

Little Red Riding Hood: The Wolf's Story

By David Henry Wilson

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OK, so I got killed in the end and you all said yippee. I'm not complaining about that. I wasn't as clever as I thought I was, so I'll take my defeat like a wolf. But now that I'm a was-wolf (that is, a dead wolf), and I'm up here in Valhowla (paradise for wolves), I'll rest a lot easier if the record is set straight. The official accounts of what happened that day are all lies, and I hate lies—especially lies about me. So here's the story of what really happened.

The first lie that annoys me is all this big-bad-wolf business. Big? I may have been average size once, but by the time I was killed, I was more ribs than muscles. I hadn't had a decent meal in weeks. Skinny, yes—big, no. And why bad? What was ever bad about me? I reckon I'm one of the nicest wolves I know. So instead of, *In the forest there lived a big bad wolf*, now read, *In the forest there lived a skinny nice wolf*.

Next we come to the question of motive. The history books say I wanted to eat Little Red Riding Hood. I didn't, and I can prove it. But even if I *had* wanted to eat her, what's so terrible about that? When she had eggs and bacon for breakfast, did anyone complain that big bad Red Riding Hood took the eggs from the chicken as well as two slices off Porky Pig? When she had roast turkey for Christmas, did it bother her what might have happened to Mrs Turkey and all the little Turks? When she sank her teeth into a juicy rump steak, did she spare a thought for some poor cow walking round the field with half its bottom missing? What's the difference between a little girl eating me and my mates, and me eating a little girl?

Anyway, as I said, I didn't want to eat her. Here's the proof. You remember she and I had a little chat in the woods? I asked her where she was going, what she had in the basket, and where her sick granny lived. Well, if I was close enough to talk to her, you'll have to agree that I was close enough to eat her. Why didn't I? Some of the accounts suggest it was because there were some woodcutters nearby. Rubbish. If

there'd been a single woodcutter nearby, I'd have been off faster than you can say, "The wonderful wolf went away from the wood."

The fact is, I was after Red Riding Hood's basket with all the goodies in it. With my blunt old teeth I couldn't even bite a chicken, let alone a little girl. It was the basket I wanted. I thought of stealing it from her there and then, but for three reasons I didn't. First, I didn't want to upset her. Second, she might have started screaming, and I don't like screams, or people who hear screams. And third, she might not have let go, and I was in no condition for a fight.

My plan was very simple. I intended to pop along to Granny's cottage, give her a little scare so she'd run away for a few minutes, pretend I was Granny, and relieve Red Riding Hood of the basket. Then she would have gone home thinking she'd done her good deed, Granny would have come back feeling pleased she'd escaped from the wolf, and I'd have got the basket. We'd all have lived happily ever after.

Only things didn't quite work out that way. First of all, in spite of what the official reports might say, Granny wasn't there. I pushed open the door, all set to say "boo" and get out of the way as she rushed out, but there was nobody to say "boo" to. Actually, I was rather glad, because some grannies don't scare easily. I've seen grannies that scared me a good deal more than I scared them. Anyway, the room was empty, so I reckoned it was my lucky day. I crawled into bed, pulling the covers over me.

In a few minutes, Little Red Riding Hood came along, and again the history books have got it all wrong. Unless she was as short-sighted as a one-eyed rhinoceros, do you honestly think she would have taken me for her grandmother? All those lies about what big teeth you have', and so on: I'll tell you exactly what we said to each other.

When she knocked at the door, I stayed under the covers and called out: "Who is it?" (That was rather clever of me. I knew who it was, but Granny wouldn't have known, would she?)

"It's me, Grandma!" said Red Riding Hood.

"Who's me?" I asked.

"You's you!" she replied.

"Well, who's you?" I asked.

"Little Red Riding Hood!" she said. "I've brought you a basket full of lovely food."

"Oh, surprise, surprise!" I said. "Come in, my dear, come in."

And in she came. Naturally, I stayed under the covers.

“How are you, Grandma?” she asked.

“I’m not well at all, dear,” I said. “I’ve caught a catching illness, and as I don’t want you to catch it, too, I’ll stay under the covers till you’ve gone. Just leave the basket there, dear, and run along home. Run quickly, ’cos I’ve heard there’s a big bad wolf in the forest.”

It was brilliant. I felt like jumping out of bed and giving myself a round of applause.

“Yes, Grandma,” said Red Riding Hood, and she put down the basket, turned round to leave, and . . . just my luck! Who should walk into the room at that moment but Granny herself! I knew I was in trouble as soon as I heard the footsteps. I’d have made a run for it if I hadn’t been paralysed with terror.

“Hullo, Red Riding Hood,” said Granny.

“Hullo, Grandma,” said Red Riding Hood.

“Hullo, trouble,” said I to myself.

“Grandma,” said Red Riding Hood, “if you’re here, who could that be in your bed?”

I wished I could just curl up and disappear down the side of the mattress.

“Whoever you are,” said Granny, “I’ve got you covered. Come out with your hands up.”

I poked my nose out from under the blanket.

“Look,” I said, “it’s all been a terrible mistake . . .”

“It’s the big bad wolf” said Red Riding Hood.

“No, no,” I said, “I’m just a skinny nice wolf . . .”

BANG, BANG, BANG!

Oh, the injustice! All I wanted was something to eat, but before I even had a chance to impress them with my charm and good intentions, Granny had put three bullets right where I should have had the fruit cake and chocolate biscuits. I collapsed like a chopped tree.

“Good shooting, Grandma!” said Red Riding Hood—though what was good about it I shall never know.

“Quick, fetch the vet!” I gasped.

But the last thing those two had in mind was to help poor dying Wolfie.

“We ought to get the newspapers here,” said Granny. “This could be quite a story.”

“Oh, yes,” said Red Riding Hood. “They might publish our pictures and we’d be famous!”

And while I lay there, half in and half out of the world, they calmly discussed the tale they would tell the reporters. Granny was worried that she might get into trouble because she didn’t have a license for her gun. (I wish she’d thought of that earlier.) Red Riding Hood also wondered why Granny hadn’t been in her bed, because she was supposed to be sick. It turned out that Granny had been on the lavatory, but she certainly wasn’t going to tell *that* to the reporters.

“And what,” said Granny, “are they going to think when they find the wolf in my bed? After all, I’ve got my reputation to think of.”

“Blow your reputation,” I groaned. “What about me? I’ve been shot!”

“You keep out of this, Wolfie,” said Granny. “You’ve caused enough trouble as it is.”

I’d caused trouble! Was it my fault she’d been on the lavatory? And who fired the gun? And who didn’t have a license? But it was no use arguing—they’d made up their minds that I was the villain and they were the heroes.

“Perhaps,” said Red Riding Hood, “we can pretend someone else shot him—a hunter, or a woodcutter.”

“But that wouldn’t explain how he got into my bed,” said Granny.

“I know what,” cried Red Riding Hood. “We could say you were in bed, and Wolfie came in and ate you.”

“You must be joking,” I moaned. “With my teeth I couldn’t even eat a chicken, let alone a tough old bird like Granny.”

“Keep quiet, Wolfie!” said Granny. “No, the problem there, my dear, is that if he’d eaten me, I’d be dead. And I’m not.”

“Well,” said Red Riding Hood, “we could say he ate you whole, and then the woodcutter cut him open and you came out alive.”

“Now that’s an idea!” said Granny.

“Oh, yeah!” I gasped. “A newborn fifteen-stone sixty-year-old baby! Who’s going to believe that?”

“Then,” continued the Little Red Liar, “we’ll say he disguised himself as you, I came in, and the woodcutter rescued me in the nick of time.”

“Oh, well,” I groaned, “why don’t I eat a whole Red Riding Hood for dessert—make a proper meal of it?”

“Why not?” asked Granny.

“You’re both crazy!” I panted. “Nobody in this whole wide world can be stupid enough to swallow a story like that!”

Those were my last words. With one more bullet from Granny, I huffed my last puff. But I died happy in the knowledge that nobody in the whole wide world could be stupid enough to swallow a story like that. Ugh, how wrong can a wolf be?