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Chapter 1: Red Receives the Letter and Sets Off

Scarlett sits at the table, tying the red ribbon of her cloak while her mother slices a loaf of warm bread and wraps it in cloth.

Her mother, with a mix of concern and gentle encouragement, places a sealed letter atop the parcel and slides it toward Scarlett.

'Take this to your grandmother, but do not stray from the path,' she urges, her voice both loving and serious.

Scarlett, clearly curious about the mysterious woods and their secrets, lets her curiosity show as she gazes out the window toward the shadowy trees.

She wonders aloud about what lies within the forest and considers how different it looks at dusk, expressing a longing to discover its mysteries.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett leans closer to the window, her breath fogging the glass ever so slightly as her gaze lingers on the shadowy tree line. Scarlett paused at the edge of the familiar winding path, her red cloak catching the golden light as dusk settled over the woods. She tilted her head, studying the shifting shadows between the trees, a thoughtful crease forming on her brow. The woods always looked so different at this hour, she mused, almost as if they were hiding secrets just out of sight. What really lay beyond the tangled branches and muted glimmers, she wondered, her curiosity tugging at her despite her mother's warnings. With a gentle, steadying breath, Scarlett stepped forward, drawn by the mystery that dusk seemed to promise. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett leans forward, pressing her palm to the cool glass and peering more intently into the gathering darkness. Scarlett pressed her palm to the cool windowpane, leaning forward until her breath fogged the glass. The woods beyond lay shrouded in dusk, the silhouettes of ancient trees shifting restlessly at their edges. Curiosity flickered in her eyes as she watched the shadows slip and swirl between the trunks—always just out of reach, always tempting. She wondered, not for the first time, if taking a few steps closer might finally unveil the secret: what made the darkness dance so mysteriously between the trees. Her mother, both cautious and supportive, reminds Scarlett to be careful and reassures her that it's okay to feel brave while still being careful.

Scarlett's MotherShe squeezes Scarlett's arm gently, her eyes lingering with worry and affection

before releasing her hand. Scarlett's mother squeezed her arm gently, her fingers lingering with both worry and affection before she let go. Her voice was soft but firm, the kind that wrapped around Scarlett like a shawl. She reminded her daughter to stay on the path and keep her eyes open, her gaze searching Scarlett's face as if trying to impress the caution upon her. "I know you're brave," she murmured, a faint smile flickering through her concern, "but it's all right to be careful, too." As Scarlett turned to go, her mother's hand hovered for a moment, unwilling to part, and she added, "I'll be thinking of you every step of the way." Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett squeezes her mother's hand in return, offering a small but determined smile. Scarlett felt her mother's hand tighten around her arm, a silent plea for caution lingering in the gentle pressure. She looked up, her eyes bright with determination despite the flutter of nerves beneath her red cloak. Squeezing her mother's hand in return, she offered a small, reassuring smile. "I promise I'll be careful, Mama—and I'll come straight back after I visit Grandma." The words slipped out softly, earnest and brave, carrying all the weight of her love and her promise as she prepared to step into the sun-dappled path beyond their cottage. Scarlett promises to be careful and to come straight back after visiting her grandmother, determined to prove her responsibility while also satisfying her curiosity.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)She tightens her red cloak around her shoulders, takes a steadying breath, and steps forward, boots crunching as she heads resolutely into the misty forest. Scarlett tightened the red cloak around her shoulders, its familiar weight a small comfort against the chill. Frost crackled beneath her boots as she stepped out, the morning sun barely piercing the thick mist that curled between the trees ahead. She paused at the edge of the yard, steadying herself with a deep breath. Grandmother's counting on me, she reminded herself, determination flickering in her chest. I won't let her down—not today. With that silent promise, she squared her shoulders and strode resolutely into the waiting shadows of the forest. She steels herself, reminding herself of her grandmother's need and her own resolve, then sets off toward the misty woods, her curiosity and sense of duty guiding her steps.

Uncertainty hangs in the air as Scarlett leaves the familiar path behind, letting the shadowed trees swallow her silhouette. With each step deeper into the woods, the world grows quieter, and the sense that she is not alone begins to take root. Unbeknownst to Scarlett, her journey is about to take an unexpected turn, as the forest holds more than just tangled branches and hidden trails.

Chapter 2: Scarlett Encounters the Mysterious Stranger

Scarlett, gripping her wicker basket, navigates around tangled roots and pushes aside a curtain of ferns to clear her path.

Lucian, his axe slung over his shoulder, steps from behind a birch tree, barring her way with a firm but gentle stance.

He scans the woods, eyes alert, and asks in a low voice why she is alone so deep in the forest.

Lucian narrows his eyes, scanning the shadowed trees for any sign of movement, his hand instinctively resting near the hilt of his blade. Lucian's eyes narrowed as he swept the shadowed trees, every muscle tensed for the slightest movement. His hand hovered close to the hilt of his blade, fingers curling as if ready to draw at a moment's notice. In the hush beneath the ancient boughs,

his voice carried low and steady, edged with both warning and concern. “You shouldn’t wander these woods alone.” He paused, gaze never straying from the darkness beyond her shoulder, then added, “What brings you so deep into the forest at this hour?” Scarlett straightens, declaring her intent to reach her grandmother’s cottage and refusing to turn back.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett lifts her chin defiantly, tightening her grip on the basket as she looks Lucian in the eye. Scarlett lifted her chin, the familiar weight of the basket grounding her resolve as she met Lucian’s gaze, unwavering. “No, Lucian. I won’t turn back—not now,” she said, voice clear and steady despite the shadows pooling beneath the trees. Her knuckles whitened around the basket’s handle as she pressed on, heart brimming with determination. “My grandmother is waiting, and I promised I’d bring her this basket.” The woods loomed dark around her, branches whispering warnings she refused to heed. “I know the path,” Scarlett insisted, her eyes bright with conviction. “I can do this.” Lucian steps forward, concern etched in his eyes as he gently positions himself beside Scarlett, ready to accompany her on the path. Lucian moved quietly, the forest floor barely whispering beneath his boots as he stepped forward. Concern creased his brow, but his voice was low and steady, threaded with a gentle insistence as he positioned himself beside Scarlett. “Scarlett, your courage is clear,” he said, eyes scanning the deepening shadows between the trees. “But the forest holds more than shadows—at least let me walk beside you, so neither of us faces its dangers alone.” He didn’t touch her, but the protective set of his shoulders made it clear: he would not let her walk this path unaccompanied. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett tightens her grip on the basket, her gaze steady and unwavering as she steps forward onto the path. Scarlett tightened her grip on the basket, her red cloak fluttering with each purposeful step. She met Lucian’s concerned gaze without flinching, her eyes steady and clear. Though his offer lingered in the air between them, she shook her head, resolute. This journey was hers alone—her promise to Grandmother carried more weight than the trembling uncertainty in her chest. “I appreciate your offer, Lucian,” she said softly, her voice threaded with determination, “but this is something I must do on my own. My promise to her matters more than my fear.” Without waiting for further protest, Scarlett straightened her shoulders and stepped onto the winding path, the morning sun glinting off her cloak as she began her solitary walk toward the cottage nestled deep in the woods. Lucian warns her of fresh wolf tracks nearby, kneeling to point out claw marks in the mud.

Lucian kneels by the muddy path, brushing away wet leaves to reveal the sharp, unmistakable claw marks. His voice is low and urgent as he gestures for Scarlett to come closer and see for herself. Lucian knelt beside the muddied path, his gloved hands sweeping aside a tangle of wet leaves. Beneath them, the earth yielded a set of deep, razor-edged impressions. He glanced up at Scarlett, his eyes shadowed with concern, and beckoned her silently to his side. “These tracks are fresh,” he murmured, his voice pitched low as if the forest itself might be listening. He traced a finger along the print, showing her how the mud was still slick and dark within its contours. “See how the claws dug deep? This wasn’t just a stray passing through. Whatever made these marks came by less than an hour ago—maybe even less.” His tone carried both warning and certainty, the quiet gravity of someone who knew too well the dangers that prowled these woods. Scarlett hesitates, then insists she must continue, glancing down at the tracks before stepping past Lucian.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett hesitates at the edge of the tracks, her fingers clutching the basket tightly. She takes a shaky breath, then steps forward, resolutely moving past Lucian while trying to mask her uncertainty. Scarlett squared her shoulders, the weight of her red cloak settling more firmly around her as she faced Lucian. The forest loomed, shadows pooling between

the gnarled trees, but she kept her voice steady despite the tremor beneath it. “I know this path is dangerous, Lucian,” she said, her eyes flicking to his with a mixture of impatience and resolve. “You don’t have to remind me.” The underbrush rustled at her feet as she took a cautious step forward, determination burning brighter than her fear. “But I can’t turn back now—not when I’ve come this far.” Scarlett’s grip tightened on the basket swinging from her arm, its contents a promise she refused to break. “Grandma’s waiting, and I promised I’d bring her what she needs.” She met Lucian’s gaze, pleading but unyielding. “Please, let me pass.” Lucian steps sideways, his arm slightly outstretched as if to bar her way, concern etched deep in his eyes. Lucian shifted sideways, his boots silent on the damp earth, the gesture protective as his arm came up—not quite touching Scarlett, but barring her path all the same. Concern flickered deeply in the shadows of his eyes, sharp and vigilant as ever, and when he spoke, his voice carried the warmth and warning of someone who’d seen too much of the forest’s hidden perils. “Scarlett, just because you’ve come this far doesn’t mean you have to go alone,” he urged, gaze lingering on the uncertain tracks at their feet. “Let me help you, or at least wait until the fog clears.” Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett tightens her grip on her basket, her jaw set, as she steps firmly past Lucian onto the shadowed path. Scarlett hesitated, the dense woods ahead swallowing the last slivers of sunlight. She glanced down at the tracks pressed into the soft earth, then back at Lucian’s worried eyes. Her fingers tightened around the basket’s handle, knuckles whitening as she drew a steadying breath. She could feel the tremor of nerves fluttering in her chest, but she forced herself to step forward, determination settling over her features like armor. If she waited any longer, she feared her courage might falter—and, she told herself firmly, she would not let fear decide for her. With her jaw set, Scarlett squared her shoulders and moved past Lucian onto the shadowed path, the red of her cloak vivid against the gloom. Lucian steps aside reluctantly, his eyes fixed on Scarlett as she moves past, worry etched across his face. Lucian shifted his weight, boots crunching softly against the tangled undergrowth as he reluctantly stepped aside, his presence never quite receding even as he made room for Scarlett to pass. His gaze, sharp and unwavering, stayed fixed on her, tracing the line of her shoulders as she hesitated over the muddied tracks at her feet. Worry carved deep lines across his face, and when he spoke, his voice was low but urgent, almost catching on the cool morning air. “Then at least promise me you’ll call if anything seems wrong—I don’t want to lose you to the woods too.” Lucian, motivated to protect her, tries to persuade her to let him accompany her, but Scarlett firmly insists this is something she must do alone, referencing her promise and her need to face her fears.

Lucian, respecting her resolve, asks her to promise to call for help if she senses danger and remains nearby, listening for distant howls and watching for movement among the trees.

As Scarlett disappears into the deepening shadows, Lucian’s warning echoes in her mind, sharpening her senses to every rustle and distant cry. The woods, now tinged with uncertainty, seem to close in around her, each step drawing her closer to her grandmother’s cottage—and to an encounter she cannot yet foresee. With her thoughts swirling between caution and curiosity, Scarlett presses on, unaware of the cunning presence waiting just beyond her destination.

Chapter 3: The Wolf's Deception at Grandmother's Cottage

Scarlett arrives at the cottage, her boots squelching in muddy earth as she knocks on the pine door.

Viktor, disguised in Grandmother's nightgown and cap, lies stiffly in the creaky bed, the coarse linen scratching his fur beneath the covers.

Scarlett sets her wicker basket on the oak table and approaches, narrowing her eyes at Viktor's twitching nose poking from beneath the blanket.

She leans closer, inspecting the long, clawed hands gripping the quilt, and asks in a steady voice, 'Grandmother, what big hands you have.

' Viktor, forcing his voice into a quavering imitation, replies, 'All the better to hold you with, my dear,' while curling his claws tighter around the sheet.

Scarlett silently steps back, keeping one hand near the fireplace poker as she scans the room for signs of her real grandmother, determined to uncover the deception.

But as Scarlett's unease grows, a faint noise from the locked closet catches her attention, deepening her suspicion. Unbeknownst to both her and Viktor, footsteps approach the cottage from the shadowed woods—Lucian, drawn by his own urgent purpose, is about to arrive and tip the delicate balance of deception and danger.

Chapter 4: Scarlett's Suspicion and Lucian's Return

Scarlett, determined to help her sick grandmother, braves the muddy path with her basket of herbal remedies.

When Lucian emerges from the shadows, he warns her with urgency that Viktor is dangerously close to the cottage and insists they must act quickly.

Scarlett, resolute, argues for her independence and the importance of her promise to her grandmother, but her words reveal an inner struggle between her need for self-reliance and her understanding of the risks.

Lucian pauses at the edge of the clearing, scanning the shadows, his hand resting instinctively on his weapon as he waits for Scarlett's reaction. Lucian paused at the edge of the clearing, his boots sinking into the damp earth, the forest's hush pressing in from all sides. He scanned the shifting shadows, every sense sharpened, his hand instinctively resting on the hilt of his blade. His gaze flicked to Scarlett, intense and unwavering. "Scarlett," he said quietly, urgency threaded through his voice. "We don't have much time." He kept his stance vigilant, eyes narrowing as he continued, "Viktor was seen circling the cottage—he's closer than ever." Lucian's jaw tightened, the protective edge in him flaring. "We need to decide what to do before he makes his move." The words hung between them, weighted with warning and the promise of action. Lucian, more anxious than before, pleads with her repeatedly to accept his help, stressing the unpredictability of the woods and his concern for her safety.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett pushes past Lucian, her brow furrowed with concern as she shoulders aside a low branch, eyes fixed on the winding path ahead. Scarlett pressed forward, brushing past Lucian with a determined set to her jaw. Her fingers tightened around the handle of the basket as she ducked beneath a low-hanging branch, her eyes never straying from the twisting path ahead. "I don't have time," she insisted, her voice edged with urgency and concern. "My grandmother needs me." The promise she had made echoed in her mind—she would bring this basket, no matter what. Nothing, not even Lucian's worried presence, was going to stop her. Lucian steps in front of her path, his eyes scanning the dense shadows between the trees. Lucian stepped in front of her, a protective barrier between Scarlett and the labyrinth of shadows beyond. His gaze swept the undergrowth, keen and vigilant, every muscle taut with silent warning. "Scarlett, wait—going alone isn't safe, especially with the woods so thick today." The words came low and earnest, edged with a concern that brooked no argument, as if he alone understood what might be lurking just out of sight. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett tightens her grip on the basket, her gaze unwavering as she steps forward, determination etched across her face. Scarlett tightened her grip on the woven basket, the weight of its contents grounding her as she moved past Lucian with purposeful steps. Determination burned in her eyes—a fire that refused to be dimmed by warning or doubt. She didn't bother to slow, her voice steady but urgent as she declared, "I know the woods better than anyone, Lucian." The words hung in the cool air, her conviction unmistakable. "My grandmother is counting on me." She didn't pause, didn't falter, her gaze fixed on the path ahead. "So either help me or let me go," she added, her tone leaving no room for argument. Lucian steps in front of Scarlett, his gaze earnest as he tries to match her pace, clearly unwilling to let her go alone. Lucian moved swiftly, positioning himself between Scarlett and the narrow forest path ahead. His presence was commanding—protective yet never overbearing—as he tried to meet her determined stride. There was an earnest intensity in his eyes, the kind that brooked no argument, even as he softened his words for her sake. "Scarlett," he said, his voice low and unwavering, "if you're set on this, at least let me walk with you—danger isn't always something you can see." Even as she attempted to sidestep him, his vigilance didn't waver; it was clear he had no intention of letting her disappear into the woods alone. Their conversation is more emotionally charged and layered than before, with Scarlett acknowledging Lucian's care but emphasizing her need to grow by facing danger herself.

Lucian steps in front of Scarlett, his arm outstretched and eyes narrowed, scanning the rustling shadows at the edge of the path. Lucian moved swiftly, stepping in front of Scarlett with protective intent, his arm stretching out to bar her from the uncertain darkness beyond the path. His gaze was sharp, sweeping the rustling shadows with a quiet intensity that betrayed his vigilance. "Scarlett, wait—don't go alone," he said, voice low but urgent, never taking his eyes off the trembling undergrowth. Every line of his posture radiated resolve and a quiet charm, as if he'd made it his duty to shield her from whatever prowled the night. "Something's not right out here tonight. Let me walk with you." Ultimately, after a tense exchange in which both characters share their vulnerabilities, Scarlett accepts Lucian's companionship—not as a guardian, but as a supportive ally—while making it clear she wants to lead the journey.

Lucian steps closer, concern etched on his face as he tries to meet Scarlett's gaze. Lucian stepped closer, his silhouette cutting deeper into the hush of the forest. Concern was etched in the furrow of his brow as he tried to catch Scarlett's gaze, unwilling to let her dismiss his words. "Scarlett," he began, his voice low but threaded with intensity, "I know you're capable." He paused, searching her eyes for a flicker of understanding, his protective nature surfacing between them like a shield. "But the world isn't always kind to those who walk alone," he continued, gentling his tone yet refusing to

back down. “Promise me you’ll at least let me help when things get rough.” The quiet around them seemed to lean in, the woodland shadows bearing silent witness to his plea. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett folds her arms defiantly, her gaze steady as she meets Lucian’s worried eyes. Scarlett folded her arms, the scarlet of her cloak flaring against the dusk as she stood her ground. Her gaze met Lucian’s, steady and unyielding, refusing to be shaken by the worry etched across his face. The hush between them carried his caution, lingering in the air. But Scarlett’s voice—quiet but certain—broke through. She told him she appreciated his concern, yet she couldn’t spend her life glancing over her shoulder. No matter how much danger lay ahead, she needed to trust herself to face whatever waited in the woods, even if it meant risking everything. Lucian gently places a reassuring hand on Scarlett’s shoulder, his eyes searching hers for understanding. Lucian’s hand settled gently on Scarlett’s shoulder, his touch steady and warm amid the hush of the forest. His eyes, dark and intent, lingered on hers, searching for a flicker of understanding. “I know you need to stand on your own,” he murmured, his voice low enough to blend with the wind threading through the trees. “But my worry isn’t about doubting your strength—it’s about wanting you safe when uncertainty turns dangerous.” The words, spoken with quiet intensity, revealed not just his vigilance, but the depth of care he tried so hard to conceal. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett lifts her chin, meeting Lucian’s gaze with quiet determination, her red cloak catching the faint light as she stands her ground. Scarlett lifted her chin, the fabric of her red cloak catching the faint light as she faced Lucian with quiet determination. The stillness between them seemed to press in, amplifying the gentle echo of their words. Lucian’s voice was careful, laced with concern, urging her to tread carefully. But Scarlett’s resolve did not waver. She met his gaze, her eyes bright with conviction, and said softly but firmly that safety mattered—of course it did—but so did learning to trust her own judgment. If she never stepped into the unknown, how would she ever grow? That was a risk she was willing to take, and she stood her ground, the shadow of adventure flickering in her expression. They set off together, side-by-side, both aware of the lurking threat but strengthened by their mutual respect and understanding.

As the door closed behind them, a tense silence lingered in the air, the echoes of Viktor’s true nature still reverberating through the cottage. Though Scarlett and Lucian had escaped immediate danger, the confrontation had left questions unanswered and emotions raw. With each step away from the cottage, they could not ignore the secrets unearthed and the new uncertainties that shadowed their path. The night was far from over, and as they prepared to face Viktor once more, they sensed that startling revelations awaited them—ones that would challenge everything they thought they knew.

Chapter 5: The Confrontation and a Surprising Confession

Scarlett stands at the oak table, pouring hot tea with calm yet probing curiosity.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets the teapot down with a faint clink, her hand trembling ever so slightly as she watches Viktor through narrowed eyes. Scarlett drew her red cloak tighter around her shoulders, the chill of the forest seeping through even the thickest wool. She paused on the narrow path, glancing over at Viktor, whose boots were muddied from the long trek. The forest felt wilder than ever—she’d heard the howls at dusk, seen shadows flit between the trees, and noticed unfamiliar faces passing through the village. Curiosity flickered in her eyes as she studied her companion, a stranger braving the deep woods in such unruly weather. “You

must've come a long way, Viktor," she remarked, her voice soft but edged with concern. "The forest's been wild lately—strangers about, wolves howling. What brings you so deep into these woods, if you don't mind me asking?" She tried to catch his gaze, hoping for honesty in his answer, even as the wind rattled the branches overhead. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor offers a faint, almost apologetic smile, his eyes flickering from the dancing flames to Scarlett's tense grip on the teapot. Viktor's smile was faint, almost apologetic, as he watched the interplay of shadows cast by the fire. His gaze drifted to Scarlett's tense hands, her knuckles white around the handle of the cracked teapot. "Ah, just seeking shelter from the storm, nothing more—these woods are less forgiving than they once were, wouldn't you agree?" he offered, the words slipping gently into the charged quiet, as if he hoped to ease the strain that hung between them. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets the teacup in front of Viktor, her hand lingering just long enough to watch his reaction, eyes sharp beneath her hood. Scarlett set the teacup before Viktor, her fingers hovering on the rim a heartbeat longer than necessary, watching for the flicker of surprise—or recognition—in his eyes. The cracked ceramic pot trembled slightly in her grip as she poured, steam curling between them. Beneath the shadow of her red hood, her gaze was keen, unblinking. "Forgiving, perhaps, but never forgetful," she murmured, the words weaving into the hush of the cottage. "These woods remember every footstep, especially those that don't belong." As the tea's aroma mingled with the scent of moss and distant pine, Scarlett's voice lingered in the air, both a warning and a quiet challenge. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor gives a thin smile, his eyes lingering on the steam rising from Scarlett's cup, hands folded calmly but tension visible in his shoulders. Viktor's hands remained folded on the table, but tension coiled in his shoulders, belying the calmness of his posture. As steam curled upward from Scarlett's cup, he allowed himself a thin, almost wistful smile, his gaze lingering on the fragile dance of warmth in the chilly air between them. "And yet," he murmured, voice soft but steady, "sometimes it's the forgotten paths that offer the warmest welcome—if one knows where to step." Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets the teacup in front of Viktor with a steady hand, though her eyes linger on his muddied boots, searching for answers among the clinging dirt. Scarlett set the teacup in front of Viktor with a steady hand, though her gaze lingered on the thick mud caked to his boots—a silent record of where he'd been and, perhaps, what he'd done. As she poured the steaming tea from the cracked ceramic pot, her voice came soft but certain, weaving easily with the gentle clink of porcelain. "Warm welcomes can hide cold intentions, Viktor; I've learned to watch for both." She held his gaze then, curiosity flickering behind her calm composure, determined to read any truth that might slip between his words or the dirt at his feet. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor lifts his cup with steady hands, but his eyes flicker to the door, gauging her reaction. Viktor lifted his cup, the steady motion at odds with the restless flicker of his eyes toward the door, as if measuring the distance between trust and escape. Scarlett's hands moved with practiced care, pouring hot tea from a cracked ceramic pot, her gaze meeting his with unspoken questions. He watched her, weighing his words, and then let a hint of reassurance slip into his voice. "You have sharp instincts, Scarlett—rest assured, I've no wish to overstep your hospitality." The words lingered in the quiet, his tone both respectful and edged with something softer, almost regretful, as if he hoped she'd believe him despite the wolf's shadow that clung to his every gesture. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets Viktor's teacup down with a quiet clink, her eyes never leaving his face as steam curls between them. Scarlett set Viktor's teacup down, the porcelain meeting wood with a soft clink. She kept her gaze fixed on him, watching the steam spiral gently between them. Pouring hot tea from the cracked ceramic pot, she spoke quietly, her words edged with the certainty of someone who'd wandered these woods more than once. Instincts, she said, were what kept a girl safe here—especially when the shadows outlasted the day and the forest seemed to breathe with secrets of its own. Viktor

(The Wolf)Viktor lifts his cup, letting the steam obscure his eyes as he studies Scarlett over the rim, his voice deceptively gentle. Viktor lifted his cup, allowing the rising steam to veil his eyes for a moment as he studied Scarlett over the rim. His voice slipped into an almost tender cadence, the gentleness deceptive. "And yet," he murmured, pausing just long enough for Scarlett to sense the weight of his words, "shadows only grow where the light dares not follow." The faintest flicker of conflict crossed his features—regret, perhaps, or longing for something lost. He set his cup down with deliberate care, gaze never leaving hers. "Some secrets," he continued, the corners of his mouth curving in a bittersweet smile, "prefer the dusk, don't they?" Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets Viktor's teacup down with a deliberate clink, her eyes never leaving his as she eases into the chair across from him, hands folded tightly in her lap. Scarlett set Viktor's teacup down with a deliberate clink, the porcelain trembling ever so slightly in her careful grip. She eased into the chair across from him, hands folded tightly in her lap, her gaze unwavering. The cracked ceramic pot still steamed between them, its fragrant warmth curling through the hush that had settled over the room. Outside, dusk pressed against the windows, thick and impenetrable, but Scarlett's voice cut quietly through the gloom as she studied Viktor's face. Secrets, she mused, had a way of slipping out—even in the thickest dusk, and especially when guests lingered after dark. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor leans forward, his eyes catching the flicker of firelight as he wraps his muddy coat tighter, the faintest hint of a smile curling at the edge of his mouth. Viktor leaned forward, the firelight catching in the depths of his eyes as he drew his muddy coat tighter around his shoulders. A faint, knowing smile flickered at the corner of his mouth. Watching Scarlett fuss with the cracked ceramic pot, he let his voice slip into the hush between them, low and almost confessional. "Some guests find nightfall comforting; it conceals what daylight might expose." Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett slides Viktor's teacup across the table, her eyes never leaving his face as she keeps her hand curled protectively around her own. Scarlett slid Viktor's teacup across the battered oak table, the chipped rim catching for a moment beneath her slender fingers. Her own cup she kept close, hand curled protectively around it as if the warmth might steady her nerves. The steam curled between them, softening the shadows that clung to Viktor's face. Without looking away, she poured the last of the hot tea from the cracked ceramic pot, her voice quiet but clear. Comfort, or concealment—it was always hard to tell the difference, she mused aloud, especially when one could never be sure if a guest sought shelter from the storm outside, or something darker lurking within. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor wraps his arms tighter around himself, eyes flickering between the fire and Scarlett's steady gaze, his voice soft but edged with something unspoken. Viktor hugged himself tighter, as if warding off more than just the chill that seeped through the cracks of the cabin walls. His eyes flickered between the restless flames and Scarlett's unwavering gaze, searching for words. When he finally spoke, his voice was low, almost confessional, edged with a vulnerability he rarely allowed himself. "Sometimes," he murmured, watching the steam curl from the chipped teacup she held, "the things we run from are closer than we think. The storm..." He glanced toward the shuttered window, as if the wind might overhear his admission. "It's just an excuse to pause, to catch our breath." The truth lingered in the quiet that followed, heavy and unspoken. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets the teapot down with a soft clink, her hands steady but her gaze sharp and unblinking on Viktor's face. Scarlett set the teapot down with a soft clink, her hands steady despite the steam curling between them. She didn't look away from Viktor, her gaze sharp and unblinking, studying the way his eyes flitted from shadow to shadow, never quite resting, not even with the fire's warmth spilling over the oak table. "You speak as if you know the weight of running," she observed quietly, her words threaded with curiosity and something gentler—an understanding. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor traces the rim of his chipped mug with a muddy fingertip, gaze flickering between Scarlett's steady eyes and the

flickering shadows on the wall. Viktor traced the rim of his chipped mug with a muddy fingertip, pausing as the heat from it seeped into his rough skin. Across the table, Scarlett's steady eyes met his, her hands sure even as she poured steaming tea from the cracked ceramic pot. Shadows flickered on the wall behind her, briefly catching his attention—a reminder of how easily comfort could slip into danger. With a low, almost wistful tone, Viktor let his gaze return to her. Warm fires, he reflected, had a way of coaxing people into lowering their guard, yet the habits he'd carried through storms and curses seemed to cling tighter than even the worst of weather. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett pours the tea with a steady hand, her gaze unwavering as she slides his cup across the table, the faint aroma of herbs drifting between them. Scarlett poured the tea with a steady hand, her eyes never leaving Viktor as she slid his cup across the scarred oak table. The faint aroma of herbs curled in the air between them, mingling with the sharper scent of wolfbane drifting from the windowsill. She watched the subtle flicker in his expression, noting how he glanced, almost involuntarily, toward the door. A small, knowing smile tugged at her lips. "What sort of habits are those, Viktor?" she asked quietly, her voice threaded with curiosity and a hint of challenge. "Are they the kind that keep your eyes darting to the exit, or the kind that make you flinch whenever you catch the scent of wolfbane here?" Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor's fingers tighten around his mug, his gaze flickering briefly to the window where dried wolfbane hangs, before settling warily on Scarlett. Viktor's fingers curled tighter around his mug, the knuckles pale in the flickering lamplight. His gaze flicked, almost involuntarily, toward the window where dried wolfbane dangled—an ever-present warning—before settling warily on Scarlett. As she poured steaming tea from the chipped ceramic pot, the scent of chamomile mingling with something wilder in the air, Viktor's voice cut quietly through the room. "Old habits, Scarlett," he murmured, his words carrying the weight of memories and cautions, "are the kind that remind a man—or a beast—when he's wandered too close to danger." Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets the teacup in front of Viktor with trembling fingers, never taking her eyes off his mud-splattered boots. Scarlett set the chipped teacup before Viktor, her fingers trembling ever so slightly, though she refused to let her gaze stray from the mud-caked boots planted on her grandmother's rug. The storm outside still rattled the windowpanes, a low growl that seemed to seep into the small cottage, but she ignored it. Instead, she poured the steaming tea, watching it swirl as if it might reveal some secret lurking beneath its surface. Danger, she thought, was nothing more than a word—until it sat across your table, tracking mud over the threshold and asking for tea. Her voice, steady despite the tremor in her hands, slipped into the hush between thunderclaps. "So tell me, Viktor," she said, her eyes sharp with curiosity and something braver, "are you truly thirsty, or just waiting for the dark to finish what the storm began?" Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor wraps his fingers around the cracked mug, his gaze lingering on the shadows that pool beneath the table. Viktor wrapped his long, scarred fingers around the cracked mug, feeling the warmth seep through the worn ceramic. Shadows gathered beneath the table, thickening as the sun retreated from the corners of the room. He watched Scarlett carefully, studying the way her hand trembled only slightly as she poured the steaming tea. His voice, low and roughened by years of regret, slipped into the hush between them. A sip of tea might steady shaking hands, he mused aloud, but some thirsts—he let his gaze linger on the night pressing at the window—only grew sharper with nightfall. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett sets the teacup down in front of Viktor with a careful, measured motion, her eyes never leaving his face as the wind rattles the shutters. Scarlett set the teacup down in front of Viktor with careful precision, the porcelain clinking softly against the wood as the wind rattled the shutters behind her. She kept her gaze fixed on him, her eyes steady and thoughtful. "I hope you're not too parched, Viktor," she said gently, her voice threading through the hush of the room. "There's comfort in tea, but little relief

for a hunger that waits in the shadows.” The words lingered in the air between them—part concern, part warning—as she slid the cup a little closer, her red cloak catching the firelight. Viktor, cloaked in mud and mystery, trades tense, layered words with her, both hinting at hidden motives and past traumas.

Lucian slams the door behind him, breath ragged, eyes darting to every shadow as he advances into the dimly lit room. Lucian slammed the door behind him, the sound reverberating through the cramped, shadowed room. His breath came in ragged pulls, each inhale sharp with vigilance. Wet leaves trailed from his boots, marking his harried path as he swept the dim space with a fierce, searching gaze. He didn’t hesitate. “No time to waste—if anyone’s here, show yourself!” The warning rolled off his tongue, low and urgent, as he brandished his axe with practiced ease. His knuckles whitened around the handle. “Or else, this axe finds its mark.” Every muscle in his frame was coiled and ready, the air charged with the promise of swift, necessary violence. Their conversation grows more intimate and revealing than before, with Scarlett displaying sharper suspicion and a demand for truth, while Viktor admits to being cursed and haunted by a monstrous side he cannot always control.

Lucian bursts in, protective and wary, and keeps his axe at the ready, though his aggression is focused on ensuring proof rather than outright hostility.

Scarlett presents a family portrait, noticing Viktor’s deep recognition and prompting a confession: Viktor has protected her family for generations due to a debt owed after her grandmother spared him, intertwining their bloodline with his fate.

Lucian steps in front of Scarlett, his arm stretched protectively across her path, eyes scanning the shadowed doorway ahead. Lucian’s boots barely made a sound as he stepped in front of Scarlett, his presence blocking her path with a swift, protective motion. His arm extended across her chest, barring her from the shadowed doorway ahead. Eyes narrowed, he swept his gaze over the darkness, every muscle taut with vigilance. “Scarlett, wait—let me go first,” he murmured, voice low but urgent. There was a warning in the way he held himself, a quiet intensity that hinted at dangers unseen. “We don’t know what’s waiting for us in there.” The dialogue reveals that Scarlett is not just an outsider to the Wolf’s story, but part of it herself;

Viktor (The Wolf) Viktor sits at the edge of a battered chair, hands clenched so tightly his knuckles turn white, eyes lowered and voice trembling with conviction. “You want the truth? Fine. There’s a darkness in me—old as the blood in my veins. It comes in the night, when the moon is high, and it takes everything I am. I become... something else. Something I can’t control. People call it a curse. They’re right. But I’m not here to tear down those who wronged me. I’m here because every life I’ve wrecked weighs on me like chains. I’m not hunting vengeance—not anymore. I want to be free, to be forgiven, even if that means facing the monster in myself. I’m tired of running from it.” —Viktor (The Wolf)

Viktor exposes the wolf’s mark within her lineage, making the curse and its resolution a family legacy.

Lucian lowers his axe slightly, but his grip remains firm and his stance tense, prepared to react at a moment’s notice. Lucian lowered his axe, but the tension in his shoulders never eased. His grip remained firm, knuckles pale against the worn haft, each muscle poised for a sudden move if needed. His gaze, sharp and unwavering, fixed upon the stranger before him. Words alone did little to sway him—he’d long since learned that trust required more than promises whispered in

the dusk. “I’ve seen too many betrayals to trust so easily,” his voice carried no warmth, only the weight of bitter experience. If they wished to convince him, he needed proof—something tangible, something real. Until then, the axe would never leave his side. Scarlett bravely accepts the truth and promises to help Viktor break the curse, while Lucian agrees to a fragile truce, standing guard as night falls.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood) Scarlett holds out the faded portrait, her voice steady but her hands trembling slightly as she faces Viktor, searching his eyes for answers. Scarlett retrieved the faded portrait from the mantle, her fingers tracing its worn edges as she turned to face Viktor. Though her voice remained steady, her hands betrayed her with a slight tremble. She held the picture out toward him, searching his eyes for any flicker of recognition.

“Viktor,” she began, her gaze unwavering, “this portrait has sat here for years, but it’s only now that I noticed how you reacted to it.” She watched his expression closely, her curiosity sharpened by the way his features tightened. “You recognized these faces, didn’t you?” The question hung between them, laden with something heavier than simple curiosity. Scarlett drew in a breath, her compassion mingling with the need for answers. “This isn’t just any family portrait—it means something. Please, Viktor, tell me what you know.” Her voice softened, but her tone was insistent. “How are you connected to them?” Viktor (The Wolf) Viktor steps closer, his gaze lingering on the portrait, fingers tracing the edge of the faded frame as he struggles with the memories surfacing. Viktor stepped closer, the soft pads of his fingers gliding along the worn edge of the frame as if he could conjure the past from the touch alone. His gaze lingered on the faded faces, each one a ghostly reminder, and when he finally spoke, his voice was low and unsteady, a quiet confession slipping out against his will. “Scarlett,” he began, the name almost a sigh, “the truth is more tangled than you realize.” Pain flickered in his eyes, but he pressed on, unable to look away from the portrait. “Your grandmother once saved me, and every face in that portrait holds a debt—or a secret—owed to the Wolf.” Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood) Scarlett steps closer, holding the portrait tightly, her voice steady but urgent as she fixes Viktor with a determined gaze. Scarlett stepped closer, the faded portrait clutched tightly in her hand, the weight of it grounding her resolve. Her eyes found Viktor’s, unwavering and sharp, refusing to let him slip away behind half-truths and evasions. “You owe me the truth, Viktor,” she insisted, her voice steady but edged with urgency. “No more riddles. Start with my grandmother—tell me what happened between you and my family.” Viktor (The Wolf) Viktor’s gaze lingers on the portrait, his claws resting lightly on the frame as if recalling old memories. Viktor’s gaze lingered on the faded portrait, his claws resting lightly on the edge of the frame, tracing its contours as though summoning memories buried deep beneath his fur and flesh. Scarlett watched the way his amber eyes softened, flickering with something almost human. Quietly, he spoke—not as a beast, but as a man marked by gratitude and sorrow. Her grandmother’s face in the painting drew his attention, and his voice was low, reverent. She had spared him once, deep in the forest, when hunters closed in on all sides. In that act of mercy, Viktor found a purpose beyond survival. From the shadows, he had devoted himself to watching over every face in that portrait, becoming the silent guardian of their bloodline. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood) Scarlett steps closer to Viktor, her grip tightening on the portrait, her eyes searching his face for honesty. Scarlett stepped closer, the faded portrait clutched tightly in her hands. She studied Viktor’s face, searching for some flicker of truth in his eyes. The way he looked at the picture told her he recognized every face, every shadow behind those smiles. If he had truly watched over her family all these years, then he must carry secrets no one else could know. Scarlett’s voice trembled with need and resolve as she pleaded, “You must tell me everything, Viktor—starting with why my grandmother trusted you.” Viktor (The Wolf) Viktor

steps closer to the portrait, his gaze lingering on Scarlett's grandmother as his voice grows softer with old regret. Viktor stepped closer to the portrait, the firelight flickering across his lupine features as his gaze lingered on the image of Scarlett's grandmother. His voice, usually edged with sly confidence, softened now, weighted with regret that seemed to echo from a lifetime ago. "She trusted me," he murmured, almost to himself, as if the truth cost him dearly. "She saw the sorrow behind my hunger, and in her mercy, she offered me forgiveness when the world would offer only fear." The words hung between them, fragile and honest, as Viktor's eyes traced the old woman's gentle smile, haunted by memories of grace he'd long believed lost to him. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps closer, holding the portrait between them, her gaze searching Viktor's face for any sign of hesitation or hidden truths. Scarlett stepped closer, the faded family portrait trembling slightly in her hand as she held it between herself and Viktor. Her eyes, sharp with curiosity and something gentler beneath, searched his face as if she might uncover the truth in the lines of his expression. "If my grandmother saw something worth saving in you, Viktor," she said quietly, her voice steady despite the uncertainty that flickered in her gaze, "then I need to understand what bound you to us." Her grip on the frame tightened, the old glass cool beneath her fingers. "Tell me about the promises made that night," she pressed, "and what debts still linger between you and my family." Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor gently places a clawed hand over the faded portrait, his eyes meeting Scarlett's with solemn intensity. Viktor's clawed hand hovered for a moment before settling gently atop the faded portrait, the sharp curve of his talons a stark contrast to the softness in his touch. His eyes, deep pools swirling with old sorrow and something dangerously close to hope, met Scarlett's gaze.

"The promise," he said, his voice low and threaded with memory, "was simple, yet binding—protection for your family, in exchange for secrecy and trust." His thumb traced the ghostly outline of a face in the photograph, as if recalling every past whisper and bargain. "But each generation," Viktor continued, the weight of years pressing on each word, "added its own price."

He looked up at her then, the solemn intensity in his gaze unflinching. "And now, Scarlett, the final debt is yours to claim." Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps closer, holding the portrait between them, her eyes searching Viktor's face for answers. Scarlett stepped closer, the faded portrait trembling slightly in her grip as she held it between herself and Viktor. Her eyes lingered on his face, searching for the truth she sensed he carried—no more evasions, no more half-answers. If the final debt truly belonged to her, she needed to understand its weight. Her voice was steady, but beneath it lay a thread of urgency and resolve. She looked Viktor straight in the eyes, compelling him gently but firmly. She needed to know exactly what her family had asked of him, and what it was she was now meant to do—no more shadows, no more secrets. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor steps closer to the portrait, gently tracing a claw over the faded faces, his eyes meeting Scarlett's with solemn intensity. Viktor stepped closer to the mantle, his shadow stretching across the faded portrait Scarlett held in her trembling hands. With a gentleness that belied the razor curve of his claw, he traced the worn edges of the painted faces—faces he remembered far too well. The silence hung heavy until his gaze locked with Scarlett's, solemn and unyielding. "Scarlett," he said, voice low, the words woven with regret and gravity, "the debt your family owes is not merely for protection. It is the truth itself." His claw lingered over the image as he continued, the confession almost reverent. "They asked me to guard the secret of our bond—until you were ready to face what lies hidden in your lineage." Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett holds the portrait tightly, her gaze unwavering as she steps closer to Viktor, determination in her voice and eyes. Scarlett's fingers curled tightly around the faded portrait, the edges worn smooth by years of silent reverence. She lifted her chin, the firelight catching in her determined eyes, and

stepped closer to Viktor, the distance between them shrinking with each deliberate stride. Though her heart beat hard beneath her red cloak, her gaze never wavered from his. “I’m ready,” she said, her voice steady and clear, the weight of generations behind it. “Show me what my family hid, Viktor—and let me decide what to do with the truth.” Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor steps beside Scarlett, gently guiding her hand to the faded corner of the portrait where a subtle wolf sigil is hidden among the painted shadows. Viktor stepped quietly beside Scarlett, his presence a shadow at her shoulder. With surprising gentleness, he guided her hand toward the faded corner of the portrait, his clawed fingers barely grazing hers. “Look closer,” he murmured, his voice a low current beneath the hush of the room. He traced the subtle wolf sigil hidden among the painted shadows, his eyes never leaving the canvas. “The eyes you thought belonged only to your kin—look again. See how the wolf’s mark is woven through your bloodline.” There was both pride and sorrow in his gaze as he met hers, the truth hanging between them. “You are not just their legacy, Scarlett,” he said, voice tight with something like longing. “You are mine as well.” The scene ends with the trio united by revelation: the fate of the family and Viktor’s redemption are now inextricably linked, and Scarlett steps into her role as the heir to the secret, determined to face what lies ahead.

Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor sits heavily on the battered couch, hands trembling as he exposes the jagged scars beneath his shirt. The flickering lamplight throws shadows across his haunted face, and he meets Scarlett’s eyes with a raw vulnerability. Lucian, tense by the window, tightens his grip on his weapon, his posture broadcasting suspicion as he scans the encroaching darkness outside. Viktor hesitated, his gaze tracing the jagged scars along his forearms as the firelight flickered over them. For a moment, he seemed lost in memory, the cunning edge in his eyes dulled by something older—regret, or perhaps shame. When he finally spoke, his voice was low, almost reluctant, as if each word cost him dearly.

“I never thought I’d speak of this again,” he admitted, the confession hanging heavy between them. “But if we’re to survive what’s coming, you should know the truth.” He drew a slow breath, collecting himself before continuing. “Years ago, before the curse marked me as The Wolf, I was betrayed by those I trusted most. They hunted me, forced me into darkness—turned me into the very monster they feared.” His fingers flexed, claws half-extended, as if remembering the pain of transformation. “Every scar you see is a debt I owe to their hatred,” he said quietly, his eyes flickering to Scarlett and then away, unable to meet her gaze for long.

“I don’t expect forgiveness,” Viktor murmured, voice wavering as he glanced at Lucian, whose distrust was palpable in the tense set of his shoulders. “Nor trust. But I need your help if I’m to end what began that night.” The vulnerability in his posture belied the reputation that haunted him—The Wolf asking, not for mercy, but for a chance to put the past to rest. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps closer to Viktor, her voice trembling with conviction as she glances at Lucian, silently pleading for his understanding. Scarlett stepped closer to Viktor, her red cloak brushing softly against the fallen leaves. Her hands trembled, but her gaze was steady—filled with conviction and a fierce compassion that belied her youth. She glanced at Lucian, her eyes silently pleading for him to understand, to trust her judgment just this once. Turning back to Viktor, she spoke quietly, her words carrying more weight than she realized. He deserved better than the cruelty he had endured, and no one should be hunted for something beyond their control. Scarlett’s voice wavered with emotion as she promised, “I’ll help you break this curse, Viktor—even if it means risking more than I ever have before.” Lucian stands by the rain-streaked window, crossbow in hand, his eyes never leaving Viktor as twilight deepens outside. Lucian stood by the rain-streaked window, crossbow cradled in his arms, his posture as unyielding as the darkening

forest beyond. The twilight pressed against the glass, casting his features in shadow, but his eyes never wavered from Viktor. “I’ll watch your back tonight,” he said, voice low and edged with warning. It wasn’t an offer; it was a promise bound in iron. “But don’t mistake this truce for trust—one wrong move, and I’ll end it myself.” The words hung between them, as sharp and final as the weapon resting in his hands. —————

As the storm raged on outside, a fragile silence settled among the trio, each of them measuring the weight of promises and threats that now bound their fates together. With uncertainty swirling in the dimly lit room, Scarlett realized the next move belonged to her alone. The choices she made tonight would not only determine Viktor’s fate, but would also test the limits of her own courage and compassion. As dawn threatened the horizon, Scarlett quietly turned toward the ancient tome resting on the table, knowing that the path to breaking the curse—and finding her own truth—was about to begin.

Chapter 6: Scarlett’s Choice and the Spell’s Breaking

Scarlett stands defiantly beside her grandmother’s bed, clutching her red cloak and placing herself squarely between Viktor and her ailing grandmother as Viktor, still in wolf form, enters the cottage.

Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps protectively in front of the bed, clutching her red cloak tighter. Her eyes are wide with fear but unwavering as she faces Viktor, her body tense and ready to defend her grandmother at any cost. Scarlett stepped protectively in front of the bed, her fists twisting the fabric of her red cloak as if she could draw courage from its familiar folds. Though fear widened her eyes, she refused to back down, planting herself between Viktor and the fragile figure beneath the quilts. Her voice rang out, steady and fierce despite the tremor she fought to suppress: “Stay away from her, Viktor! If you lay a single paw on my grandmother, you’ll have to go through me first.” Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his teeth in a chilling grin, stalking a step closer, his yellow eyes fixed hungrily on Scarlett and her grandmother. Viktor bared his teeth in a chilling grin, the shadows shifting along his lean muzzle as he stalked a step closer. His yellow eyes glinted with hunger, fixed unblinking on Scarlett and the frail figure of her grandmother. He let his gaze linger on the girl’s trembling hands, the way she clutched her little red cloak to her chest. “Oh, such brave words for someone trembling in their little red cloak,” he murmured, his voice curling around the edges of the room like smoke. “Do you really think you can stop me, Scarlett?” GrandmotherScarlett steps between Viktor and the bed, her hands shaking but her eyes fierce, while her grandmother reaches out a trembling hand to touch Scarlett’s arm in silent support. Scarlett moved with trembling resolve, stepping between Viktor and the bed, the crimson folds of her cloak clutched tightly in her fist. Her heart hammered, but her eyes blazed with a fierce protectiveness. “I won’t let you hurt her—she’s all I have left,” she declared, voice unsteady but unwavering. Behind her, her grandmother’s frail hand reached out, fingertips brushing Scarlett’s arm in silent gratitude and support, the gentle touch both grounding and strengthening Scarlett’s resolve as she stood her ground. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his teeth in a wicked grin, stepping closer as his shadow looms over the bed. Viktor’s lips curled back in a wicked grin, the flicker of candlelight catching on his bared teeth. He stepped closer, his shadow stretching over the tangled quilts and swallowing the little patch of bravery Scarlett clung to beside her grandmother’s bed. She gripped her red cloak tighter, knuckles white, but Viktor’s eyes glinted with a hunger that was both familiar and terrible.

“Your loyalty is touching, child,” he murmured, his voice a low, persuasive growl as he leaned in,

the scent of earth and fur drifting between them. “But I hunger—and no thread or threat will keep me from my meal.” The words lingered in the cold air, heavy as the promise of nightfall, and Scarlett felt her heart thudding desperately against her ribs, as if it might leap free and flee before he did. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps closer to the bed, planting herself between Viktor and her grandmother, her fists clenched tight around the edge of her cloak. Scarlett stepped closer to the bed, planting herself firmly between Viktor and her grandmother. Her fists clenched tight around the edge of her red cloak, she glanced anxiously at the looming figure before them. Heart pounding, she refused to budge, her voice steady and unwavering as she declared that if Viktor wanted to reach her grandmother, he would have to face her first—she wasn’t moving from that spot. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his fangs in a wicked grin, circling slowly as Scarlett stands firm between him and the bed, her grandmother clutching the quilt with trembling hands. Viktor circled the edge of the room with deliberate slowness, his wicked grin flashing sharp beneath the lamplight. Scarlett planted herself between him and the bed, her crimson cloak gripped tightly in trembling hands. On the mattress, her grandmother shrank against the pillows, clutching the worn quilt as though it were armor. Viktor’s amber gaze lingered on Scarlett, both mocking and admiring. “Brave, but foolish,” he murmured, voice low and smooth as velvet, the words curling around the room. “Do you really think your love is sharper than my teeth?” Grandmother reaches a trembling hand toward Scarlett, her voice wavering as Viktor’s eyes glint hungrily in the dim light. With her hand trembling, Grandmother reached out toward Scarlett, the gesture both a warning and a plea. Her voice, soft and wavering, carried the weight of love and wisdom earned through years of resilience. “Scarlett, darling, step back,” she managed, her gaze never leaving Viktor’s eyes, which glinted hungrily in the dim light. She didn’t want her granddaughter to risk herself, and even now, weakened but undaunted, she clung to hope. Perhaps, if they were careful, there might be a way to reason with him. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett spreads her arms in front of the bed, her voice shaking but her eyes blazing with defiance as Viktor’s shadow looms larger across the moonlit floor. Scarlett stepped forward, her small frame casting a bold silhouette as she positioned herself protectively in front of her grandmother’s bed. The cool moonlight spilled across the worn wooden floor, stretching Viktor’s shadow until it seemed to swallow the room. Her fingers tightened around the edge of her red cloak, knuckles white, and though her voice trembled, her eyes burned with unyielding defiance. “I won’t leave you, Grandma,” she promised, not just to the frightened old woman behind her, but to the looming figure as well. “If he wants you, he’ll have to go through both of us.” Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his fangs, circling the bed while Scarlett tightens her grip on her cloak, her grandmother reaching for her hand in silent reassurance. Viktor bared his fangs, gliding in a slow, predatory circle around the bed. Scarlett clutched her red cloak, knuckles white, as her grandmother reached for her hand—a fragile link of comfort between them. The wolf’s amber eyes flickered with a cold amusement, his voice curling through the shadows. “How noble,” he mused, the words lingering in the stillness, “two trembling hearts against one ravenous wolf.” He paused, the hint of a tragic longing flickering beneath his cunning gaze. “But love does not dull my hunger.” Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps in front of her grandmother, fists clenched around her cloak, voice shaking but resolute as she stares down the wolf, her body blocking the bed. Scarlett stepped forward, planting herself firmly between her grandmother and the looming wolf. Her small hands tightened around the edges of her red cloak, knuckles white with determination. Though her voice trembled, she forced herself to meet Viktor’s gaze, unflinching. “You may be hungry, Viktor,” she said, her words quivering with both fear and courage, “but I’d rather be swallowed whole than let you touch her.” Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his fangs, muscles coiling as he steps closer, eyes glinting with cruel anticipation. Viktor bared his fangs, muscles coiling beneath his fur as he prowled closer, the low candlelight flickering across his

sharpened features. His eyes glinted with cruel anticipation as he fixed Scarlett with an unblinking stare. “So be it, little lamb—your courage will make the feast all the sweeter,” he murmured, each word curling through the darkened room like a promise and a threat. Scarlett clutched her red cloak tighter, her breath quickening as she stood her ground beside her grandmother’s bed, the wolf’s ominous presence pressing in from every shadow. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett tightens her grip on her cloak and steps protectively in front of her grandmother, her eyes blazing despite the quiver in her voice. Scarlett drew herself up, tightening her grip on the familiar red cloak as she stepped protectively in front of her frail grandmother. Her heart hammered in her chest, but she refused to let her fear show. Fixing her blazing gaze on Viktor, she tilted her chin defiantly, her voice quivering only slightly as she challenged, “Then come closer, Viktor—I dare you.” Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his fangs and lowers his head, muscles coiling as he inches closer, the floorboards groaning beneath his weight while Scarlett tightens her grip on her cloak, refusing to flinch, and the grandmother clutches the bedsheet, eyes wide with terror. Viktor bared his fangs, lowering his massive head as he inched closer, every muscle in his lupine frame coiling with tension. The floorboards creaked and groaned beneath his weight, echoing through the small cottage like a warning. Scarlett stood her ground, her fingers tightening imperceptibly around the edge of her crimson cloak, refusing to step back. Beside her, the grandmother clutched at the bedsheet, knuckles white, eyes wide with terror. Viktor’s voice rumbled low and almost sorrowful as he paused at the threshold, gaze flickering between Scarlett’s defiance and the old woman’s fear. “As you wish, Scarlett,” he said, the words heavy with both menace and regret. “Just remember—once I cross this threshold, there’s no turning back for any of us.” Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett spreads her arms protectively in front of her grandmother, her voice shaking but fearless as Viktor’s yellow eyes lock with hers, the air crackling with tension. Scarlett stepped firmly between her grandmother and the looming figure, her hands trembling as she pulled her red cloak tighter around her shoulders. Viktor’s yellow eyes glinted with a predatory challenge, but she refused to back down. The air between them seemed to spark and hum as she lifted her chin, her voice unsteady yet unwavering. If Viktor wanted to cross that line, he would have to face her directly—because Scarlett would not cower while he threatened the only family she had left. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor bares his fangs and steps forward, his shadow looming over Scarlett and her trembling grandmother as the tension in the room thickens. Viktor bared his fangs, stepping forward so that his shadow engulfed both Scarlett and her trembling grandmother. The air grew thick with the scent of fear and the weight of unspoken threats. His eyes lingered on the girl’s defiant posture, the way her hand clutched the crimson cloak as if it could shield her from fate itself. With a voice that curled around the edges of menace and admiration, he let his words seep into the tension between them: such devotion—let’s see if your heart is as unbreakable as your spirit. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps in front of her grandmother, chin lifted in defiance, her hands trembling but her gaze locked fiercely on Viktor as he takes another deliberate step forward, eyes gleaming with predatory intent. Scarlett stepped bravely in front of her grandmother, her chin lifted in defiance even as her hands trembled against the soft fabric of her red cloak. Viktor advanced, eyes glinting with predatory intent, yet Scarlett refused to move aside. Though fear thudded in her chest, she met his gaze with unwavering resolve. Her voice was steady, ringing out through the small room as she declared that her heart might break, but it would never yield to a monster like him. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor lowers his head, lips curling back to reveal glistening fangs as he begins a slow, deliberate advance toward the bed, his yellow eyes locked on Scarlett and her trembling but determined stance. Viktor lowered his massive head, lips curling to bare fangs that gleamed in the dim light. With each measured step toward the bed, his yellow eyes never left Scarlett—her trembling hands clutching the red cloak, her resolve

battling the flicker of fear behind her gaze. He let the words slip out, heavy and unyielding, as if the curse itself demanded honesty: she ought to prepare herself, for a monster like him would never pause to ask permission before devouring. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett squares her shoulders, planting herself protectively in front of her grandmother as her trembling hands clench the edge of her red cloak, her eyes blazing with defiant resolve despite the fear flickering within them. Scarlett squared her shoulders, planting herself protectively in front of her grandmother. Her trembling hands clenched the edge of her red cloak, knuckles white, but she refused to back away. Fear flickered in the depths of her eyes, but her gaze blazed with a fierce, defiant resolve as she stared down Viktor. "If you want to see what a 'little lamb' can do when cornered, Viktor," she warned, voice steady despite the quiver she fought to suppress, "then come any closer and find out." Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor lowers his head, lips curling back to reveal gleaming fangs as he advances, muscles coiled and eyes fixed hungrily on both Scarlett and her trembling grandmother. Viktor lowered his massive head, lips peeling back to reveal the lethal glint of his fangs. He advanced, each sinewy muscle tensed beneath his ragged fur, eyes fixed hungrily on Scarlett and her trembling grandmother. The air between them crackled with danger and something darker—regret, perhaps, or longing for what he once was. "Very well, Scarlett—let's see if your bite matches your bark," he rumbled, voice edged with both mockery and challenge, as if daring her to prove herself worthy of the red cloak she clutched so tightly. Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett spreads her arms protectively in front of her grandmother, her voice shaking but her eyes blazing with defiance as she faces the advancing wolf. Scarlett planted herself firmly between the bed and the looming wolf, her arms flung wide in a protective arc as if she could shield her grandmother with sheer will alone. Though her voice trembled, her eyes burned with a fierce, unyielding light. Clutching her red cloak tighter around her shoulders, she met Viktor's yellow gaze without flinching. "You'll find my teeth are sharper than you think, Viktor—take another step, and I swear you'll regret it." The words left her lips with more courage than she felt, but in that moment, Scarlett stood her ground, a living barrier between danger and the one she loved most. Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor lowers his head, lips curling back to reveal gleaming fangs, as he prowls closer, eyes locked on Scarlett and her trembling but defiant stance beside her grandmother's bed. Viktor lowered his massive head, lips curling to expose fangs that gleamed in the muted light. He prowled forward, every muscle taut beneath his coarse fur, eyes never leaving Scarlett's trembling form as she stood protectively beside her grandmother's bed. The red cloak bunched in her fists, a desperate shield against the threat he embodied. Viktor's voice, smooth and dark as velvet, slipped through the hush, a whisper that pricked with menace and melancholy. "Then let the hunt begin, little red," he murmured, a tragic glimmer flickering in his gaze, "may your courage not be the last thing you taste." The air is thick with tension as Viktor circles, his hunger and predatory instincts evident in his words and demeanor.

Scarlett refuses to yield, declaring that Viktor will have to go through her first if he wishes to harm her grandmother, while her grandmother pleads for reason and tries to diffuse the confrontation.

The standoff intensifies, with Viktor taunting Scarlett's courage and threatening both of them, but Scarlett's resolve does not waver.

As Viktor advances, the emotional bravery and fierce love displayed by Scarlett and her grandmother begin to affect him;

Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor lowers his head further, his ears flat against his skull, and nudges the wildflower closer with his nose, refusing to meet Scarlett's or Grandmother's eyes. Viktor lingered at the threshold, the shadows curling around his lupine form as he extended a trembling paw.

Between his claws rested a small, wildflower—crushed but not yet lifeless. He hesitated, searching Scarlett’s face for a flicker of warmth. “I found this outside,” he murmured, his voice roughened by longing and regret. The flower trembled as he placed it gently on the windowsill. “It reminded me of you, Scarlett.”

He faltered, the words tangling in his throat, and for a moment the mask of the Wolf slipped, revealing the man he had once been. “I know my presence brings fear,” he admitted, gaze dropping. The weight of his curse pressed visibly on his broad shoulders. “But I wish... I wish things could be different.” His voice softened, almost breaking. “I didn’t mean for any harm.” He looked up, raw hope flickering in his golden eyes. “I just wanted to understand what kindness feels like.” his tone softens, and he confesses that he never truly wanted harm, only to understand kindness.

Overcome, Viktor produces a wildflower and offers it to Scarlett as a gesture of peace.

Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor staggers back from the fire, his fur shimmering and rippling as if touched by unseen hands. His voice trembles between fear and fragile hope, eyes wide as he glances between Scarlett and Grandmother, searching for answers or comfort. The room grows colder, heavy with dread and anticipation. Viktor staggered back, his paw trembling as an unfamiliar warmth surged beneath his fur, seeping into his very bones. Confusion flickered in his amber eyes, clouded with a fear he could barely name. “What... what’s happening to me?” he rasped, voice rough and unsure. The sensation was changing—growing, shifting, burning through the curse that shaped him. He lifted his foreleg, the coarse fur bristling under his gaze. “The warmth—it’s changing. I can feel it in my bones.” His words trembled between desperation and hope as he turned to Scarlett and Grandmother, urgent. “Scarlett, Grandmother—look at my fur!” Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps closer, eyes wide with a mixture of shock and guarded hope, her hand instinctively reaching for her basket. Scarlett edged closer, her eyes wide with a mingled shock and a flicker of guarded hope as Viktor’s fur caught the firelight, shimmering in a way she hadn’t seen before—almost as if it were fading away. Her fingers tightened instinctively around the handle of her basket, the silence in the room broken only by the gentle crackling of the fire. Heart pounding, she leaned forward, her voice barely above a whisper as she tried to make sense of what was unfolding. Was the spell finally breaking? Grandmother leans forward, her eyes wide with both wonder and dread, clutching her shawl as the firelight flickers across Viktor’s shifting form. Sunlight filtered through the lace curtains, casting a faint shimmer across the cottage’s worn wooden floorboards. Grandmother’s breath came shallow but steady as she reached for Viktor’s hand—her touch warm, despite the lingering chill in the room. Her gaze drifted to the flicker in the air, that strange iridescence near the window. “Child,” she murmured, voice gentle and edged with wisdom, “that shimmer... it’s the old magic losing its grip.” She squeezed Viktor’s fingers, her eyes shining with quiet resilience. “Hold tight to your heart, Viktor,” she whispered, her words carrying the weight of years and the tenderness of her love. “For what comes next may shape your soul forever.” Viktor (The Wolf)Viktor’s voice trembles as shimmering patches ripple across his pelt, his eyes darting between Scarlett and Grandmother, searching for reassurance in their faces. A hush settled over the room, broken only by the soft, uncertain crackle of the fire. Viktor’s voice trembled as shimmering patches rippled across his pelt, the transformation betraying his unease. His amber eyes darted between Scarlett and Grandmother, searching their faces for some flicker of reassurance. The words escaped him—halting, vulnerable—as he struggled with the weight of what lay ahead. If this truly was the end of his curse, Viktor wondered aloud, would Scarlett trust the man he might become? Or would she be haunted still by the memory of the wolf he once was? Scarlett (Little Red Riding Hood)Scarlett steps closer, eyes wide with both caution and hope,

her hand hovering uncertainly between reaching out to Viktor and holding back. Scarlett took a tentative step closer, her crimson cloak catching the flickering firelight as she studied Viktor's shimmering fur. Her hand hovered in the air—caught between the urge to reach out and the instinct to protect herself. Caution warred with hope in her wide eyes. She wanted so much to believe him, yet a deeper wisdom whispered that trust must be earned. “Viktor,” she murmured, voice steady despite the tension in her posture, “I want to trust you—but I need to see the truth of who you are, not just the shadow the spell cast.” Grandmother reaches out, her hand trembling with both fear and hope, eyes locked on the shifting glow of Viktor's fur. Grandmother reached out, her hand trembling—a mix of fear and hope flickering in her delicate fingers. She fixed her gaze on the shifting glow of Viktor's fur, the way it shimmered like moonlight caught in motion. The fire crackled softly behind her, filling the quiet room with warmth. With wisdom etched into the lines of her face and love steady in her voice, she reminded him gently that, whatever form he chose, the choices of his heart would echo louder than any spell ever could. As the flower is accepted and placed in water, Viktor's fur begins to shimmer, signaling the breaking of his curse and marking a pivotal moment in his transformation.

The chapter closes with Scarlett, still wary but willing to believe in Viktor's change, and her grandmother imparting wisdom about the power of one's choices over any spell.

As dawn crept softly through the cottage window, Scarlett, her grandmother, and Viktor—no longer just wolf or foe, but something new—stood together amidst the fading shadows, the promise of forgiveness and transformation settling gently over them like morning light, and with it, the story found its peace.