded path ahead.

She pauses, kneeling to examine an odd set of footprints pressed into the soft mud, her fingers brushing over the fresh tracks.

From behind a thick bramble, Wolfe emerges, brushing leaves from his shoulder, and offers a half-bow.

He lifts a hand in greeting, his eyes keen and watchful.

Red stands, gripping her basket tighter and angles her body away from Wolfe, recalling her mother’s warning but also curious about the stranger’s reputation.

Wolfe, noticing her wariness, picks a sprig of wild mint and extends it, saying, ’The deer eat these when they’re nervous.

Wolfe gently holds out the sprig of wild mint, his gaze steady and reassuring, inviting the other character to accept the gesture. Wolfe noticed the tension in her shoulders, the way her eyes darted to the shadows beneath the trees. With a quiet, reassuring smile, he knelt and plucked a sprig of wild mint from the forest floor. Holding it out, his hand steady and open, he let the fresh scent linger between them. “You know,” he said softly, his voice carrying the calm of someone who’d spent years listening to the woods, “when the deer get jumpy, they nibble on these. Helps them settle, or so I’ve seen.” He waited, letting the silence stretch just enough to draw her in. “Here—take it.” His gaze didn’t waver, and beneath the playful glint in his eyes was a sincerity she hadn’t expected. “Sometimes a bit of green between your fingers is enough to remind you you’re not alone out here.” You look like you could use a little calm.

Wolfe gently gestures toward a quiet corner, his tone soft and inviting, making space for the other person to join him or open up if they’re ready. Wolfe angled his body toward the quiet alcove,

his movements easy, almost conspiratorial, as if inviting Red to step out of the storm and into a pocket of peace. His voice, low and edged with gentle wit, broke through the hush. “You look like the weight of the world’s on your shoulders.” That familiar spark—half mischief, half genuine concern—flickered in his eyes as he gestured to the bench beside him. “Maybe we could sit for a minute—catch our breath,” he suggested, not pressing but leaving the door open. “Sometimes it helps just to talk, if you want to.” The offer lingered in the air, tender and persistent, the kind that didn’t demand, only welcomed. ’ He then gently asks if Red is alright and suggests taking a moment to rest and talk if she wishes, revealing a more openly concerned and supportive side than previously shown.

Red, still cautious, politely declines to share much detail, simply stating that she is visiting her grandmother who is unwell and bringing bread and honey, subtly avoiding mention of the hidden letter.

Wolfe glances at the basket in her hands, his gaze lingering a moment longer than necessary, as if weighing the importance of its contents. Wolfe’s gaze drifted to the basket in Red’s hands, lingering there as if he could divine its secrets just by looking. He walked a step behind her, boots crunching softly on the leaf-strewn path, and a sly smile played at the corner of his mouth. “You seem to be in quite a hurry this morning,” he remarked, voice warm and teasing, but with a hint of genuine curiosity beneath the banter. “Where are you off to, if you don’t mind my asking?” His eyes, thoughtful and a touch too perceptive, flicked from her determined stride to the basket again, as though quietly weighing the importance of whatever she carried. Wolfe continues to ask about her journey in a friendly but persistent manner, but Red deflects, maintaining her focus on her family.

Red Riding HoodRed offers a small, polite smile, but her fingers fidget nervously with the edge of her cloak, her other hand unconsciously pressing the concealed letter closer to her side. Red offered a small, polite smile, though her fingers couldn’t quite stop fidgeting with the edge of her cloak. The other hand pressed the concealed letter tighter against her side, a subtle gesture masked by her easy tone. “Oh, nothing special, really,” she replied, her gaze steady despite the flutter of nerves beneath her calm exterior. “Just off to see my grandmother. She’s not been feeling well lately, so I thought I’d bring her some bread and honey.” The lie slipped out as effortlessly as a sigh, her practiced composure betraying nothing of the real errand hidden beneath the folds of scarlet fabric. Red Riding HoodRed fidgets with the edge of her cloak, glancing briefly down the path as if eager to move on. Red Riding Hood’s fingers found the frayed edge of her crimson cloak, working it between her thumb and forefinger as she cast a quick, restless glance down the winding path ahead. She kept her tone light—almost breezy—while her other hand tightened subtly on the little basket she carried. “I suppose it’s just one of those days where you want to check in on family, you know?” she said, her words floating out as if they were nothing more than a passing thought, even as her eyes flickered with a quiet determination. Their conversation reveals a slightly more open rapport, with Wolfe expressing philosophical thoughts about choices and paths, signaling his wish to see her again.

The encounter ends with Wolfe stepping aside at a fork in the path, gesturing with a flourish for Red to pass, and promising, ‘I’ll see you further down the trail.

Wolfe steps aside with a graceful sweep of his arm, eyes lingering on Red with a sly, unreadable smile, allowing her to pass as the breeze stirs his cloak. With a graceful sweep of his arm, Wolfe stepped aside at the fork in the path, his cloak catching the breeze and stirring around his boots.

His eyes lingered on Red, a sly, unreadable smile curling at his lips as he gestured for her to pass. “The woods are full of crossroads, Red,” he mused, his voice low and edged with that familiar charm. “Each one offers a new choice—sometimes echoing with footsteps, sometimes with regrets.” For a moment, something unspoken glimmered in his gaze, as if he weighed the cost of his own wandering. “But remember,” he added, softer now, “every path circles back eventually.” With a final, knowing tilt of his head, Wolfe let the hint of a promise hang between them. “I’ll see you further down the trail.” ’ Red nods curtly, her focus sharpening on the path ahead, and continues deeper into the woods.

Red hesitated only a moment before pressing onward, her thoughts swirling with Wolfe’s cryptic words. The forest seemed to lean in closer now, shadows stretching between tangled roots and dappled sunlight, urging her to quicken her pace. Determined to reach her grandmother before dusk, Red picked up speed, sensing she was not alone on the winding trail and that the race had quietly begun.

Chapter 3: A Race to Grandmother’s Cottage

Red Riding Hood pushes onward, urgency clear in every step as she speaks aloud her determination to deliver the letter to her grandmother before nightfall, undeterred by the dangers of the forest.

Red Riding Hood presses forward, her boots crunching over tangled roots, eyes darting ahead for any sign of the path’s end. Red Riding Hood pressed forward, her boots crunching over tangled roots hidden beneath the undergrowth. Ferns brushed against her crimson cloak as she moved, unfazed by the shadows that flickered between the trees. Every muscle in her body was taut with urgency, her heartbeat echoing the silent refrain in her mind: she couldn’t afford to slow down—not when every minute mattered. Grandmother was waiting, frail and alone, counting on the letter Red carried close to her chest. Determination burned in her eyes; nothing the forest conjured would stop her from delivering what her family needed. Red Riding Hood quickens her pace, glancing anxiously at the darkening canopy overhead as she tucks the letter closer to her heart. Red Riding Hood quickened her pace, the hush of the forest broken now and then by a distant, haunting howl that sent a chill through the gathering dusk. She pressed the letter tighter to her chest, feeling its edges beneath her cloak—a fragile promise she refused to break. Ferns brushed her skirts as she strode along the winding trail, her gaze flicking anxiously upward to the darkening canopy. Fear gnawed at her, but she straightened her shoulders, steadying herself with the thought that her resolve was stronger than any shadow or wolfish cry. This message, she reminded herself fiercely, must reach Grandmother before nightfall—no matter what watched from the trees. Red Riding Hood tightens her grip on the letter, scanning the dappled path ahead as she pushes forward with unwavering determination. Red Riding Hood tightened her grip on the letter, feeling the worn edges press into her palm as she scanned the dappled path ahead. The hush of the forest was punctuated by the soft rush of her cloak through low ferns, each step deliberate and swift. She knew these woods well, their shifting shadows and tangled secrets, and as the wind teased her hair, she pressed forward with unwavering determination. If she quickened her pace and allowed her instincts to guide her, she was certain she could outsmart whatever dangers might be lurking among the shadows. The thought steadied her resolve, sharpening her focus on the trail—her family’s safety depended on her courage, and she had no intention of failing them. Wolfe appears, announcing his presence and warning her of the risks after sunset, his tone more

ominous and self-serving than before.

Wolfe stands his ground, posture easy yet deliberate, eyes studying her reaction beneath the brim of his hat. Wolfe stepped out from the shadow of a gnarled oak, the crunch of gravel beneath his boots slicing through the hush of dusk. He planted himself firmly in her path, posture relaxed but purposeful, the brim of his weathered hat casting his sharp gaze into shadow. With a lopsided, charming smile, he dipped his head in greeting, his voice carrying a low, easy drawl as he studied her reaction. “Evenin’, miss. Hate to trouble you, but I reckon folks shouldn’t wander these woods alone after sunset.” His eyes twinkled with a hint of mischief, though his tone betrayed a thread of genuine concern. “Strange things tend to happen out here.” Red, clever and perceptive, immediately calls out his presence, refusing to be deceived and demanding reasons for his stealth.

Wolfe offers a shortcut, emphasizing his familiarity with the woods, but his inner thoughts reveal a cunning plan: he intends to reach Grandmother’s cottage before Red, hinting at sinister intentions with the line ‘supper will be served.

Red Riding HoodRed narrows her eyes, keeping her basket close and her steps light as she circles a dense patch of brambles, never turning her back to the shadows. Red narrowed her eyes, her grip tightening on the handle of her basket as she moved lightly, circling a dense patch of brambles. She made sure never to turn her back to the shifting shadows at the forest’s edge. With every step, her senses sharpened, scanning the undergrowth for the slightest movement. Pausing, she shook her head, refusing to let fear root her in place. Her voice rang out, steady and clear despite the tremor of unease in her chest. “I know you’re out there. Show yourself—I’m not as easy to fool as you think.” Red Riding HoodRed tightens her grip on her basket, eyes darting between the shadows as she slowly backs toward a thicker patch of trees. Red tightened her grip on the woven basket, the handle digging into her palm as she slowly edged backward, her gaze flickering restlessly across the tangled shadows. The undergrowth rustled—a brittle twig snapped, impossibly loud in the hush between them. She shook her head, sidestepping the figure that lingered too close, her mind already cataloguing every movement, every potential threat. “Every snapped twig gives you away,” she murmured, her voice both steady and sharp, never taking her eyes off the shifting darkness. “So you’d better have a good reason for following me.” Red remains steadfast, relying on her instincts and refusing to trust Wolfe.

Wolfe steps aside, gesturing toward the tangled entrance of the deer trail, pausing just enough to meet her eyes and wait for her answer before moving ahead. Wolfe matched her stride, his steps deliberate yet light, and with a sweep of his arm, gestured toward the tangled entrance of a deer trail veiled by brambles and shadow. A half-smile played on his lips—charming, a little daring—yet his gaze lingered on hers, searching. “If we cut left here,” he assured her, voice low and coaxing, “we’ll save at least half an hour.” He nodded at the narrow path, the wild undergrowth barely deterring his confidence. “It’s tight, but I’ve walked it before—safer than circling the ridge.” He paused, his persistence softening into something almost sincere as he waited, letting the question hang between them. Did she trust him? Both set off on separate paths, Wolfe now explicitly motivated by a competitive, possibly predatory goal, rather than simply impressing Red and her grandmother.

As the echoes of their laughter faded into the hush of the forest, the two competitors disappeared down diverging paths, each propelled by their own hopes and hidden intentions. The race was no longer just a game; every step now carried consequences neither fully understood. While Red

pressed onward along the familiar trail, Wolfe melted into the shadows, intent on gaining the advantage that only the woods could offer. The outcome of their contest would be decided not by speed alone, but by choices made in the quiet spaces between heartbeats. And as the sun dipped lower, fate was already waiting at the cottage door.

Chapter 4: Wolfe Arrives First and Strikes a Deal

Wolfe steps onto the worn stone path and raps twice on the weathered door, glancing at the twisted brambles lining the cottage.

Grandmother, wrapped in a patchwork shawl, opens the door just enough to peer out and assesses Wolfe with a steady gaze.

Wolfe tips his hat and offers to chop firewood in exchange for a few minutes of conversation, his voice low and earnest.

Wolfe tips his hat respectfully, keeping a careful distance as he gestures toward the woodpile with callused hands, his posture open but cautious. Wolfe lingered just beyond the reach of the fading evening light, his silhouette outlined against the tangled woods. With a deft motion, he tipped his hat in a gesture both respectful and unassuming, the brim shadowing a sly but earnest glint in his eyes. He kept a careful distance, never one to presume, yet his posture was open—inviting, but cautious, as if he weighed every step between solitude and connection.

He nodded toward the dwindling stack of firewood beside the cottage, his callused hands gesturing with practiced ease. “Evening, ma’am,” he began, voice smooth as river stones, the faintest trace of mischief dancing at the corners of his lips. “I don’t mean to intrude, but I couldn’t help noticing your woodpile looking a bit lean.” The offer hung in the air, sincere beneath its playful veneer. “If you’d allow it, I’d be glad to lend a hand with the chopping—no need for payment, just a few minutes of your company.” His gaze flickered up to meet hers, steady and disarming. “Sometimes, you know, a stranger’s ear is all it takes to lighten a heavy heart.” Grandmother leans a little on her cane, studying Wolfe’s face with a wary but not unkind gaze, gesturing toward the stacked logs by the cottage wall. Grandmother leaned a little heavier on her cane, her eyes sharp as she studied Wolfe’s face with a mixture of caution and gentle amusement. She nodded toward the neat stack of logs by the cottage wall, her fingers curling in invitation. “Kindness is rare as spring rain these days, young man,” she murmured, her voice playful but edged with wisdom. “Still, I reckon you’re welcome here—if your axe proves as honest as your tongue.” Wolfe sets his axe gently against the porch rail, keeping his hands visible as he meets Grandmother’s gaze, respectful but quietly searching. Wolfe set his axe gently against the porch rail, the gesture slow and deliberate, as if to prove he carried no threat. He faced Grandmother with a respectful nod, his battered hat tipped just so, eyes glinting with a mix of mischief and sincerity. “My word’s my bond, ma’am,” he assured her, the promise woven through his voice with an easy charm. “I’m seeking only a story, not trouble, and maybe a warm place to rest after the work is done.” The offer hung between them, earnest beneath his playful exterior, as he waited, hands open and visible, for her judgment. Grandmother steps aside from the doorway, watching Wolfe with sharp, appraising eyes as she gestures toward the woodpile. Grandmother stepped aside from the doorway, her gaze never leaving Wolfe as he lingered on the threshold. She studied him with eyes as clear and sharp as the morning frost, the lines of her face creasing into something wry and knowing. With a subtle gesture, she pointed him toward the woodpile stacked neatly beside the cottage. “Stories are the

currency of old women and wolves alike,” she remarked, her voice rich with playful wisdom, “but you’ll find mine come dear—so swing that axe true, and we’ll see what trust is worth.” The words hung between them, both invitation and challenge, as she watched to see whether he would accept the bargain. Grandmother unlocks the door fully, gestures toward the woodpile, and instructs Wolfe to stack logs by the hearth.

Grandmother swings the door wide, points firmly to the woodpile outside, then to the empty space near the fireplace, her tone leaving no room for argument. With a deft twist of her wrist, Grandmother swung the cottage door wide, letting the pale dusk spill in. Her sharp gaze slid past Wolfe, settling instead on the woodpile outside. Without a word, she pointed firmly toward the heap, then to the empty space beside the hearth—a silent but unmistakable order. Her voice, when it came, held no room for argument: “Come along now, Wolfe. The door’s open.” She lingered at the threshold, playful warmth glinting behind her keen eyes, and added, “I want those logs from the pile stacked neatly by the hearth before supper. No dawdling.” Even illness couldn’t dull her authority; Wolfe knew better than to hesitate when Grandmother made herself clear. Wolfe steps inside, glancing at the woodpile before moving toward it. Wolfe ducked beneath the low doorframe, a wry smile flickering across his lips as he glanced at the haphazard woodpile stacked in the corner. Grandmother, sharp-eyed and vigilant, finished sliding the bolt and gestured toward the logs with a brisk nod. Ever the gentleman—or at least eager to appear so—Wolfe dipped his head in acknowledgment, his voice smooth as he strode toward the pile. “Yes, Grandmother, I’ll get started right away.” The words carried a playful lilt, but there was an undercurrent of genuine willingness behind them, as if he welcomed the task more than he let on. As Wolfe gathers and splits wood, Grandmother watches, testing his diligence and intent.

Wolfe agrees to her terms, stacking the logs neatly, and Grandmother nods, signaling her willingness to listen to his proposal inside, setting the stage for their bargain.

Wolfe brushes wood dust from his hands, standing respectfully by the door, meeting Grandmother’s gaze with calm anticipation. Wolfe brushed the last traces of wood dust from his hands, standing respectfully just inside the doorway. He met Grandmother’s gaze with a calm, almost playful anticipation, his eyes never leaving hers. “There,” he said, his voice as smooth as polished oak, “the logs are stacked as you asked, Grandmother.” A hint of a smile curled at the corner of his mouth, gratitude and daring mingling in his tone. “Thank you for your patience—and for giving me the chance to speak.” He paused, sincerity flickering beneath his usual charm. “May I come inside now to present my proposal?” Grandmother opens the door wider, gesturing for Wolfe to step inside, her expression measured but open to discussion. Grandmother opened the door wider, her eyes sharp yet inviting as she gestured for Wolfe to step inside. The logs were stacked neatly, just as she had asked, and a faint, approving smile tugged at her lips. “You’ve honored your word,” she said, her voice layered with both gravity and warmth, “and I will honor mine.” She turned toward the hearth, her movements deliberate but gentle, and beckoned Wolfe to join her near the comforting glow of the fire. “Let us sit,” she continued, settling into her armchair, “and hear what you have to offer.” Her gaze lingered on Wolfe, both playful and measured, signaling that the conversation ahead would be given its due. —————

As Wolfe and the grandmother settled by the hearth, the quiet negotiation between them unfolded against the backdrop of the deepening afternoon. Outside, the shadows lengthened along the forest path, signaling the approach of another visitor. Unbeknownst to those inside, Red was already making her way toward the cottage, her arrival destined to stir the delicate balance Wolfe and the grandmother had just begun to establish.

Chapter 5: Red's Arrival and the Deceptive Introduction

Red Riding Hood hurries along the tangled woodland path, fiercely protective of the basket meant for her ailing grandmother.

Wolfe appears, charming as ever, and inquires about her purpose.

Red, anxious about her grandmother's health, urgently explains the importance of her mission—her grandmother needs the food to recover, and any delay could be serious.

Wolfe steps out from the shadow of a lamppost, arms folded, watching the hurried figure approach. Wolfe emerged from the shadow of the lamppost, arms folded casually across his chest, a faint, knowing smile playing at the corners of his mouth. As the hurried figure drew near, he tipped his head in appraisal, a glint of mischief in his eyes. "Where are you headed with such purpose?" he inquired, his tone light but edged with genuine curiosity, as if he already suspected her answer but wanted to hear it from her own lips. Wolfe attempts to guide her onto a shortcut, but Red, increasingly suspicious, questions his motives and insists on the route she knows.

Red Riding Hood keeps her eyes on the wolf, carefully edging past him while tightening her grip on her basket. Red kept her eyes fixed on the wolf, her hand tightening around the worn handle of her basket. She edged past him with practiced caution, every muscle poised in case he lunged. Yet her voice was steady and clear, determined as ever. She said, "I'm going to see my grandmother, and nothing is going to stop me." The words hung in the misty air, a quiet but unyielding promise that neither fear nor threat would deter her from her path. Despite her wariness, she acknowledges Wolfe's efforts to help and expresses gratitude for his concern, though she remains firmly in control of her path.

Red Riding Hood clutches the basket tightly and starts walking briskly down the path toward Grandmother's house, glancing anxiously at the forest ahead. Red Riding Hood clutched the basket more tightly, her fingers tense around the woven handle as she set off at a brisk pace, the familiar path stretching ahead beneath the shifting shadows of the forest. Grandmother was waiting for this food, and lately, she hadn't been feeling well. The thought pressed insistently at Red's mind, urging her onward. She glanced anxiously at the dark tangle of trees, determination sharpening her steps. Nothing could slow her down today—she needed to get this basket to Grandmother as soon as possible. Red Riding Hood adjusts the basket on her arm and quickens her pace, glancing anxiously at the path ahead. Red Riding Hood shifted the weight of the basket on her arm, the familiar ache reminding her of its precious contents. She quickened her stride, boots brushing over the tangle of roots and moss that lined the path. Ahead, the forest seemed to lean in, shadows flickering between the trees. An anxious glance toward the narrowing trail spurred her onward, her thoughts circling back to Grandmother—frail and waiting alone in the cottage. If she didn't reach her soon, there was no telling if Grandmother would have the strength she needed to recover. Red Riding Hood pressed forward, determination sharpening her features as she braved the deepening woods, her family's safety guiding each step. Wolfe, seeing her determination and appreciation, continues to follow at a distance, his interest in her mission undiminished but his respect for her wishes growing.

The tone is more urgent and Red is more openly grateful for Wolfe's presence than previously, but she maintains her independence and mission focus.

Red Riding Hood Red lifts her chin, meeting his gaze directly, her basket firm in her hand as she takes a deliberate step forward, refusing to be led. Red Riding Hood lifted her chin, her gaze unwavering as she met his eyes. The basket in her hand did not waver, and she took a measured step forward, making it clear she would not be coaxed off her path. She noticed the subtle shift in his stance—the way he tried to guide her toward another trail—and narrowed her eyes, her curiosity mingling with caution. “I know the way,” she insisted, her voice calm but firm. “You don’t have to keep suggesting shortcuts—or watching me so closely.” She paused, studying him with clever suspicion before adding, “Is there something you’re not telling me?”

Red’s challenge hangs in the air, thick with tension and possibility. The cottage, once a place of comfort, now crackles with the energy of truth about to be spoken. As Wolfe hesitates, the grandmother’s gentle encouragement pushes Red to listen, not just with suspicion but with curiosity. The atmosphere shifts, and Red senses that the next words will define not just their immediate safety, but the direction of her journey—and perhaps her heart. With her mission clear but her certainty shaken, she braces herself for revelations that will demand a choice she never expected to face.

Chapter 6: The Confession and the Choice

Red Riding Hood arrives at Grandmother’s cottage and knocks urgently, her anxiety heightened by a sense of imminent danger.

Wolfe appears, more tense and secretive than before, warning Red that there is a traitor within their circle and that they must act swiftly to protect themselves.

The exchange at the door escalates as Red calls for Grandmother with increasing urgency, and Wolfe reveals a second, desperate letter, hinting that its contents are a confession that could upend everything.

Sensing the threat, Grandmother quietly opens the door and joins Red in a united front, wary of Wolfe’s intentions.

The trio engage in a tense verbal sparring, each testing the other’s resolve and motives.

Wolfe glances around to ensure no one else is listening, his eyes sharp with concern. Wolfe’s gaze swept the dim corners of the room, his expression sharpening with an edge of wariness. Satisfied no prying eyes lingered, he stepped closer to Red, his voice dropping to a low, urgent murmur. “Listen carefully—what I’m about to tell you doesn’t leave this room.” The usual glint of mischief in his eyes was replaced by something graver, almost vulnerable, as he added, “There’s more at stake here than anyone realizes, and if we don’t move quickly, we’re all in danger.” Wolfe glances toward the door, ensuring no one is listening, his jaw clenched with concern. Wolfe’s gaze flickered toward the door, his jaw tightening with a tension that rarely slipped past his easy grin. The usual glint of mischief in his eyes was replaced by something far more serious. He took a step closer, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial hush. “I have reason to believe someone inside our circle is

working against us,” he murmured, the words edged with sincerity beneath his charming facade. His presence—always a little daring, always a little unpredictable—felt suddenly protective, as if he was determined to shield Red from threats lurking in the shadows. Wolfe admits his hunger—for truth, trust, and perhaps something darker—but Red and Grandmother stand firm, their courage sharpened by fear and their determination to uncover the truth stronger than ever.

The standoff at the threshold becomes more than just about a letter;

it’s about loyalty, hidden dangers, and whether Wolfe can be trusted at all as the night closes in around them.

Red Riding HoodRed raps sharply on the door again, her brow furrowed with concern, glancing nervously at the quiet cottage. Red considered the silent cottage, her anxiety mounting with each moment of quiet. She rapped sharply on the weathered door, her brow furrowed and eyes scanning the shadowed windows for any sign of movement. “Grandmother, are you in there?” she called, her voice steady despite the worry threading through it. “It’s me, Red! Please open up—it’s important!” The words hung in the still air, echoing her urgency as she pressed her ear closer, listening for any familiar response from within. Red Riding HoodRed leans closer to the door, her voice trembling with worry as she knocks even harder. Red Riding Hood hesitated for a moment, her breath catching in her throat as she weighed the silence on the other side of the heavy wooden door. Worry gnawed at her resolve, but she refused to let fear win. She leaned closer, pressing her ear against the weathered panels, and knocked even harder, determination sharpening her trembling voice. “Grandmother, please—I really need to see you right now!” Her words spilled out, urgent and pleading, echoing through the quiet cottage and into the shadowy hush beyond. Red Riding HoodRed clenches her fist and knocks even harder, her voice trembling with worry. Red clenched her fist, determination sharpening her features as she rapped even harder on the weathered door. Her voice, thin but resolute, trembled with worry as she called out, “Grandmother, please, it’s urgent—I won’t leave until you answer!” The echo of her plea faded into the hush of the forest behind her, but she stood her ground, refusing to be deterred by the heavy silence pressing back from within the cottage. —————

As the night pressed in around the little cottage, the secrets between them were laid bare, and with the final choice made, Red, Grandmother, and Wolfe stepped together into the uncertain dawn—bound by truth, changed by trust, and ready to face whatever waited beyond the woods.