



High Fashion, Little Red

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Retold Fairy Tales

When was the last time you wore a particularly marvellous pair of shoes and began telling everybody to call you Medium Pink Kitten Heels? Wouldn't it be awfully peculiar? But when Little Red Riding Hood started calling herself just that, nobody questioned it. Perhaps it had something to do with her fashionable grandmother's reputation, or maybe there was something sewn into that wonderful cloak that the world knew was worth mentioning. Whatever it was, Little Red Riding Hood was Little Red Riding Hood, and she had a number of very stylish places to be.

Though grandmothers are always old and wrinkly by the time we get to meet them, rarely have they always been so. In fact, many grandmothers were once beautiful young ladies, the kinds of ladies who have silky hair that they wash every Saturday and squeaky clean shoes that never stay stuck with gum for very long. Red's grandmother had been one such lady, and when age started creeping up she'd that she didn't want to stop being it. A fashionista if I ever saw one, Grandma kept a hold on her fine coats and fancy bags; she wore them when she watched the fashion shows on telly. And one day, when she was feeling particularly inspired by that year's zebra print craze, Grandma decided that she had had enough of television fashion parades. She was going to host one of her own.

With neat, swirly handwriting – the kind your grandmother spent time learning how to do at school – Grandma wrote a careful letter for her granddaughter, whose name doesn't matter, because when her gift arrived, she would be known as Little Red.

“Darling,” the note said. “I've decided to host a very glamorous fashion show in my little cottage by the woods.

I'm very excited, and you are so very beautiful. I would dearly love for you to come along and have sent something very special that I thought you might like to wear. Love and diamonds, Granny." From the most expensive section of her overfull wardrobe, Grandma pulled a thick, red cloak, studded with five golden buttons. She tucked the letter inside, and she sent it off in that morning's post.

Red was not usually allowed to travel into the woods on her own.

"Don't you know what's in there?" her mother would exclaim. "Vampires," she said. "And werewolves and spiders and rats." Red, though, was a brave sort of girl, and a smart one, too. She found it difficult to believe that vampires and rats belonged in the same sentence, let alone in the same woods, and this made her think that her mother might be being just a teensy bit dramatic. Besides, Red had often travelled through the woods alone. Someone had to bring Grandma her backup lipstick or she'd never leave the house.

When Grandma's letter arrived, Red's mother said no, absolutely not, there was no way that Red was marching through the woods for something as silly as a fashion show.

"But Mother," said Red, stamping her feet. "Look how safe and warm I'll be!" She shook that heavy red cloak like she was a proud knight and it was her shining armour. "Look how utterly gorgeous I'll look!"

Red's mother looked very grumpy about it, but one of the sparkling buttons must have caught the light just so because she said, "Fine. But you'll stick to the paths and no dawdling. There are tricky, spooky, unfashionable places in the dark corners of the woods."

The next morning, before her mother had had time to change her mind, Red set out into the woods with the red cloak draped spectacularly over her shoulders. In a basket, she carried an emergency sewing kit, a bottle of water and some cupcakes in case she got hungry on the way.

As she moved deeper and deeper into the woods, Red began to notice the changing, darkening movements of her surroundings. Where before the air had been full of light and a flowery breeze, here the trees leaned into one another. They knitted together at their tops with an offensively uneven sort of seam, and the atmosphere they trapped became suffocating and murky, the ground a sloppy parade of dirt and mud.

"I think I know what Mother meant," Red whispered. She pulled her cloak more tightly around herself, holding back a shiver. "It's awful in these parts. I never know what's going to leap out at me."

As if the woods took Red's words as a challenge, they began to throw their most visually displeasing, fashionably criminal offences at her. First, a SPLAT as a stinking pile of bird poop slid expertly through the air and buried itself in her hair. Then, a GROAN as a tree's branch bent down to wipe mud across her cheek. Finally, just as Red pulled out her bottled water to wash off the upset, there came the HOLLER of three of the most truly unstylish people Red had ever seen, running barefoot through the woods in badly torn coats and skirts and trousers, mismatched patterns of orange and purple and green almost impossible to ignore.

Red could feel her nervousness rising, the fear of being alone and vulnerable, surrounded by strange people who thought stripes and polka dots were a match made in heaven. And then a great fur glove tapped three times on her shoulder.

“Ahh!” Red spun around and discovered that the glove was not a glove at all. The furry hand was attached to a furry arm, which stuck sideways out of a very furry body. And at the top of that furry body was a huge, fur-covered head, pointy yellow teeth sticking out of its mouth, and a rubbery black nose twitching this way and that. “Who are you?” Red demanded, because to ask what he was would have been rude. She drew the cloak tighter still.

“Settle, my dear Little Red,” said the wolf. “I mean you no harm. But a small girl like you in a pretty cloak like that has no place wandering through these woods on her own. You’ll be attacked, eaten, or at the very least your fabric will be torn.”

Red thought about this for a moment, and then she loosened grip on her cloak. “Well, Mister Wolf,” said Red, “I’m in a bit of a dilemma. My Granny is hosting a fashion show, and she’s sent me this gorgeous cloak of hers to wear for it. I had to go through the woods, or else I’d never make it in time.”

At this, the wolf nodded understandingly. “It is a marvellous cloak,” he told Red. “But I worry it will be much worse for wear by the time you’ve worn it through the trees and twigs and mud and muck. Perhaps you ought to take it off, just for now, just to keep it from being torn or dirtied before you wear it to that fashion show.”

Already, the cuffs of the beautiful red cloak were a little less brilliant than they had been when Red had set out, now faded by dirt and water she’d accidentally caught them in. The wolf, thought Red, might have had a good point. “Alright,” Red agreed, taking off the cloak and handing it to the wolf to hold. “I’ll take it off for safekeeping. Thank you, Mister Wolf.” Red gave a short curtsy. “Now, I’d really better be on my way.” And so off she went. And she’d put the cloak safely in the basket, hadn’t she?

When Red finally arrived at her grandmother’s cottage, the fashion show had nearly begun.

“You’re here!” cried Grandma. Her gold earrings jingled; her high heels clip-clopped across the floor. “Get ready,” Grandma said. “The show’s about to start!” She bustled off to straighten the chairs, or to answer the door, or to arrange the costume changes (Miss Tiger alone had seventeen). Red hurried backstage and rummaged through her basket. Where was the cloak?

“Attention!” Grandma’s excited voice boomed, and the little cottage fell silent. “I welcome you all to the greatest fashion showcase these woods have ever seen. Click your hooves, fasten your belts, and don your very best spectacles. Let the beauty begin!”

Boom, boom, boom. Grandma's music playlist started, bouncing out of the speakers. The three little pigs went trotting onto the stage, their gowns knitted together with twigs and straw and other silly materials for costume design. Backstage, Red kept digging. She turned her basket upside down and hit it in time with the music. All of the cupcakes fell out, icing first, and the sewing kit, too. But the cloak did not come. It wasn't there.

"No, no, no!" Red wailed. "Grandma will be so upset! I've lost it! I've lost her finest cloak!" Now, you've heard of people seeing green when they're feeling jealous, and red when they're feeling very angry. But perhaps red also makes an appearance when one is very frightened or saddened, or when one has lost a particularly extraordinary cloak with five shiny, golden buttons. Whatever it was that caused Red to take notice then, she turned her attention to a spot a little to the left of the stage and there she saw it. The cloak. Bright red and dazzling as ever, and much too small for the great big wolf who wore it.

"He's stolen it!" Red hissed, pointing to the wolf. "That's my cloak! Mister Wolf has stolen my cloak!"

Though little, Red was no pushover, and she did not take kindly to having her most wonderful possessions taken from her by creatures of woods who were supposed to have been acting out of a love for fashion. She put her hands firmly on her hips – the way your mother does when you know she's really mad – and she stormed right over to the wolf, ready to give him a piece of her mind.

"Why," Red spat, "Mister Wolf, fancy seeing you here? What an awfully red cloak you have."

The wolf grinned back at her. "Yes," he said sweetly. "All the better to warm me with."

Red gave her right foot a gentle stomp. "Mister Wolf," she said, "what awfully shiny buttons it has."

The wolf smiled again. "Yes," he said. "All the better to fasten it with."

Now, Red stomped her left foot. "Mister Wolf," she said. "What an awfully tiny waist it has."

"Mhmm," the wolf replied. "All the better to fit me with. Don't you know form fitting is in?"

The wolf got up out of his chair. The cloak stretched at his shoulders and his waist, its careful stitching barely keeping itself together. "Now," said Mister Wolf, "if you'll excuse me, I have a fashion show to win."

Red watched on as the wolf thundered out onto the stage. Thud, thud, thud. He flashed a grin to the audience, who oohed and ahed at that delightful cloak, however badly it fit him. And then Grandma rose from her seat.

"My cloak!" she shouted. "That's my cloak!" The room gave a collective gasp. "The big bad wolf has stolen my

granddaughter's cloak!"

It was difficult to tell what came next. It sounded like a circus gone wrong, or a dramatic escape from a zoo. It looked like a number of paws and hooves and fists, and a flash of fur as it slid out through the front door, quickly while hardly anybody was looking.

The next thing Red knew, her shoulders were warm again. The marvellous red cloak, springing back to its proper shape, fell down her back and down past her knees. She pulled its hood up over her face.

"Little Red Riding Hood!" The crowd roared. Red gave a bow, and she let the applause wash over her.

"Take that, Mister Wolf," she laughed to herself. "This is my cloak." She clutched it tightly. "And I am Little Red."

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