Ms. Aird’s Version of “Little Red Riding Hood”

Lisa was a high-energy nine-year-old with curly brown hair and a smattering of freckles across her face. She was very friendly, always calling out to her neighbors to say “good morning” or “hello there!” Lisa lived with her mother and father in a cheerful yellow house that backed up to a small forest. Her grandma, who Lisa called Granny, actually lived in a cottage within the forest. Lisa would skip there regularly to give her grandma company. On one of those occasions, Granny had given her a beautiful, handmade red riding cloak complete with a large hood to keep the sun out of her eyes and off of her head. Lisa wore it so often that people started to call her “Little Red Riding Hood.” Eventually, the nickname “Little Red” stuck to her.

One spring day, the woodsman stopped by Lisa’s house to let them know that Granny was sick and that she could use some help and company. Lisa and her mother immediately put together a goody basket of some of Granny’s favorite foods and a couple crossword puzzles to keep her entertained. Before Lisa could run out the door under the hood of her red riding cloak, her mom grabbed her shoulders and made her promise that she wouldn’t talk to any strangers on her way to Granny’s. Lisa nodded impatiently until her mother was satisfied, and then Lisa took off skipping and hopping towards the forest path that would take her to Granny’s.

On the way, she saw many distracting sights. Butterflies flitted through the air and flowers bloomed in the sunlight that filtered through the trees. Squirrels chittered and leapt from branch to branch above her, dropping the occasional acorn to the ground which Lisa gleefully stomped on. All of a sudden, a wolf appeared on the pathway. He was a strange wolf, standing on his hind legs and wearing a red velvet vest with a pocket watch tucked in the pocket. As she neared him, he said in a voice like a growl “Hello,” and asked her who she was. Lisa remembered her promise to her mom, but she didn’t see any harm in saying her nickname since he seemed so civilized. He then declared his name was Mr. Wolf and held out his paw, so she shook it. He asked her where she was travelling to on such a fine day and Lisa replied, “To my grandma’s cottage up the path.” Mr. Wolf smiled widely so that she could see the tips of his teeth, murmuring “Ah, an excellent day on which to visit a grandma. Unfortunately, I’m heading the other way. Until we meet again, Little Red.” Mr. Wolf took to all fours and ran the opposite way down the path. Lisa watched until he was out of sight around a bend in the path.

Mr. Wolf doubled back although Lisa was not aware of it. He had a daring plan, one that made him drool at the possibility of eating a plump granny and a fresh little girl in one day. He hurriedly raced through the trees to beat Little Red to the grandma’s cottage. Once there, he snuck up to a side window and carefully peered in. The granny was asleep in her bed. Perfect timing! Mr. Wolf eased open the window, crawled through, and gobbled up the granny. The poor old woman barely struggled because she was so groggy from sleep. He chuckled at his good fortune. Then he heard the humming of a sweet female voice followed by a gentle rap at the door. Mr. Wolf wasn’t ready to eat again so soon. He needed at least ten minutes to make room for Little Red in his stomach. He decided to stall by dressing like the little grandma and impersonating her until he was ready to eat Little Red. He wriggled into a spare nightgown from the closet, snapped a night cap on his head, and scrambled into the bed. Little Red came in right as he yanked the covers up over his wolf snout.

Lisa made a face as she saw the color of Granny’s skin. Granny’s illness was worse than she thought it’d be. She brought the basket over to the bedside table and pulled up a chair next to the bed. She began to talk to Granny, telling her about the things she’d seen in the woods. As she spoke, Lisa noticed that the night cap seemed stretched to the limit. The only explanation was that Granny’s ears were swollen from her sickness. When Lisa asked her about it, Granny replied that now her ears were big enough to hear her. *Weird*, Lisa thought. That voice was not Granny’s! She supposed it might be the flu. Lisa reached under the covers, trying to grab Granny’s hand to comfort her. Lisa froze in sudden fear; the hand was furry and where there should be fingers she felt only long, sharp claws. Lisa leapt to her feet screaming, but too late. Mr. Wolf lunged and consumed Lisa whole. Lisa realized her foolishness inside Mr. Wolf’s stomach. It was a very tight fit. On the upside, she found Granny unharmed.

Mr. Wolf was full to bursting point. He lounged on granny’s bed, picking his teeth with a claw. Then there was forceful knocking at the door. It was the woodsman! Mr. Wolf could tell by the booming voice that called out “Is everything okay in there, Beatrice?” *Who’s Beatrice?* wondered Mr. Wolf as called out in his most granny-like voice “It was nothing, dearie. Thank you for checking.” Then he sighed contentedly and closed his eyes.

The woodsman knew that Lisa’s grandma, Beatrice, was sick, but that was too gravelly a voice for her. He snuck to the side window and glimpsed a huge, overstuffed wolf snoozing in Beatrice’s bed. He ran back to the front door and kicked it in. The wolf appeared to be too full to run since he couldn’t squeeze through the side window. The wolf scrabbled to push himself through, but he was stuck fast. The woodsman stormed in, raised his axe, and cut open the wolf’s belly. Beatrice and Lisa came spilling out onto the floor. Other than being slimy, they were okay. He then received two slimy hugs and many thanks for his bravery and concern.

Lisa shamefacedly apologized to Granny and to the woodsman. It was her fault Mr. Wolf had even known about Granny’s cottage. Granny squinted at her, then smiled warmly and accepted the apology. The woodsman reminded Lisa and Granny to keep their eyes peeled for dangerous animals, then he went towards his home, whistling as he went. Granny ran herself a hot bath and left Lisa to consider the lesson she’d learned.