



Mr. Wolf and Little Red

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Retold Fairy Tales

My pups lay whimpering in the cave, their poor mother already dead from the famine. The urge for food is the only thing keeping them and me alive, but not for very much longer.

One of my boys comes up. “Father?”

“Stay inside. I’ll be back”

“But father.”

“No buts. Our home cannot protect you if you leave. And I cannot when I am hunting. I’ll be home soon. Now go rest with your siblings.”

Tail between his legs, he whimpers back to bed.

Without a glance behind me, I leave them. I pray the seclusion of our home will hide them from any lurking enemies.

But as I forge a path through the dense woods, only the eerie quiet welcomes me. It would make any creature, big or small, feel frightened. For my pups, though, it is a sign of no food.

The troubling thoughts of moving further away from the cave creep into my mind as I wander. I sniff the ground, begging for the earth to give me some hint of prey. Nothing but dead leaves scattered among the browning grass.

I look towards the mountains, wondering if I should try my luck there, when the sweetest smell invades my senses. Salivating, I slowly follow it, getting closer and closer towards a barren trail once used by horsemen of the Royal Courts and bands of travelers. This time, though, only a light humming filled the air.

Peeking through a rotten berry bush, I see a younger villager coming 'round the bend. Its red cape drapes around its entire body. The sweet scent wafts through the air, taking hold of me. The villager passes without noticing me. I take the chance to get behind it, following it ever so closely.

I could kill it and bring it back to my pups.

I sneak up, baring my teeth and focusing my eyes on the red cape.

Just a few more steps –

A twig breaks under my feet. I freeze.

The cape flutters up as the villager spins around. Large blue eyes lock onto mine.

I tense, waiting for a scream.

It gasps. “Why hello, Mr. Wolf! How are you doing, today?”

I edge backwards at the sound of her voice, looking one way then another. Her father or brother– where are they?! Will they jump out and kill me?! Will they capture me?! My pups!

I move to leave until a large bun is pushed into my line of sight. I sniff it. Fruits, fresh and baked, fill my nostrils. Drool drips through my fangs.

“You look awfully small. Are you hungry?” Her voice, as sweet as the bun, rings, captivating me once more.

She is so close to me. I could just take her down. It would be the right thing to make her a meal for my pups. If her family does not care enough to send her out here without protection. . .

“Oh!” She bends down, closer. “Here you go! Much easier to eat now!”

This one is stupid. How can she get so close to me? I am a beast of the forest, and she, a mere girl. I should kill her. One slight snip of the neck–

Her eyes meet mine. Those blue pools hold me.

“Do not worry. This pastry is fresh.”

Eyes still locked, I take a lick of the pastry. Berries swirl in my mouth.

I break away from her gaze and snap it up the treat.

She giggles. “I take it that you like it?”

I chew the best I can, forcing myself to not swallow it whole. I lick every bit of the filling off my mouth.

“What’s your name, Mr. Wolf?”

I clear my throat, wondering if this villager even knows my tongue. “Us woodland animals don’t give our names to strangers. Much less villagers.”

Another light giggle. “Of course not! How silly of me! Especially when I have not given you my name!”

She understands me!

“I have a proper name, but people just call me Little Red.”

Little Red? Such an odd name for a villager.

“I can keep calling you Mr. Wolf if you are alright with that?”

I nod.

“Well, then, let us be on our way. Grandmother needs these pastries and wine. She is awfully ill.”

I follow her down the trail. She starts humming, and all I can do is listen, some of my worry washing away.

“So, Mr. Wolf,” she chirps, “what brings you here today? Were you trying to find some food?”

“Well, yes, I was,” I say. The guilt of almost eating her creeps in.

“Why is that? I thought all of the animals would be away at this time. With the famine and all.”

"I cannot leave this place."

"You have loved ones to take care of?"

"Y-yes, I do," I do not know why I keep answering her. In reality, we are enemies. "My little pups."

"Awe! Pups!" The chiming in her voice quiets my arguing mind. "So sweet!"

"It would be. They have no mother, though. Because of this—" I gesture towards the dead trees "—she withered away as she bore our pups. I am the only one left to care for them."

I do not look at her, but it seems she can feel how painful the subject is for me. She skips to another. "So many predators have left these woods. That is the only reason my mother has allowed me to go to my grandmother's house alone."

"It is still dangerous, though. Woodland fairies could be lurking about."

"True. But as long as I stay on the trail, they never seem to bother me." She pauses, her brow creasing slightly.

"Mr. Wolf. Have you been able to find anything to eat? Anything at all?"

"Not much. The other predators have gone, but only because the prey has gone as well."

"Hmm. . ." Her blue eyes shimmer with thought. "After I get done visiting my grandmother, I will make you and your pups some food."

"You don't—"

"Do not worry. It is just my mother and me at home – and of course my grandmother here in the woods. You will not be taking any of our food. We have enough berries at home to sustain us and I bet I can make some really good berry pies for your pups."

Her kindness stings me. For someone to do something for a wolf was beyond imagination.

"I-I would be honored," I say.

"No worries!"

We keep moving down the path, talking, her blue eyes catching my interest more and more. We do not notice

her grandmother's house growing on the horizon until we are nearly on the doorstep.

"Wait out here, Mr. Wolf."

I nod and find refuge under a nearby treat.

The door moans open to her touch. "Grandmother! I have brought treats for you!"

I settle in, nuzzling the ground with my snout. Maybe this will be fine. My pups will be fine—

Blood-curdling screams shoot out from the cottage.

Little Red!

Instinct takes over.

I fly to my paws and run towards the door.

I knock it in.

A giant, shadowy cloud hangs over a small bed, sprouting from the stomach of a sickly withered old woman.

Little Red is backed into a corner, shaking, staring at it like a fearful deer.

It lunges for her.

She screams.

I jump and bite through the blackness.

Screeches fill the room.

Claws form from the cloud and knock me out of its way.

It grabs me, squeezing the air from my lungs.

I claw at its eyes.

It hisses, throwing me aside.

I jump back up, between it and Little Red.

“Mr. Wolf!”

I growl, baring my fangs.

It hisses.

“Leave this place, creature!”

It screeches, shooting its arm towards me.

I jump towards its base and tear it away from the old woman.

Shrieks fill my ears as it pounds at my back.

I keep tearing at it.

Claws clutch me tightly and rip me from the bed and throw me towards a window. My body smacks into the shutters before it breaks into a tree.

I slump to the forest floor.

My vision darkens.

Heavy footsteps approach.

Little Red is yelling.

I look up one last time to see an axe falling towards me.

With a thud, everything goes black.

I am dead.

At least I think I am.

The thought of time seems to slip from my grasp.

Everything is dark, bleak.

Nothing around me.

No air.

No sky.

No forest.

No Red.

Nothing.

“My, my. What do we have here?”

A woman’s voice breaks the silence.

I try to reply, but nothing comes out.

“A little wolf, I see. How quaint.”

My voice is lost. I struggle to move.

“Now, now. I know you’re trying, but that won’t work. You see that big, bad Huntsman chopped off your head. And when you’re dead you can’t speak and you can’t feel. Least not physically.” A low laugh. “But you can feel the pain of knowing your pups will die without you.”

I try to bark, to move, to do anything.

Nothing.

“But that’s alright. I’m here to help.”

Fright grips me.

“I can bring you back to life. And I won’t even take any of your pups for payment. You can have your whole life back, and you won’t go hungry and they won’t either. I just need one little thing from you.”

Chills run through me.

It is now that my voice finally finds me again. "Who are you?"

"It doesn't matter," she whispered back. "All that matters is your answer. Please do this for me. Please say yes. Tell me I can bring you back to life. And I will guarantee the safety of your pups. They will grow up strong and healthy. And you won't have to worry about them or your own life ever again."

"What will you have me do in return?"

"Simple. You will do little odd jobs for me for a time. And after that, you'll be free. Your pups' lives and your own still intact."

A vision of my pups springs to life in my mind. I yearn to be with them.

"What will it be? Life or oblivion?"

A moment seems to pass.

"Yes," I say. "Save my pups."

A horrifying screech, one from the lowest depths of Hell, rings through my ears.

Two voices speak up. "Good choice, Mr. Wolf."

My body convulses.

"I promise to not ask anything from you for now. A father should spend time with his children. But be ready for when I do call."

The two voices fade, leaving me in silence once more.

I open my eyes. My cave stands in front of me. The sun is still high in the sky, just as it was when I left.

I hear barking ahead of me. My pups. They were waiting for me.

I get back up easily as if I was never injured. I walk into my home, spotting a strong buck is laying on the ground. It is already dead and seems to have already been fed upon. A present from the woman?

In front of me, my pups spring around. They are the happiest little hounds I have ever seen. Instead of whimpering for food, they run around our home, playing with each other. Shining coats and bright eyes assure me that their health is fully restored.

“Father! Father! You’re back!” they cheer.

“Yes, I am, little ones.”

Joy fills me. I can finally relax. I know they all will live long lives, ruling their own packs with strength and wisdom one day. Something their mother and I have always wanted so badly for them. Something that I could never give them on my own.

As they play, I bend down and take some of the deer, though I do not feel hunger like before. I take a piece into my mouth, but something charred strokes my tongue. I cough the meat up, throwing it to the side. I try once more, with a smaller piece. Again, I cough up.

I peer down at the piece. The muscle starts breaking apart, turning to ash.

My eyes widen.

I look at the rest of the deer. The meat is black, not red. I lean in to sniff it, only to jerk away as something cuts my nose. A long, black worm with pincers and thousands of tiny claws pokes out of it. It hisses at me, before diving back down, making its way through the deer.

A laughter fills my ears.

That woman!

I run out of the cave but sense no one near.

“I’ll call on you soon, my little hound.” Her sickly sweet voice fades from my mind.

One of my pups rushes towards me. “Father! Father! Come play with us!”

I make my way inside the cave again, my son following me.

“Father!”

“No, pup. I am too tired now.”

He whimpers off, only to get excited again as his brothers and sisters start tackling him.

I slide down, laying my body on the cool cave floor. My eyelids become heavy. I try to keep them open. But sleep bids me welcome. Before I can nod off completely, my eyes fall on a shadow plastered above the deer on the cave wall. Its bright blue eyes shine down at me as it silently laughs.

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