



The wolf, the woodcutter, granny and the red riding hood

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Retold Fairy Tales

Millie's teacher was sick so Miss Maple, another teacher at the school, was taking her class for the afternoon.

'Good afternoon,' said Miss Maple to Millie's class. Her silver hair billowed like a pincushion on top of her head and her strong ankles puffed out from her sensible shoes. 'I have a special treat for you today,' she said.

Millie leaned forward.

'Seeing as today is Wednesday, I'm going to read you a story. I always read to my class on Wednesdays. Now who's heard of Little Red Riding Hood?'

Everybody threw up their hands, except Millie.

You're kidding, Millie thought as she leaned onto the back legs of her chair. She must think we're all still babies.

Miss Maple pulled the chair out from behind the desk and placed it in front of the class. 'Are you sitting comfortably?' she said, as though she were talking to a group of four year olds.

'Yes Miss Maple,' chimed the class, as though they were a group of four year olds.

'Then I'll begin. Once upon a time...'

Millie yawned. This was going to be a very long afternoon.

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CRASH! Millie fell off her chair. The whole class jumped and Miss Maple dropped her book and leaped over to Millie who was lying in a heap on the floor.

'Are you all right?' she asked reaching out her hand.

'Yes, I think so,' Millie said and blinked. 'Is Granny okay?'

The room exploded with laughter.

'Is Granny okay?' mimicked one of the boys.

'Settle down,' said Miss Maple in a firm voice. She helped Millie to her feet. Millie straightened her dress, picked up her chair and sat down again. This time she kept all four legs firmly on the ground.

Miss Maple made her way back to the front of the class and began reading again.

Millie could see her lips moving but there was no sound coming out. She tried to pop her ears but all she could hear was the whispering of her classmates...or was it the rustling of leaves? She looked around her and everyone seemed far away and slightly out of focus. She rubbed her eyes and when she turned back to the front of the class she saw that Miss Maple had disappeared altogether and in her place stood a quaint little cottage. Millie's heart fluttered inside her like a trapped butterfly. This is very strange, thought Millie but before she could think another thought Millie heard a frantic cry.

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'HELP! HELP!' someone screamed. 'The woodcutter's gone mad!'

The commotion was coming from inside the cottage. Millie looked around. Her classroom had vanished and she was standing on a paved path that led right up to the cottage door. On either side of the path was a row of daffodils. Millie rubbed the lump on the back of her head. This is very strange indeed. Perhaps she was unconscious. She pinched herself hard on the arm.

'Ouch!' A red welt appeared and she rubbed it quickly.

'HELP! SOMEONE PLEASE!'

Millie jumped. I can't just stand here, she thought, so slowly she made her way to the cottage and tried the door. It was locked. She stared at the door for a while, not knowing what to do. The noise coming from inside didn't sound very welcoming.

'HELP!'

Millie grasped the claw-shaped knocker and rapped three times.

'Hello?' she said. 'Is everything okay?' She stepped back and waited.

Then it went quiet. Suddenly, the door flew open.

'Miss Maple?' Millie stammered. 'What are you doing...?' But before she could get another word out, the old woman grabbed Millie by the arm and pulled her into the cottage.

'Thank goodness,' she sobbed. 'The woodcutter's gone completely mad!'

Millie ducked as a piece of splintered wood flew towards her.

'I'm sick of it!' the woodcutter bellowed.

SMASH! A chair went flying.

'I won't cut down another tree!'

CRASH! The kitchen table split in two.

'Get with the times Granny,' he roared. 'Put in an electric heater like everybody else!'

Millie was dumb struck. Had she completely lost her mind? Then she noticed the wolf sprawled out in front of the fire.

I know what's happened, I'm dreaming. I'm listening to the story and I'm dreaming. She looked at the welt on her arm; it was still throbbing. At least I hope that's what's happened.

'Grrrrr!' The beast growled softly at Millie and his ears twitched.

What big ears you've got, thought Millie as she stepped behind the old woman.

'Aw don't worry yourself over old Wolfy there.' The old woman pulled Millie out from behind her skirts. 'He's just a big softy.'

'He certainly is big,' said Millie staying close to the woman. 'In fact he's the biggest wolf I've ever seen. Actually, he's the only wolf I've ever seen.'

The wolf was the size of a small horse and he seemed to be totally unaware of all the chaos around him. Then the woodcutter, still crashing around the room in a rage, stepped on the wolf's tail.

The wolf howled in pain, then leapt up and began to snarl viciously. The noise was deafening. The old woman charged over to the wolf pushing the woodcutter out of the way.

'Look what you've done now, you clumsy oaf. Never mind Wolfy,' she said soothingly and she vigorously rubbed his chest.

Millie watched as the familiar silver bun bounced on top of the old woman's head. 'Where's the classroom?'

Millie begged. 'How did we get here? What's going on?'

'I told you dear,' said the woman. 'Please pay attention. The woodcutter's gone mad.'

'But Miss Maple...' Millie's tongue felt fat in her mouth. She just couldn't seem to form the right words. 'But Miss Maple...' she began again but the old woman interrupted her.

'I'm Granny,' she said. 'Just call me Granny.'

Millie stopped trying to speak and looked around the one-roomed cottage. There was a bed in the middle, pushed up against the back wall. A large chest of drawers was on the left-hand side of the bed and an open fireplace was on the right with a rocking chair nearby. Millie was surprised to see an artist's easel with a half-finished painting on it, standing to the side of the fireplace. A small kitchenette, littered with smashed remains of the table, took up the rest of the room.

Millie saw a three-legged stool that had escaped the woodcutter's axe, so she dragged it over and sat down.

Slowly her head began to clear and her tongue started to behave itself.

'Why has he gone mad?' she asked before she realised what she was saying.

'I don't know why he's gone mad,' said the old woman, 'he's just gone mad, that's all.'

'Perhaps you could ask him,' suggested Millie, hoping that she would wake up soon.

'Ask him?' The old woman gave Wolfy one last pat and stood up. She walked over to the kettle. 'All right, I will. But I'll put the kettle on first and make some tea. Would you like a cup of tea dear? You're not looking very well.'

'I'd like a cup of tea,' said the woodcutter. He'd stopped chopping up the furniture and was sitting on the end of the bed.

The old woman crossed her arms. 'Not until you tell me why you have gone absolutely, completely, stark raving mad.'

The woodcutter gave a deep sigh. 'It's the same thing everyday,' he complained. 'Chop! Chop! Chop! More wood! More wood! It's never ending. I've had enough.'

'But I get so cold,' shivered the old woman as she plopped three teabags into mismatching mugs. Then she took the boiling kettle off the hob and poured the water into the mugs. 'Wolf sits in front of the fire and blocks all the heat. I need a roaring fire, especially at night. It's freezing in that bed.'

The woodcutter started to cry. 'It's just that I don't get anytime to paint,' he said. 'Painting is my life. I'd much rather paint trees than chop them down.'

Millie looked up. That explained the easel. Suddenly, she had an idea that might get her out of this dream or

whatever it was. 'What about a compromise?' she said.

'A compromise?' The old woman slopped milk into the mugs and heaped in three teaspoons of sugar. 'What do you mean?'

'Why don't you swap places?' Millie said beginning to enjoy the bizarre position she'd found herself in.

'Swap places?' chattered Granny through her blue lips.

'Why don't you sit by the fire and let Wolfy lie on the bed?'

The woodcutter was right on to it. He pushed the rocking chair close to the fire. 'Come on Granny, you'll be warm as toast over here.'

The old woman hesitated. 'But what about Wolfy, he'll get cold now?'

'No he won't,' said Millie jumping up. 'He's got a great big fur coat of his own. And you can wrap one of your shawls around him,' she said, trying hard not to laugh. 'Tuck him right up in the bed if you like.'

'You're a strange one, you are,' said the old woman. 'Wherever do you get your ideas from?'

Millie wasn't listening. She was too busy digging through the big chest of drawers that stood in the corner of the cottage. 'Here you go,' she said. 'Perfect.' She held up a red woollen cloak with a built in hood.

'That's a present,' Granny said, 'for my granddaughter.'

'It's very ugly,' said the woodcutter as he gathered up his paints.

'No-one asked you,' Granny snapped. 'Try it on,' she said to Millie. 'It should fit you nicely.'

Brilliant, thought Millie. This is just getting better and better. 'I'll try it on in a minute,' she said. 'Once I've found something for Wolfy to wear. She pulled out a shabby looking nightgown. 'What about this?' she said.

'Flannel is lovely and warm.'

The old woman blew on her steaming cup of tea. 'There's a matching night cap in there somewhere.'

Millie found it stuffed back in the corner of the drawer. She took the nightie and the cap over to Wolfy who was fast asleep in front of the crackling fire. She tried to lift his head but he was too heavy so the woodcutter, who was setting up his easel, came over to give her a hand. He lifted up Wolfy's head while Millie pulled the nightie over it.

The old woman slurped up her tea. 'He's going to look very odd in that don't you think?'

'Whose going to see him?' Millie asked as she pulled his front paws through the arms and plonked the night cap on his head.

'My granddaughter, for one,' said the old woman. 'She's due here any minute. She comes about this time, every

Wednesday.'

Millie and the woodcutter heaved Wolfy onto the bed and pulled up the covers.

Wolfy opened his dreaming eyes and stared blankly.

What big eyes you've got, thought Millie as she stepped away from the bed.

She picked up the red hooded cloak and put it on. It fitted perfectly. 'Your granddaughter wouldn't be called Little Red Riding Hood by any chance, would she?' Millie asked as she did a little twirl and picked up her mug of still-hot tea.

'Little Red Riding Hood?' said Granny. 'What sort of a name is that?' 'My granddaughter's name is...' The old woman stopped mid sentence and pointed out the window.

Millie looked out towards the path and there, pinching herself on the arm, was...

'...Millicent,' said the old woman. 'My granddaughter's name is Millicent. Millie for short.'

The room began to spin and as Millie staggered towards the bed, she knocked the woodcutter's easel into the fire.

'Nooooooo!' he screamed as he tried to save it from the flames. But he was too late and in a fit of frustration he picked up his axe and began to chop up the furniture.

'Oh not again,' wailed the old woman. 'HELP! SOMEONE PLEASE! The woodcutter's gone mad!'

As Millie teetered she caught her reflection in the mirror. What an ugly red cloak, she thought as she lost her balance completely and spilled hot tea over Wolfy's chest.

Wolfy howled and pounced towards her.

And what big teeth you've got, thought Millie just before she hit the ground...

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CRASH! Millie fell off her chair. She lay there for a while wondering what had happened. Slowly it came to her, the woodcutter, the wolf, the fire and the teeth...

'Are you all right?' asked Miss Maple as she reached out her hand.

'Yes, I think so,' Millie said blinking. 'Is Granny okay?'

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