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## Chapter 6: A Desperate Fight for Survival

Red tightened her grip on the wicker basket, eyes darting as she stepped over twisted roots littering the muddy path.

Her red cloak snapped in the wind, rain beginning to needle her cheeks.

A low growl rolled from the shadows behind a gnarled oak, and The Wolf emerged, hackles raised, his yellow eyes fixed on her.

He circled slowly, paws silent on the wet leaves.

Red took a step back, pressing herself against the slick bark, then shifted her weight, ready to dart.

The Wolf bared his teeth, voice rumbling with false sweetness, 'Lost, little one?

' Red's breathing quickened, but she squared her shoulders and replied, 'Stay back.

I won't let you near me.

' The Wolf flicked his tail, calculating, edging closer to block her escape.

Thunder rolled overhead as Red scanned the clearing, searching for a stick or stone, determined to defend herself and reach safety.

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As Red clung to her grandmother, the adrenaline from their narrow escape still surged through her veins. Outside, the storm raged on, but safety inside the cottage was fleeting. Knowing the wolf could return at any moment, Red helped her grandmother to her feet and urged her toward the back door. The woods beyond beckoned with both promise and peril, and together they stepped into the shadows, uncertain of what awaited them on the winding path ahead.

## Chapter 2: A Sinister Encounter on the Path

Red adjusted the strap of her wicker basket, careful not to bruise the bread and cakes inside as she navigated a tangle of roots.

She paused to listen: a branch snapped ahead, followed by the low crunch of paws pressing into the undergrowth.

From behind a thicket, a tall figure stepped onto the path—fur bristling, eyes sharp as broken glass.

The Wolf, lips curled in a facsimile of a smile, inclined his head and blocked her way.

Red gripped her basket tighter, recalling her mother's warning, but kept her voice steady.

'Oh, thank you, sir!

I'm just bringing some cakes and honey to my dear grandmother—she lives in the cottage at the very end of this path, just past the big oak tree.

' The Wolf's nose twitched, catching the scent of bread and wildflowers.

He flicked his tail and replied, his voice oily with false concern, 'How thoughtful you are—surely your grandmother will be delighted;

tell me, does she live alone in that cozy cottage, or does someone stay with her?

' Red answered, 'She lives all by herself, sir—she's been feeling poorly, so Mama asked me to visit and bring her these treats.

' The Wolf, motivated by hunger and cunning, angled his body to keep her talking, pretending interest in her errand while his eyes darted toward the direction of her grandmother's house.

The Wolf leans in with a warm, toothy smile, his ears pricked for any hint of direction. He tilts his head, feigning concern while his eyes flicker down the path, tracing where Red might go next. With a warm, toothy smile that nearly masked the hunger lurking beneath, the Wolf leaned in, his ears pricked for any hint of direction from the child. He angled his body just so, blocking Red's path while his eyes darted down the winding forest trail, tracing where she might wander next. "My, what a lovely basket you carry, child," he murmured, the concern in his tone artfully feigned. "It looks quite heavy for someone so small." His head tilted, the gesture almost tender, though impatience flickered across his gaze. "Are you traveling far, or is your grandmother's house nearby in these woods?" The Wolf's lips curled with practiced sympathy. "I do hope she's well—what brings you out here all alone this fine morning?" Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red hugs her basket closer, her eyes shining with innocent pride as she gestures vaguely down the winding trail. Red hugged her basket a little tighter, the weight of her errand filling her with a quiet, innocent pride. Her eyes shone as she gestured vaguely down the winding trail, eager to share her purpose with the stranger. "I'm just bringing some cakes and honey to my dear grandmother," she explained, her voice bright with sincerity. "She lives in the cottage at the very end of this path, just past the big oak tree." The Wolf tilts his head in feigned curiosity, his gaze lingering toward the distant bend in the path as he subtly inches closer to Red. The Wolf tilted his head, feigning a gentle curiosity as his gaze drifted past Red to the winding path beyond. With each subtle step closer, he masked his hunger behind a smooth smile. "How thoughtful you are," he murmured, letting the compliment linger as if he genuinely admired her kindness. His voice, silky

and warm, coaxed her to open up further. “Surely your grandmother will be delighted; tell me”—he angled his body to keep her talking, eyes glinting with predatory interest—“does she live alone in that cozy cottage, or does someone stay with her?” Red (Little Red Riding Hood)Red hugs her basket tighter, glancing down the path with innocent concern, while the Wolf’s ears perk up, a sly grin flickering across his face. Red hugged her basket a little tighter, her fingers pressing into the woven reeds as she glanced down the winding path ahead with innocent concern. “She lives all by herself, sir—she’s been feeling poorly, so Mama asked me to visit and bring her these treats,” she explained, voice gentle but steady, the words tumbling out with a quiet determination. The Wolf’s ears perked up at her answer, a sly grin flickering across his muzzle as he angled his body just so, careful to keep her talking, feigning interest while his hungry gaze lingered on the small girl and the precious bundle she clutched. The Wolf leans in slightly, voice soft and inviting, while his tail flicks with anticipation, eyes narrowing as he glances slyly down the sun-dappled trail. The Wolf leaned in, his posture casual yet calculated, voice dropping to a soft, almost intimate murmur. His tail flicked with barely contained anticipation, the tip tracing restless patterns in the leaf litter. Eyes narrowed, he glanced slyly down the sun-dappled trail as if appraising each bend and shadow. “How fortunate your grandmother is,” he observed, his tone laced with honeyed admiration, “to have such a caring granddaughter.” He angled his body to keep her engaged, feigning sincere interest while hunger gnawed at his patience. “Tell me,” he continued, the question slipping out as naturally as a breath, “do you always take this same path, or do you sometimes choose another way through the woods?” Red (Little Red Riding Hood)Red smiles brightly, swinging her basket as she glances down the familiar trail, unaware of the Wolf’s intense, calculating gaze. Red’s smile was bright as she swung her basket, the path beneath her feet so familiar that she barely glanced down to watch her step. Her red cloak fluttered with each stride, and she felt a surge of confidence in the quiet morning air. When the Wolf, all polite curiosity and false warmth, asked about her journey, she answered without hesitation, her tone light and assured. “Oh, I always take this path—I know it so well, and Mama says it’s the quickest way to Grandmother’s cottage.” Unaware of the intent behind the Wolf’s keen gaze, Red’s attention remained fixed on the sun-dappled trail ahead, her mind already anticipating the welcome at her grandmother’s door. He asked, ‘May I ask, do you always take this same path or do you sometimes choose another way through the woods?’

’ Red replied, ‘Oh, I always take this path—I know it so well, and Mama says it’s the quickest way to Grandmother’s cottage.

Red (Little Red Riding Hood)Red forces a small, tight smile, clutching her basket closer to her chest. She takes a careful step backward, glancing nervously at the darkening path ahead before turning to quicken her steps, her heart thudding. Red glanced up at the looming figure of the wolf, her grip tightening around the wicker basket. She offered him a polite smile, careful to keep her tone steady and friendly, despite the uneasy flutter in her chest. “Well, it was nice seeing you, Mr. Wolf,” she said, shifting her weight as if ready to dart away at any moment. The woods pressed in around her, shadows stretching long and thin, but she refused to let her nerves show. “I really must hurry along now—Grandmother’s expecting me, and I wouldn’t want to keep her waiting.” With a last, courteous nod, Red turned and continued down the winding path, her determined steps crunching through the undergrowth as she pressed onward, resolute and unafraid. The Wolf’s eyes linger a moment longer, his smile sharpening as he melts into the shadows, watching Red’s hurried steps. The Wolf’s eyes lingered on Red a moment too long, his sharp smile curving as he receded into the gloom at the edge of the clearing. His voice followed her, honeyed and velvety with false warmth: “Of course, dear Red—do give your grandmother my regards; the woods can be so lonely, after all.” He watched her quickened steps, hunger curling inside him as he melted

completely into the shadows, patient only in the certainty of the hunt. ' As Red edged forward, the Wolf's shadow stretched across the path, a silent reminder of the danger lurking beneath his courteous words.

Red forced a polite farewell, 'Well, it was. nice seeing you, Mr.

Wolf.

I really must hurry along now—Grandmother's expecting me and I wouldn't want to keep her waiting.

' The Wolf melted back into the shadows, offering, 'Of course, dear Red—do give your grandmother my regards;

the woods can be so lonely, after all.

' He watched her disappear, already plotting his next move armed with details about her route and her grandmother's solitude.

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As Red continued along the winding forest path, an uneasy chill lingered in the air, her thoughts circling back to the stranger's unsettling questions. The cheerful birdsong seemed distant now, replaced by the rustling hush of leaves overhead. Unbeknownst to her, the shadow of danger crept ahead, weaving its way toward her grandmother's cottage. Each step brought Red closer to the edge of innocence—and to the first hints that something was terribly amiss.

## Chapter 4: Red Discovers Signs of Trouble

Red paused beside a toppled birch, adjusting the basket on her arm and scanning the undergrowth. She noticed a clump of gray fur snagged on a bramble and bent down to inspect it, fingers brushing the coarse strands.

As she straightened, the Wolf stepped onto the path ahead, disguised as a weary traveler with a tattered cloak.

Red gripped her basket tighter, recalling her mother's warning.

The Wolf dipped his head, voice smooth, 'You seem far from home, little one.

Where are you headed?

' Red answered cautiously, 'Just visiting my grandmother.

She lives close by.

' The Wolf's nostrils flared, catching the scent of bread and fruit.

He smiled, taking a step closer, 'The woods can be dangerous.

Would you like company?

' Red shook her head, stepping back and glancing at the fur in her hand.

She said, 'No, I know the way.

' The Wolf's eyes lingered on her, but he merely nodded and melted into the shadows, his presence leaving a chill in the still air.

Red quickly tucked the fur into her pocket and hurried on, scanning the path for further signs of trouble.

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As Red edged deeper into the dim hallway, an uneasy silence pressed in around her. Every creak of the floorboards seemed to echo the warning in her mind, urging caution with each step. The unsettling clues scattered throughout the house hinted that danger was closer than she'd feared. Just as she reached for the staircase, a sudden noise from the next room made her freeze, heart pounding, as if the forest's shadows had followed her all the way inside.

## Chapter 1: Red Receives a Warning

Red stood at the table, tying the coarse string around a basket filled with bread and small jars of preserves, her fingers working quickly.

Mother moved around her, checking the contents and pushing a folded cloth deeper into the basket, her brow furrowed with concern.

She stepped close to Red, placing a firm hand on her shoulder, and spoke in a low voice: 'You must stay on the path.

The woods are not safe, Red.

Strange things have happened.

' Red met her mother's gaze, squaring her shoulders, and replied, 'I'll be careful, I promise.

' Mother leaned over, securing the red cloak around Red's shoulders, pulling it snugly before handing her the basket.

The wind rattled the door, and Mother glanced toward it, eyes narrowing, before she pressed the latch closed.

Red adjusted her cloak, feeling its weight, and walked toward the threshold, basket in hand, determined to show she could handle the journey.

Mother watched her go, standing guard by the door until Red disappeared down the winding path toward the woods.

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As Red disappeared into the dense shadows of the forest, the quiet cottage faded behind her, leaving only the echo of her mother's warning carried on the wind. Unbeknownst to Red, the woods concealed more than just tangled thickets and silent trees; danger had already begun to stir, far ahead on the path she was determined to follow. While Red pressed forward with resolve, elsewhere, a sly figure was making its way toward Grandmother's isolated home, setting the stage for a fateful meeting that would change everything.

## Chapter 3: The Wolf Arrives at Grandmother's House

The Wolf, fur slick with rain, pads silently through the thick underbrush, his paws pressing damp leaves into the mud.

Driven by hunger, he circles the cottage, nose twitching as he catches the scent of old bread and herbal tea wafting from a cracked window.

Hearing the clatter of a teacup inside, the Wolf lowers his body and creeps to the door, claws scraping softly on the wooden boards.

He raps on the door with a single, deliberate paw, mimicking the pattern of a human knock.

Inside, Grandmother, wary after recent rumors of prowling beasts, approaches slowly and calls through the door, 'Who's there?

' The Wolf, voice gravelly but practiced, replies, 'It's Red, come with food and a scarf for you.

' Grandmother, still suspicious, slides the bolt just enough to peer through, but the Wolf shoves the door with his shoulder, forcing his way in.

The sudden movement knocks over a basket of mending, scattering spools across the uneven floor.

Grandmother, determined to protect herself, grabs a heavy iron candlestick and swings at the Wolf, who dodges and corners her by the hearth.

The Wolf's objective is clear: to overpower Grandmother and take her place, driven by his hunger and cunning.

Grandmother's actions, fueled by the need to survive and warn Red, result in a brief struggle that ends with the Wolf seizing control of the room and Grandmother silenced, leaving the cottage eerily still except for the ticking of the old clock and the rain tapping against the windows.

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Outside, the storm grows heavier, masking any sign of the struggle within. With Grandmother hidden and the disguise complete, the wolf settles into her bed, every sense alert for the sound of Red's approaching footsteps. As the cottage falls into uneasy silence, the wolf's anticipation sharpens—the trap is set, and his prey is drawing near.

## Chapter 5: The Wolf Springs His Trap

As Red prepares to enter the cottage, the Wolf is not yet inside, but instead lingers outside in the cold shadows, observing the warm light from within.

The Wolf, shivering and driven by hunger and discomfort, debates whether to risk entering the inviting warmth of the cottage, knowing that stepping into the light could expose him.

He reflects on the ache in his bones and his longing for the fire, which momentarily distracts him from his predatory purpose.

Meanwhile, inside, Grandmother remains hidden or bound, and Red approaches the door, basket in hand, ready to confront whatever danger awaits her grandmother.

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Outside, the forest pressed in with cold indifference, but inside the cottage, the air was thick with fear and the lingering scent of spilt tea. As Red pressed her back against the closet door, desperate for any barrier between herself and the wolf, a new resolve began to form within her. The lull between attack and pursuit was brief; both predator and prey braced themselves for what would come next. With nowhere left to run and the wolf prowling just beyond her fragile shelter, the moment of escape and confrontation drew closer with every heartbeat.

## Chapter 7: Escape and Confrontation

Red crouched behind the heavy oak table, her knees pressed into the splintered wood, eyes darting to the battered iron poker clutched in Grandmother's trembling hands.

Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red whispers urgently, her voice shaking as she glances between the doorway and Grandmother's pale face, gripping the edge of the table so tightly her knuckles blanch. Red crouched low behind the heavy oak table, her knees digging into the splintered wood as she pressed herself further into the shadows. Her eyes flickered anxiously between the battered doorway and her grandmother's pale, trembling face. She gripped the edge of the table so tightly her knuckles turned white, fighting to steady her breath. In a voice barely above a whisper, shaky with fear and determination, she leaned closer to her grandmother and confessed, "He's still out there. I heard him scraping against the door." Her gaze darted back to the threshold, heart pounding, hope and dread warring inside her. "What if he gets in? What do we do?" Grandmother tightens her grip on the poker, forcing a shaky smile for Red even as her own eyes flick anxiously to the shadow flickering beneath the doorframe. Grandmother tightened her trembling grip on the iron poker, forcing a smile for Red's sake, even as her gaze kept flickering to the restless shadow shifting beneath the doorframe. Her voice was little more than a whisper, thick with both fear and determination, as she leaned toward her granddaughter. "Stay quiet, my darling," she murmured, heart pounding against her ribs. "If he comes through, I'll do what I must, but you keep low and don't let him see you, no matter what happens." Her words hung in the hush of the room, fragile but resolute, while Red crouched behind the heavy oak table, knees pressed into the splintered wood, eyes wide and searching for safety in her grandmother's courage. Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red tightens her grip on the table leg, her voice barely above a whisper as she leans closer to her grandmother, eyes wide with terror. Red crouched behind the heavy oak table, her knees pressed into the splintered wood as she strained to hear over the pounding of her own heart. The air felt thick, every breath a risk. She tightened her grip on the table leg, knuckles white, and leaned in close to her grandmother. Her voice was barely a whisper, trembling with fear and resolve. "But what if he smells us, Grandmother?" she murmured, eyes wide with terror. "I can hear him breathing—so close, like he's just waiting for us to slip." Grandmother shifts her grip on the poker, her knuckles white, eyes fixed on the shadow flickering beneath the door. Grandmother tightened her grip on the cold iron poker, knuckles gleaming white in the gloom. Her gaze never left the wavering shadow that crept beneath the door. With a voice barely above a whisper, steady despite the tremor in her hands, she murmured, "Hush now, Red—hold your breath if you must, and trust me; I've outwitted worse than wolves before." The words floated across the room, settling over Red, who crouched behind the heavy oak table, knees digging into splintered wood, heart pounding in her ears. Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red grips the edge of the table, her knuckles white, as a low growl rumbles from the other side of the door. Red's fingers dug into the

edge of the table, the rough grain biting into her skin as she pressed herself lower, barely daring to breathe. From the other side of the door, a guttural growl vibrated through the floorboards, vibrating all the way up her spine. She risked a glance at the narrow sliver of light beneath the frame—just enough to catch a flash of yellowed eyes glinting in the gloom. He was still there, watching, waiting. Red swallowed hard, her mind racing. This one was smart, she realized. She'd seen it in his eyes through the crack: cold, calculating, and entirely unwilling to leave without getting what he wanted. Grandmother tightens her grip on the iron poker, her knuckles white, and shifts closer to Red, shielding her with a trembling arm as the sound of claws rakes against the door. Grandmother's grip tightened around the iron poker, her knuckles blanched with fear and determination as she shifted closer to Red, her trembling arm forming a fragile shield between her granddaughter and the looming danger outside. The grating sound of claws raking against the door sent a shiver through the small room. Red crouched behind the heavy oak table, knees pressed painfully into the splintered wood, her eyes flickering anxiously to her grandmother's face. With a voice low but fierce, Grandmother leaned in, whispering, "Then we must be smarter still, child—he'll find no easy prey here tonight." Grandmother pressed a finger to her lips, then pointed toward the cracked back door, its hinges groaning faintly with every gust.

Grandmother tightens her grip on Red's sleeve, her eyes wide and darting toward the trembling door, as she edges them both back into the shadowy corner of the kitchen. Grandmother's gnarled hand tightened around Red's sleeve, her grip surprisingly firm despite the tremor running through her fingers. Her eyes, wide and luminous with worry, darted anxiously toward the back door, where the wind coaxed a low groan from the ancient hinges. Drawing Red with her into the shadowed recess of the kitchen, Grandmother pressed a trembling finger to her lips, her voice scarcely more than a breath: "Hush now, Red. Not a sound—there's something out there." The words slipped out in a hush, urgent and protective. She glanced at Red, her gaze fierce with love and fear intermingled. "Stay close to me and don't even breathe too loud." Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red clutches her basket tighter, eyes wide, inching closer to Grandmother while casting a fearful glance toward the creaking door. Red clutched her basket tighter, her knuckles whitening as she inched closer to Grandmother. Her eyes darted anxiously between the old woman and the cracked back door, its hinges groaning with each faint movement. Grandmother pressed a finger to her lips, signaling for silence, then pointed with trembling urgency toward the door—just wide enough for something to slip through. Red swallowed, the thudding of her heart loud in her ears, and whispered, voice barely audible, "Grandmother, is it the wolf—you saw him, didn't you?" Grandmother draws Red closer, her eyes darting to the trembling door as another gust rattles the latch. Grandmother's hand reached for Red, gently pulling her close as another gust battered the trembling door, its hinges groaning in protest. Her eyes flickered warily to the cracked back entrance, then back to Red. With a cautious press of her finger to her lips, she signaled for silence, her breath shallow. In a hushed whisper, she confided, her voice barely above the wind, that she had glimpsed a shadow slipping past the window—too tall and too quiet for comfort. The words hung in the air, heavy with warning, as the old woman's gaze lingered on the uneasy latch. Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red tightens her grip on her basket, eyes darting nervously between Grandmother and the trembling door. Red tightened her grip on her basket, knuckles paling as her gaze flickered between Grandmother's anxious face and the trembling back door, its hinges groaning with each gust of wind. Grandmother pressed a finger to her lips, urging silence, then pointed wordlessly toward the cracked door. Red's heart hammered in her chest, but her voice, though hushed, was steady with determination as she whispered, "What if it comes in—should we hide, or run?" Grandmother gently takes Red's hand, her eyes wide with fear as she leads her towards the narrow cellar door,



careful not to let the floorboards creak. Grandmother's hand trembled as she reached for Red's, her touch gentle yet urgent. She pressed a finger to her lips, her wide, fearful eyes flickering toward the cracked back door, where the hinges moaned at the slightest breeze. Without a word, she began to guide Red across the worn floorboards, each step measured and careful, her grip firm to keep them steady. Leaning close, she whispered, her voice barely audible, "We mustn't run—if we move too quickly, it might hear us." She paused, listening to the hush beyond the walls, then nodded to the narrow cellar door hidden in shadow. "Crouch low and follow me to the cellar, silent as a whisper." Red (Little Red Riding Hood) Red clutches Grandmother's sleeve, her eyes wide, as they inch toward the cellar door, each footstep measured and slow. Red clutched her grandmother's sleeve, her breath barely more than a whisper between them as they inched toward the cellar door. Each step was a careful negotiation with the creaking floorboards, the shadows flickering from the cracked back door where the wind tugged at the frame. Grandmother pressed a finger to her lips—silent warning—then pointed toward the sliver of uncertain moonlight. Red nodded, determination flickering in her wide eyes. "Okay, Grandmother—I'm right behind you, and I won't make a sound," she promised, her voice low and steady, every word a vow as she followed, silent as a shadow, into the unknown. As the Wolf's claws scraped across the hallway floorboards, Red snatched up a jar from the shelf and hurled it across the room.

The jar shattered against the hearth, echoing through the cottage and drawing the Wolf's attention.

Instead of escaping outside, Grandmother quietly led Red toward the cellar door, urging her to move silently, as the Wolf prowled just beyond.

Together, they slipped into the dark cellar, closing the door softly behind them, breath held in the chill air, while above them, the Wolf's furious howl split the dusk.

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Outside, the fading daylight pressed against the cellar door, mingling with the sounds of distant voices and hurried footsteps. Red and her grandmother listened, hearts pounding, as the chaos inside the cottage gradually gave way to the muffled approach of help. Only then did they dare to emerge, uncertain of what awaited them above, but knowing the worst had finally passed and the consequences of their ordeal were just beginning to unfold.

## Chapter 8: Rescue and Aftermath

Red untangles herself from a toppled chair and rushes to Grandmother, who sits propped against the wall, clutching a shawl.

Grandmother urgently instructs Red to check and lock the door, clearly rattled by strange noises outside.

Grandmother's trembling hand reaches toward Red, her knuckles pale against the quilt, eyes wide and fixed on the shadow flickering beneath the threshold. Red's grandmother's voice trembled as she reached for the edge of her worn quilt, her eyes darting toward the shadowed hallway. "Red, dear, please—" she whispered, her hands clenching the fabric, "check the door, quickly." The old woman's gaze flickered with worry, and she pressed a palm to her chest as if to steady her heartbeat. "I heard something... strange." Her words faded, barely louder than the wind rattling the shutters. With a sudden burst of resolve, she added, "Lock it, if you can." Red She glances nervously back at Grandmother, then reaches out with a shaking hand to test the lock. "Red

hesitates, her heart pounding, then nods, clutching her basket tighter as she creeps toward the creaking door.” —Red

RedShe pauses just short of the door, her hand hovering over the latch, uncertain whether to open it or turn the key. “Red glances back at Grandmother, her voice barely above a whisper, ‘What did you hear, Grandmother?’ ” —Red

Grandmother’s hand shakes more violently now, her eyes wide with fear as she urges Red on. Grandmother’s hand trembled so violently that the patchwork quilt rustled around her thin wrist. Her eyes, wide with fear, never left Red’s face as she struggled to steady her voice. “It was a low growl, child—like nothing I’ve ever heard before.” Despite the panic fluttering beneath her words, her tone remained firm as she urged, “Please, Red, hurry.” She stretched her arm further, fingertips barely grazing Red’s sleeve, as if her touch alone could nudge her granddaughter toward the bolted door. RedShe pauses for a heartbeat, listening intently for any further sound before steeling herself to peek through the crack. “Red swallows hard, her fingers trembling as she reaches for the latch, eyes wide and searching the shadows beyond the door.” —Red

RedHer breath catches, and every muscle in her body tenses, poised to slam the door shut at the first sign of danger. “Red steels herself, whispering, ‘Stay back, Grandmother,’ as she slowly eases the door open just a crack, peering into the darkness beyond.” —Red

Grandmother clutches the blanket to her chest, her breath shallow, eyes locked on Red with terrified anticipation. Grandmother clutched the blanket tightly to her chest, her frail fingers knotting in the worn fabric as she struggled to steady her breath. Terror gleamed in her eyes, but her voice remained firm as she stretched out a trembling hand toward Red. “Be careful, Red—don’t let it see you first.” The weight of her warning hung in the air, urgency sharpening every syllable as she urged her granddaughter to check the door. RedShe keeps her body pressed close to the wall, ready to slam the door shut at the slightest movement. “Red holds her breath, the cold night air slipping through the crack as she whispers, ‘I don’t see anything—yet.’ ” —Red

Grandmother grips the edge of her quilt, her knuckles white, eyes darting anxiously between Red and the shadowy doorway. Grandmother gripped the edge of her quilt, her knuckles pale against the faded fabric, eyes flickering between Red and the shadowy doorway. Summoning her strength, she stretched out a trembling hand, her voice steady despite the fear trembling beneath it. “Keep the door shut tight, child—whatever it is, we mustn’t invite it in.” The command lingered in the room, urgent and loving, as Red moved closer, the weight of Grandmother’s words pressing against the hush that settled over the small house at the edge of the woods. Red anxiously asks about the sound, and Grandmother describes a low growl, urging caution.

Red carefully approaches and inspects the door, trying not to be seen, while Grandmother warns her to keep the door shut.

The Woodsman arrives shortly after, finds Grandmother bruised, and questions Red about what happened.

Woodsman kneels beside Grandmother, gently but urgently inspecting her wrist, his brow furrowed with worry. He glances up at Red, voice trembling with concern. The woodsman knelt beside Grandmother, his calloused hands surprisingly gentle as they traced the angry bruises blooming across her wrist. His brow furrowed, shadowed with both worry and resolve. Glancing up at Red, his voice carried a tremor of urgency as he asked, “Red, these bruises—how did this happen to Grandmother? Tell me everything you saw, and quickly.” Red clutches her cloak tightly, her voice

trembling as she glances anxiously at Grandmother. “I—I found her like this, Woodsman, just after I came in; the door was open, and I heard her whisper for help.” —Red

Woodsman gently holds Grandmother’s hand, his eyes darting anxiously between Red and the doorway. The woodsman knelt beside Grandmother, his strong hands surprisingly gentle as he cradled her bruised wrist. His keen eyes flickered anxiously between Red and the shadowed doorway, every muscle in his body tensed for danger that might yet linger. “Red,” he said quietly, his voice steady but edged with worry. “Before you came inside—did you notice anything strange? Hear or see anyone else nearby?” He kept his gaze fixed on her, searching her face for any sign that would help him piece together the peril they’d narrowly escaped. Red glances nervously at the shuttered window, clutching her basket tighter. “I heard footsteps running away through the back garden, and Grandmother kept saying ‘the wolf,’ over and over.” —Red

Woodsman leans closer to Grandmother, his voice trembling with urgency, while Red clutches Grandmother’s hand, eyes wide with fear. The woodsman knelt beside Grandmother, his broad shoulders tense with concern as he gently examined the bruises on her wrist. Red, trembling, clung to Grandmother’s hand, her wide eyes fixed on him. Leaning in closer, voice roughened by urgency, he asked, “Grandmother, can you hear me—did the wolf hurt you, or did you see who it was?” His gaze flickered briefly to Red, silently urging her to recall every detail, while his strong, reassuring presence filled the small cottage with hope. Grandmother clutches Woodsman’s hand, her fingers shaking, while Red kneels closer, eyes wide with fear and worry. Grandmother’s hand trembled as she clung to the Woodsman’s steady grip, her knuckles pale against his calloused fingers. Red edged closer, anxiety clouding her face. With a wavering breath, Grandmother mustered her strength and, voice quivering, explained what had happened. The wolf—he had seized her wrists in his rough paws, trying to stifle her cries. But she had fought him off as best she could, her resilience flickering through her fear even now. Woodsman rises, checking windows and listening intently for any sign of danger outside. The woodsman rose to his feet, his gaze sweeping the shadowed corners of the cottage as he listened for any hint of movement outside. He moved to the window, checking the latch with a practiced hand before kneeling beside Grandmother, gently examining the bruises on her wrist. His voice was firm but laced with compassion as he addressed Red, never taking his sharp eyes off the door. “We must secure the house,” he said, decisive and calm. “Red, lock the doors. Grandmother, stay close to me; the wolf may not be far.” Red reveals she found Grandmother injured, heard running footsteps in the garden, and Grandmother was repeating ‘the wolf.

Red gestures shakily at the jagged wood, her hands trembling. Her eyes flicker back to the Wolf, searching his face for any hint of remorse or recognition, her body tense and ready to flee if he moves too suddenly. “Do you see what you did to the doorframe? Splinters everywhere—like the bones you’d snap without a second thought. I heard you before I saw you, your voice all syrupy sweet, pretending to be someone you’re not. My heart was pounding so loud I thought you’d hear it. I knew something was wrong—Grandmother never sounded like that. So I hid, pressed tight behind the cupboard, barely daring to breathe. I had to. If I hadn’t, I wouldn’t be standing here now.” —Red

Wolf steps closer, eyes glinting with predatory amusement, nostrils flaring as if scenting Red’s lingering fear. “Clever little mouse, but even the cleverest prey trembles when the wolf is hungry—did you really think a cupboard could keep you safe from me?” —Wolf

Red glances nervously at the ruined doorframe, clutching her cloak tighter around her shoulders

as her eyes flicker between the Wolf's teeth and the exit. "Maybe not, but behind that cupboard I held onto hope—enough to keep quiet while you prowled and sniffed, turning every shadow into a threat." —Red

WolfThe Wolf circles closer, his gaze locked on Red, a slow, deliberate grin spreading across his muzzle as he inhales deeply, savoring the memory. "Hope is a feeble shield, Red, especially when your scent fills every corner—I could almost taste your fear, thick and sweet in the air." —Wolf

Red's hands clench at her sides as she glances at the doorframe, then back at the Wolf, her voice trembling but defiant. "Maybe my fear was sweet to you, but behind that cupboard it felt like poison—paralyzing, yes, but sharp enough to remind me my life was my own to protect." —Red

' The Woodsman asks Grandmother to confirm, and she reveals the wolf attacked her but she resisted.

The Woodsman, taking charge, directs Red to secure the house and vows to keep watch over the cottage.

Grandmother gently presses her trembling hand to the Woodsman's arm, her eyes soft with gratitude and a shaky smile forming on her lips. Grandmother reached out with a trembling hand, gently pressing it against the Woodsman's sturdy arm. Her soft eyes brimmed with gratitude, and although her smile quivered, it was sincere. "Oh, thank you, dear," she murmured, her voice barely louder than the hush of wind outside. "I don't know what I would've done without you—my heart was pounding out of my chest." She squeezed his arm with unexpected strength for someone so frail, her resilience shining through the fear. "You're a blessing," she added, the words steeped in relief and affection. WoodsmanHe gives her arm a gentle, reassuring squeeze, offering a warm smile. The woodsman knelt beside Grandmother, his presence steady and reassuring. He offered her arm a gentle squeeze, meeting her eyes with a warm smile. "I'm just glad I was here to help, ma'am—you're safe now," he said, his voice low but certain. Grandmother, still trembling from the ordeal, pressed her hand gratefully to his, her relief palpable as she managed a fragile smile in return. Red then recounts to all present, including the Wolf (who appears in a tense confrontation), her fearful hiding behind the cupboard and how she recognized the Wolf's deception.

The Wolf taunts Red for her fear, but Red stands her ground, expressing her hope and determination to survive.

WoodsmanThe Woodsman stands by the door, gripping his axe handle with quiet resolve, casting a protective glance toward Red and Grandmother. Standing firm by the door, the Woodsman gripped his axe handle with quiet resolve, the fading light casting long shadows across his weathered face. He glanced protectively at Red and Grandmother, his voice steady but gentle as he assured them, "I'll make it my duty to walk these woods at sundown from now on." The promise lingered in the room, bolstered by the unwavering strength in his posture. "No harm will come near this cottage again," he added, eyes scanning the gathering dusk outside, "not while I keep watch." Compassion and determination radiated from him, a silent vow to shield them against whatever dangers the forest might hold. Grandmother gently squeezes Red's hand, her eyes warm with love and relief. Grandmother's hand trembled slightly as she squeezed Red's, her eyes shining with a mixture of love and relief in the dimming light. The distant promise of the Woodsman's patrol lingered in the air, but Grandmother's focus was wholly on her granddaughter. "Oh, my dear Red," she murmured, voice gentle yet steady. "You were so brave today." She drew Red closer, her resilience shining through the vulnerability of age. "I am so proud of you, and I promise you

are safe here with us.” The words, soft and heartfelt, seemed to settle the shadows that pressed against the cottage windows as dusk deepened outside. Red pulls her cloak a little tighter around her shoulders, her eyes lingering on the darkening line of trees beyond the window. “Thank you, both of you—I just hope the shadows stay outside, where they belong.” ——Red

Grandmother expresses deep gratitude for Red’s bravery, and the Woodsman reassures them of his protection.

As dusk falls, Grandmother comforts Red, proud of her actions, and Red quietly hopes the threat remains outside.

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And as the moon rose over the quiet cottage, its gentle light washed away the lingering shadows, leaving Red, Grandmother, and the Woodsman gathered close within the warm glow of safety, their hearts steady and hopeful for all the days to come.