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## Chapter 5: Red Arrives and Senses Danger

Red approached the crooked wooden door, her boots crunching over the gravel path as she balanced the wicker basket on her arm.

She rapped three times, the hollow sound echoing against the thick silence, then noticed the lace curtain twitch inside the fogged window.

The door swung open slowly to reveal 'Grandmother' lying in bed, her figure bundled tightly in blankets, face shadowed by a nightcap.

The Wolf, concealed beneath the covers and wearing Grandmother's shawl, beckoned with a clawed hand hidden beneath the fabric, his voice rasping, 'Come closer, child.

' Red hesitated on the threshold, scanning the dim room for familiar sights—a pot of herbal tea simmered on the stove, but the usual scent of lavender was missing, replaced instead by a strange, musky odor.

She stepped forward, gripping the basket tighter, her eyes lingering on the shape beneath the quilt.

The Wolf, intent on deceiving her, adjusted the cap lower over his snout and shifted to mimic Grandmother's frail cough, urging Red to set the basket on the table.

The Wolf, disguised in Grandmother's nightcap and shawl, clasps the blanket closer and lets out a feeble, raspy cough, peering over the rims of the spectacles at Red with watery eyes. The Wolf reclined in the shadowy alcove, his eyes glinting with cunning as he watched his visitor step timidly into the room. With a sly, coaxing smile, he gestured languidly toward the table, his voice thick with feigned exhaustion. "Just set your lovely basket right there, my dear," he murmured, the pretense of frailty lacing each word. He let out a deliberate, raspy cough, clutching his chest for effect. "My arms feel ever so tired today," he continued, his gaze never leaving her, "and this old cough—ah, it leaves me quite weak." The Wolf's performance was flawless; every sigh and shudder was calculated to draw her closer, to lull her into a sense of safety while his predatory instincts waited beneath the surface. Red gently sets the basket on the table, studying 'Grandmother' with

a touch of worry creasing her brow. Red set the basket down with careful hands, eyes flickering over her grandmother's form—something about the way the old woman huddled beneath the patchwork quilt was off, and worry tugged at Red's brow. "Of course, Grandmother—are you sure you're all right?" she asked, her voice gentle but edged with concern. "You sound a bit different today." The Wolf pats the bed with a shaky, gloved paw, eyes glinting beneath the shadow of the cap. The Wolf, ever the master of deception, patted the edge of the bed with a trembling, gloved paw, his eyes glinting hungrily from beneath the drooping brim of Grandmother's cap. He drew the covers higher, voice syrupy-sweet despite the threat lurking beneath. "Oh, don't you fret, child—it's only this dreadful chill in my bones," he crooned, gesturing her nearer with a sly tilt of his head. "Come closer so I might see your sweet face better." Red obeyed, but kept her distance, her gaze darting uneasily between the figure in the bed and the door she left slightly ajar.

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Red lingered at the edge of the room, her heart pounding as the wolf's voice grew more urgent and the shadows seemed to press in around her. The tension hung heavy in the stale air, every instinct warning her of the danger lurking beneath the covers. Unsure whether to flee or confront the impostor, Red hesitated—unaware that, in the next moment, the wolf's true intentions would erupt, shattering the fragile calm of her grandmother's house.

## Chapter 4: Wolf Invades Grandmother's House

The wolf, driven by hunger and the scent of fresh bread, prowls through the underbrush and circles the cottage.

He forces his way inside, confronting the frail Grandmother not with immediate violence, but with verbal intimidation and taunting, revealing his interest in her granddaughter Red.

Grandmother pleads for mercy and attempts to protect Red by warning her and standing up to the wolf.

The Wolf steps into the dim room, slinking toward the bed as Grandmother recoils, pressing herself against the headboard, her eyes wide with fear and confusion. With a calculated shove, the Wolf forced the latch and slipped inside, his hulking form blotting out what little light filtered through the window. Grandmother recoiled instinctively, pressing herself against the headboard as her breath quickened in terror, eyes wide and searching for an escape. The Wolf's lips curled in a sly, predatory grin as he padded closer, his voice a velvet purr laced with mockery. "My, my, Grandmother—what a poor lock you keep," he murmured, his gaze raking over the fragile catch that had so feebly guarded her peace. He cocked his head, feigning disappointment. "Did you think flimsy metal would keep me out?" Drawing nearer, he watched her trembling with a mixture of delight and disdain, and lowered his tone to a falsely soothing croon. "Come now, don't tremble so. I'm only here for a little... conversation." Grandmother backs away, clutching the blanket tighter, her eyes wide with terror as she inches toward the corner of the bed. Grandmother shrank back, clutching the worn blanket to her chest, her frail fingers trembling as she edged toward the furthest corner of the bed. Fear widened her eyes as the stranger forced the latch and slipped inside, his shadow stretching across the moonlit floorboards. Her voice quavered with desperation, barely more than a whisper as she pleaded, "W-what do you want from me, stranger? Please, let me be!" The Wolf advances, teeth glinting in the dim light, as Grandmother backs helplessly toward the wall, her hands shaking. The Wolf's yellow eyes gleamed as he slunk forward, his jaws

parting in a cold, hungry grin. Grandmother's trembling hands clutched at the blanket, her back inching closer to the rough cottage wall with nowhere left to run. With a single, deliberate shove, the Wolf forced the latch and slid inside, his movements as fluid as a shadow. He watched her struggle from the bed, savoring the smell of her fear.

Leaning in, his voice dropped to a silken whisper, every word laced with malice. "Ah, but you see, dearest," he murmured, the corners of his mouth curving upward, "it's not you I truly want—it's your darling granddaughter." He paused, letting the threat hang heavy in the air as he blocked her escape. "And you, I'm afraid, are simply in the way." Grandmother shrinks back against the headboard, clutching her blanket tighter as her hands tremble uncontrollably. Grandmother shrank back against the headboard, her frail hands clutching the blanket tighter as they trembled uncontrollably. Fear hollowed her eyes as the intruder forced the latch and slipped inside, his presence sending a chill through the small cottage. Voice quivering, she pleaded, "Please, spare me—I beg you, I have done nothing to deserve this!" The words spilled out with desperate hope, a fragile shield against the darkness closing in. The Wolf bares his fangs, advancing with deliberate menace as Grandmother shrinks against the headboard, eyes wide in terror. The Wolf bared his fangs, each glistening tooth a threat as he advanced with slow, deliberate menace. Grandmother shrank back, clutching at the quilt and pressing herself against the headboard, her eyes wide and desperate. With a calculated shove, the Wolf forced the latch aside, slipping into the room as Grandmother struggled to rise from her bed. His voice was a low, dangerous growl as he towered over her trembling form. "Deserve has nothing to do with it, old woman," he sneered, his gaze fixed on her with predatory intent. "Step aside, or I'll show you just how sharp my teeth can be." Grandmother shrinks back against the headboard, her knuckles white around the edge of her blanket as she searches desperately for something—anything—to shield herself. Grandmother shrank back against the headboard, her frail hands clutching the blanket so tightly her knuckles blanched. The latch rattled, then gave way beneath his forceful shove, and he slipped inside, looming in the shadowed doorway. Searching desperately for something—anything—to shield herself, she pressed herself further into the pillows, her voice trembling as she pleaded, "Mercy, please—I'll do anything you ask, just don't hurt me!" The words spilled out, raw with terror and a lifetime's quiet resilience, as she tried in vain to make herself small enough to disappear. The Wolf lunges forward, snatching the blanket from her trembling hands, his eyes glittering with cruel intent as he looms over her. The Wolf's lips curled into a predatory smile as he loomed over the trembling old woman, his eyes glinting with cruel amusement. Mercy—he considered it a luxury, one he rarely bothered to grant, and certainly not now. "Mercy is a luxury I rarely indulge, Grandmother," he purred, voice thick with mockery as he pressed a clawed finger to her lips, silencing her whimpers. "Now hush," he whispered, already reaching for the faded shawl draped over her chair, "and let me slip into something more... convincing." The wolf delights in her fear, threatening her further and demanding her compliance so he can better deceive Red.

The WolfThe wolf snarls, saliva dripping from his fangs as he presses Grandmother harder into the floor. Grandmother trembles, eyes wide, clutching her shawl desperately as she gasps for breath, the basket overturned and its contents scattered around them. Saliva glistened on the Wolf's fangs as he snarled, pressing Grandmother harder into the splintered floorboards. Her shawl bunched in her fists, she gasped for air, terror freezing her wide, frantic eyes. The overturned basket lay forgotten, apples and bread rolling across the shadows. Leaning closer, his breath hot and fetid in her face, the Wolf let his predatory growl curl into words: she thought she could hide, did she? There was nowhere left to run. His claws tightened their grip, and with a chilling certainty he promised—give him what he wanted, or he would rend her apart. Grandmother twists beneath the

wolf's heavy body, her eyes wide with terror as she gropes desperately for anything within reach to defend herself. Grandmother twisted beneath the suffocating weight of the wolf, her frail hands scrabbling across the rough floorboards in desperate search of something—anything—to fend him off. Terror widened her eyes, but even as the beast's hot breath washed over her, she mustered the remnants of her strength and glared up at her attacker. "Stay back, you brute—there's nothing here for you but trouble!" she gasped, her voice trembling yet fierce, the defiant words trembling on the air as she struggled beneath his crushing form. The WolfThe wolf presses his claws into Grandmother's shoulder, his eyes gleaming with hunger and menace. With a guttural snarl, the wolf lunged, sending Grandmother's basket skittering across the floor. His heavy frame pinned her to the bed, claws biting through her nightgown and into her trembling shoulder. Hunger and menace flickered in his eyes as he leaned in close, his hot breath brushing her cheek. "Trouble is exactly what I crave," he whispered, his lips curling back from sharp teeth. "Now, scream for your precious granddaughter before I silence you forever." Grandmother struggles beneath the wolf's crushing weight, her hands scrabbling desperately for anything within reach as the wolf's hot breath sears her cheek. The wolf's weight crushed down on her fragile chest, forcing the air from her lungs in short, panicked bursts. Grandmother's trembling hands scrabbled along the floor, desperately seeking something—anything—to defend herself or her dear granddaughter. The beast's hot, fetid breath seared across her cheek, and as his jaws snapped mere inches from her face, she summoned what remained of her strength. Her voice, though thin and shaking, was filled with fierce resolve. "You monster—leave her out of this!" The words tore from her lips, defiant even as her body betrayed her, steadfast in protecting Red no matter the cost. The WolfThe wolf presses harder, claws digging into Grandmother's arms as his hot breath rasps against her cheek. The wolf lunged, knocking the wicker basket aside as he pinned Grandmother with his heavy, muscled frame. His claws dug mercilessly into the soft flesh of her arms, each prick a threat, while his hot breath rasped against her cheek. Leaning in, his eyes glittered with cruel delight, and his voice slithered out, low and triumphant: "Too late for mercy—she'll hear you beg before I feast." Grandmother struggles beneath the wolf's crushing weight, her voice shaking as she claws desperately at his fur, eyes darting toward the door in frantic hope for rescue. The wolf lunged, sending the wicker basket skittering across the wooden floor, its contents scattering like frightened birds. Grandmother gasped as his massive weight crashed down upon her frail chest, forcing the breath from her lungs. Her trembling hands clawed helplessly at the coarse fur, desperate for purchase, while her eyes darted toward the door, searching for any sign of Red, any chance of rescue. Even as her voice faltered and shook, she pleaded with the beast, her words spilling out in broken, urgent whispers—begging him to take whatever he wanted, so long as he spared the girl. When Grandmother tries to warn Red with a shout, the wolf silences her—either by overpowering her or locking her away—before rifling through the cottage to disguise himself in Grandmother's clothes, preparing for Red's arrival.

Grandmother, voice trembling but resolute, lunges for the iron poker and swings it at the wolf's side, her eyes blazing with fear and determination. As the wolf twists away, snarling, he grabs her roughly and drags her across the room toward the wardrobe, ignoring her desperate struggles and muffled shouts. Summoning the last reserves of her strength, Grandmother's trembling hand closed around the iron poker by the hearth. Though her body was frail, something fierce and unyielding flashed in her eyes. With a desperate cry, she swung the poker at the wolf's side, her voice breaking as she managed to call out, "Red! Run, darling—he's here! Don't trust him, he's—" But before she could finish, the wolf twisted away with a guttural snarl. His claws caught her feeble arms, and he dragged her roughly across the floor, her struggles growing weaker as she

fought to warn her beloved granddaughter. Her words, muffled now by the wolf's grip, hung in the air—a final, urgent plea for Red's safety. The Wolf clamps his jaws around Grandmother's arm, dragging her swiftly toward the wardrobe, his eyes glinting with satisfaction as he forces her inside and locks the door. The Wolf's jaws clamped hard around Grandmother's arm, his grip merciless as he dragged her swiftly across the creaking floorboards. Satisfaction gleamed in his eyes, cold and sharp, as she struggled and reached desperately for the iron poker, hoping to warn Red. But before she could strike again, the Wolf forced her into the wardrobe, the wood splintering under the pressure of panic and brute strength. As he locked the door, his voice curled through the darkness, low and triumphant: "Ah, too late, old woman—your warning dies with you." Grandmother's voice trembles with both terror and determination as she pounds futilely against the inside of the wardrobe, her fists echoing in the small, shadowed room while the Wolf's grin widens, already turning toward the door to await Red's arrival. Grandmother's frail hands balled into trembling fists as she pounded against the inside of the wardrobe, the hollow thuds echoing through the cramped, shadowed room. Fear quaked in her voice, but it was laced with fierce resolve as she pressed her lips to the crack in the door, her words spilling out in desperate defiance: "You'll never keep her safe—she's cleverer than you think!" The Wolf's grin only widened at her protest, his yellow eyes glinting with anticipation as he turned away, already positioning himself to await Red's arrival. The Wolf presses his snout close to the wardrobe door, voice low and cold, then turns to neaten the bedclothes, erasing all trace of struggle. The Wolf pressed his cold, wet snout close to the crack in the wardrobe door, voice dropping to a low, menacing growl that seemed to seep into the shadows. "But not quicker than my teeth, old one—she will come, and when she does, she'll find nothing but your silence." With a sly, satisfied glint in his eyes, he turned away from the hidden, trembling grandmother. He moved to the bed, methodically neatening the rumpled bedclothes with swift, practiced motions, erasing every sign of the brief, desperate struggle. All that remained was an unsettling calm, as if nothing at all had ever been amiss. —————

Outside, the forest stirred with the promise of a new day, unaware of the danger lurking within the grandmother's cottage. Meanwhile, in the warmth of her own home, Red prepared for her journey, blissfully ignorant of the trap now waiting in the shadows. As she accepted the basket from her mother and listened to a gentle warning, the path ahead seemed ordinary—yet every step would draw her closer to the wolf's deception.

## Chapter 1: Red Receives the Basket and a Warning

Red, her fingers still sticky from tying the basket's twine, carefully packs a loaf of coarse bread and a sealed jar of soup into the wicker basket.

She inspects each item, pressing the linen cloth smooth before tucking it over the food.

Her mother stands by the hearth, ladling hot broth into a flask and wiping her hands on her apron.

She steps closer, places a firm hand on Red's shoulder, and leans in to inspect the basket's contents, her brow furrowed.

'Stay to the path, Red, and speak to no one you meet,' she instructs, her gaze sharp.

Red responds by tightening the knot securing the basket's lid and nodding, gripping the handle with determination.

She glances out the window at the pale mist curling between the trees, eager but attentive to her mother's warning.

The final outcome: Red, motivated by her concern for Grandmother and her wish to prove herself, sets off toward the forest path, her mother standing watchful in the doorway, the warning still echoing in the kitchen's warm air.

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The chill of the morning air greets Red as she steps beyond the garden gate, the weight of her mother's words lingering at her back. With each careful stride along the narrow path, the hush of the forest draws her deeper into its shadowed heart. As the familiar world of home slips away behind her, Red's thoughts drift between her mission and the silent, watchful woods ahead—unaware that she is not alone among the tangled roots and whispering leaves.

## Chapter 3: Red Meets the Wolf

Red adjusted the wicker basket on her arm, brushing aside a drooping fern with her other hand as she followed the winding trail deeper into the woods, intent on reaching Grandmother's cottage before noon.

She paused to listen for the rustle of small animals, recalling her mother's warning, then bent to inspect a patch of violets for her grandmother.

Suddenly, the bushes ahead shivered and The Wolf stepped into the path, his silver-grey coat bristling and amber eyes fixed on Red.

He tilted his head, sniffed the air, and spoke in a low, measured voice: 'Good day, little girl.

Where might you be going all alone?

' Red straightened and tightened her grip on the basket, replying, 'I'm taking food to my grandmother.

She lives just past the bend.

' The Wolf's tail flicked as he circled Red at a careful distance, nose twitching as he sized her up.

He glanced toward a fork in the path, then nodded slyly, 'Such a dutiful granddaughter.

The woods are full of wonders.

Perhaps you should pick some flowers for her, too.

' Red, determined to finish her task but intrigued by the suggestion, hesitated and glanced at the wildflowers beside the trail, weighing the Wolf's words.

As she considered, The Wolf melted back into the shadows, his paws silent on the damp earth, leaving Red alone but unsettled.

The encounter shifted Red's route, drawing her further from the main path and setting the stage for the events to come.

Red wandered deeper into the woods, her arms slowly filling with vibrant blossoms. The winding path grew unfamiliar, and shadows lengthened beneath the towering trees. As she searched for a way back, a sudden crack of twigs ahead caught her attention, signaling that she was no longer alone on this quiet forest trail.

## Chapter 2: Red Encounters the Huntsman

Red strode quickly along the winding path, clutching the basket tighter after her unsettling encounter with the wolf.

She ducked beneath a low-hanging branch, twigs scraping her cloak, determined to reach her grandmother's cottage.

Ahead, the rhythmic crunch of heavy boots on undergrowth halted her—The Huntsman, his coat flecked with mud and his hat shadowing sharp eyes, blocked her way, gripping his axe.

He scanned her, noting the basket and the direction she'd come from.

Red's resolve was evident;

she insisted, 'I can't just stay here—my grandmother needs me.

She's all alone, and I promised I'd be there for her.

Red stands up quickly, her face a mix of worry and determination as she grabs her cloak from the chair. Red sprang to her feet, the legs of her chair scraping sharply against the worn floorboards. Worry flickered across her face, quickly chased by a stubborn resolve as she snatched her crimson cloak from where it hung. She couldn't just stay here—her grandmother needed her. The thought spun through her mind with fierce urgency; her grandmother was all alone, waiting, and Red had promised she'd be there. If she hesitated now, what kind of granddaughter would she be? The question pressed heavy on her heart as she fastened the cloak around her shoulders, her determination settling in like a second skin. Red clenches her fists, her eyes shining with worry as she steps toward the door. Red clenched her fists, knuckles paling as she stepped toward the door, worry shining in her eyes. Every minute she waited felt like another moment she was letting her grandmother down—a heavy ache she simply couldn't bear. The thought pressed at her chest, urging her forward despite her mother's warnings, her resolve sharpening with each breath. If I don't go now, what kind of granddaughter would I be?

Red clenches their fists, taking a steadying breath as they stare ahead, determination flickering in their eyes despite the uncertainty before them. Red clenched her fists, steadying herself with a slow breath as the looming uncertainty pressed against her resolve. She stared ahead, determination flickering in her eyes. Turning back wasn't an option—not now, not after everything she'd fought for. If she walked away, she knew all those promises would unravel, and the people depending on her would be left behind. The thought of it stung, but she swallowed her fear, stubbornness rising to meet the doubt twisting in her chest. Even if she was afraid, even if she questioned herself, she had to keep moving forward. To turn back would be surrender, and Red wasn't ready to let go of what mattered most. ' Her voice wavered with urgency: 'Every minute I wait, I feel like I'm letting her down, and I can't bear that.

' Though the Huntsman's expression softened, he warned, 'You shouldn't walk this path alone, not today.

' Red stood her ground, defiant and emotional: 'I can't turn back now.

If I did, everything I've fought for would be wasted—the promises I made, the people depending on me... all of it gone.

Even if I'm afraid, even if I doubt myself, I have to keep going.

Turning back would mean accepting defeat, and I'm not ready to let go of what matters most.

' The Huntsman, recognizing her determination, lowered his axe and stepped aside, but cautioned, 'Stay to the path and don't speak with strangers.

' Red nodded curtly and pushed past, her pace quickening, the huntsman watching her retreat with narrowed eyes, already searching the undergrowth for fresh tracks.

The encounter left pine needles crunching underfoot and the sun dipping lower, shadows lengthening as both pressed on, each driven by duty—hers to her family, his to the safety of the woods.

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Unsettled by the encounter but resolute in her purpose, Red pressed deeper into the forest, the warnings echoing at the edge of her thoughts even as she tried to dismiss them. With every step, the woods grew denser and the hush more profound, the path twisting into unfamiliar territory. As the light faded and the trees seemed to close in around her, Red's determination was tested by the growing sense that she was no longer alone—and soon, she would have no choice but to confront the danger herself.

## Chapter 6: Red Fights Back

Red, gripping the heavy basket with both hands, edges slowly across the creaking floor, her eyes fixed on the figure in Grandmother's bed.

The Wolf, half-hidden beneath the patchwork quilt, stretches his clawed paw toward the bedside table, knocking over a tin cup with a metallic clatter.

He bares his teeth in a crooked imitation of a smile.

Red, recalling her mother's warnings and her grandmother's fragility, scans the room for anything she can use.

She spots the iron poker leaning near the fireplace and, feigning innocence, steps backward, her shoes scuffing against the splintered wood.

The Wolf, hungry and impatient, lunges from the bed, jaws snapping as he growls, 'Come closer, little one.

' Red ducks aside, seizes the poker, and swings it upward, striking the Wolf's shoulder.

The Wolf recoils, fur bristling, and circles to cut off her escape, snarling, 'You clever morsel, but you won't get far.

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As the struggle intensifies, Red's desperate defense echoes through the cottage, her cries mingling with the wolf's snarls. Outside, boots crunch against frost-hardened earth, drawing nearer with



each passing moment. Just as Red braces herself for another attack, a shadow falls across the threshold, signaling that help—and a final reckoning—has arrived.

## Chapter 7: Huntsman Arrives and Final Confrontation

Red, holding her wicker basket, stands by the bed, engaging in a tense exchange with the Wolf disguised as her grandmother, questioning his features as the classic ruse unfolds.

Red tightens her grip on her wicker basket, inching closer to the bed, her brow furrowing as she studies the unfamiliar gleam in ‘Grandmother’s’ eyes. Red hesitated at the threshold, her basket pressed tightly against her side as she peered into the dimly lit room. Something in the air felt different, sharp with a tension she couldn’t quite name. She took a cautious step closer to the bed, her gaze drawn irresistibly to her grandmother’s face—yet those eyes, usually gentle and crinkled with warmth, now seemed impossibly large, glinting strangely in the shadows. Swallowing her unease, Red tried to steady her voice as she edged nearer. “Grandmother, what big eyes you have,” she murmured, curiosity and a flicker of worry threading through her words. The Wolf’s yellow eyes glint hungrily from beneath the shadowed bonnet as he leans closer, his claws twitching beneath the covers. The Wolf narrowed his gleaming yellow eyes, a sly smile curling at the edges of his muzzle as he leaned closer, his gaze sweeping over his unsuspecting visitor. Shadows flickered across his coarse fur, and he tilted his head, letting the light catch the predatory hunger in his stare. “All the better to see you with, my dear,” he murmured, the words dripping with feigned affection. Each syllable seemed to slither from his mouth, masking the menace beneath his gentle tone as he watched every movement, every nervous twitch, calculating his next move. Red tilts her head, her grip on the basket tightening as she takes a wary step closer, studying the figure on the bed. Red hesitated at the edge of her grandmother’s shadowy cottage, her heart thumping with a mixture of concern and curiosity. The dim light flickered across the familiar quilt that covered the old woman’s frail shape, but something felt... different. She took a cautious step closer, her gaze lingering on the figure’s head peeking out from the patchwork covers. A prickle of unease crept up her neck as she noticed the ears, larger and more pointed than she remembered.

Suppressing the urge to retreat, Red’s voice trembled with a blend of wonder and worry as she leaned in, searching the face she loved so dearly. “Grandmother, what big ears you have,” she murmured, her words hanging in the musty air, both a question and a warning. The Wolf’s voice grows rougher, his ears twitching beneath the quilt as he leans closer, eyes glinting with hunger. The Wolf’s yellow eyes glittered in the dim light as he leaned closer, a sly smile curling across his muzzle. His ears pricked forward with exaggerated attentiveness, and he cocked his head, feigning concern. “All the better to hear you with, my dear,” he purred, his voice silky and low, each word dripping with false affection as he watched her reaction, savoring the tremor of unease that flickered across her innocent face. Before the Wolf can strike, the door bursts open;

the Huntsman enters, axe in hand, and immediately confronts the Wolf with authoritative threats.

The Wolf, unafraid, taunts the Huntsman and asserts his willingness to fight, making it clear he will not surrender easily and negotiating for an escape through the window.

The Huntsman stands firm, warning the Wolf and offering a chance for surrender, but the Wolf refuses, ready to attempt an escape or a fight.

The Huntsman plants his feet firmly, raising his axe high, eyes fixed on the Wolf as he moves

forward with unwavering resolve. The Huntsman planted his feet firmly, every muscle tense and ready, as he raised his axe high. His eyes never left the Wolf, and his voice cut through the shadows with unwavering authority. “Back, foul creature!” he commanded, advancing step by deliberate step, swinging the axe in a wide arc meant to drive the beast away. The warning in his tone was unmistakable—take another step toward the girl, and the Wolf would feel the bite of his steel. There would be no sanctuary for evil in the forest tonight, not while the Huntsman stood guard. The Wolf bares its fangs, crouching low, muscles coiled as it circles warily, refusing to yield ground. The Wolf’s lips curled back, exposing sharp fangs as he crouched low, muscles taut beneath his bristling fur. He refused to retreat, instead circling the huntsman with a wary, predatory grace. The steel of the axe flashed, slicing through the air in a warning arc meant to drive him back, but the Wolf only narrowed his eyes, voice rough and sly as he hissed, “You think your blade frightens me, huntsman? I’ve tasted steel before—and tonight, I’ll taste victory.” His words slithered out like a threat, heavy with the promise of violence, undeterred by the gleam of metal or the huntsman’s resolve. The HuntsmanHe lunges forward, swinging the axe in a wide arc to force the Wolf further from the trembling girl. With a practiced lunge, the Huntsman surged between the trembling girl and the Wolf, his axe sweeping in a wide, threatening arc. His voice, steady and resonant, cut through the tension of the clearing as he fixed the beast with an unwavering glare. “Your arrogance blinds you, beast—justice hunts you now, and I will not falter.” The authority in his words was matched only by the determination in his stance, every muscle poised to defend, every instinct honed by years of braving the forest’s darkest corners. The Wolf bares his fangs, muscles tensing, and lunges forward with a snarling leap. The Wolf’s lips curled back, exposing a row of jagged fangs as he pressed low to the ground, every muscle taut with anticipation. With a guttural snarl, he sprang forward, eyes gleaming with predatory challenge. “Then come, huntsman—let’s see if your courage matches your threats!” he spat, voice slick as oil, each word sharpened by his hunger for dominance. The axe swung in a defensive arc, forcing the Wolf to feint sideways, but his sly smile lingered, undeterred, prowling at the edge of danger. Red, meanwhile, remains alert for her grandmother, but the focus remains on the standoff between the Wolf and the Huntsman, heightening the tension and setting the stage for a decisive confrontation.

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As the echoes of their struggle fade and the dust settles, the peril that once gripped the cottage finally begins to lift. Relief mixes with exhaustion as Red and the huntsman turn their attention to the consequences of their actions, searching desperately for any sign of Red’s grandmother. With the immediate danger behind them, they must now face the aftermath of the ordeal and the uncertain path that lies ahead.

## Chapter 8: Rescue and Aftermath

Red kneels by her grandmother’s bedside, smoothing the wrinkled sheet with shaking fingers and helping her sip water from a chipped mug.

The Huntsman stands nearby, checking the sturdiness of the door after repairing it, his boots tracking in fresh mud.

Grandmother, propped up on her pillows, thanks the Huntsman in a trembling voice, then reaches out to clasp Red’s hand.

Grandmother, her hands still shaking, clasps Red’s hand tightly and pulls her granddaughter close,

her eyes shining with tears of relief and love. The grandmother's hands trembled as she reached for the Huntsman, her frail fingers tracing the edge of his sleeve as if to reassure herself that he was truly there. Gratitude shone in her eyes, gentle but fierce, as she looked up at him and murmured, "Oh, thank you, dear Huntsman." Her voice, though soft and quivering, carried the weight of all she had endured. "You saved us—both of us." A sigh escaped her lips, half relief, half wonder, and she pressed his hand between her own, whispering, "I don't know how to ever repay your courage." Despite the exhaustion etched into her face, a resilient warmth lingered in her gaze—a silent promise that kindness would never be forgotten in this little cottage nestled deep in the woods. Red squeezes Grandmother's hand tightly, tears of relief welling in her eyes. Red squeezed her grandmother's hand, her own trembling with the force of her relief. Tears, hot and unbidden, welled in her eyes as she looked at the familiar, gentle face resting against the pillows. The fear that had knotted her chest for what felt like hours finally began to loosen. She drew a shaky breath, voice barely more than a whisper as she pressed closer. She admitted, "Oh, Grandmother—I was so scared, but now that you're safe, I feel like I can finally breathe again." The HuntsmanGrandmother squeezes Red's hand tightly, her eyes shining with grateful tears as she looks from Red to the Huntsman. Grandmother's frail fingers tightened around Red's hand, her eyes brimming with tears that shimmered in the soft afternoon light. Her voice trembled as she looked from her granddaughter to the Huntsman standing at the foot of the bed, his figure steady and reassuring in the doorway. "We have been given a second chance, my dear," she murmured, each word heavy with emotion. Her gaze lingered on the Huntsman, gratitude shining through her exhaustion. "And I thank you, Huntsman, from the bottom of my heart." Red carefully gathers the scattered belongings from the floor and sets the basket of bread and honey on the bedside table, glancing at the Huntsman for reassurance.

The Huntsman nods, urging Red to speak up, and Red promises to heed warnings and visit only when it is safe.

The Huntsman fixes Red with a steady, serious gaze, his tone gentle but firm, making sure she understands the gravity of the situation. The Huntsman fixed Red with a steady, serious gaze, his eyes sharp beneath the brim of his weathered hat. His voice, gentle but carrying an unmistakable firmness, left no room for misunderstanding as he spoke. He reminded her that the woods were not always as quiet as they appeared, and pressed her to promise she would remember his warnings. Only when it was truly safe, he insisted, should she venture this way. His words lingered in the hush between them, weighted with the experience of a man who had seen too much disappear into those shadows. Red meets the Huntsman's gaze, her tone earnest and steady, showing she takes the promise seriously. Red met the Huntsman's steady gaze, her own eyes reflecting a mix of resolve and youthful sincerity. She squared her shoulders, letting the weight of his warning settle over her, and spoke with an earnest steadiness that belied her age. She promised him she would remember everything he'd cautioned, vowing to only cross through the woods when she was certain it was safe. The words left her lips not as a fleeting assurance, but as a genuine pledge—one she intended to keep, no matter how stubborn her curiosity might sometimes urge her otherwise. Outside, the wind rattles the window panes as the Huntsman gathers his axe and prepares to report the wolf's fate to the village elders, while Red tucks the blankets securely around her grandmother, determined to watch over her through the night.

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As dawn broke over the quiet woods, Red sat by her grandmother's side, the nightmare behind them and the promise of new days ahead, while the Huntsman's steady footsteps faded into the

safety of morning.