

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **Little Redcap**

Once upon a time there was the cutest, dearest slip of a girl, and she had a mother and grandmother who were very kind and loved the little thing so much. The grandmother in particular simply could not do enough for her little grandchild, giving her now this, now that; she had also given her a splendid cap of red velvet which suited her quite delightfully, and the little girl knew this and would not wear anything else, and for that reason everyone, old and young, called her Little Redcap. Now, her mother and grandmother did not live together in one house, but were half an hour apart,



and between their two houses there lay a forest. One morning the mother spoke to Little Redcap: “Dear Little Redcap, grandmother has become weak and sick, and cannot come to us. I’ve baked some cakes, so go and take some of them to grandmother with a bottle of wine, and give her my warmest wishes, and be very careful not to fall, or you might smash the bottle and sick grandmother will have nothing to drink. Don’t run around in the forest, stick to the path like a good girl, and don’t be late back.”

“I’ll do all that, just as you say, dear Mother,” replied Little Redcap, and she put on her pinny, took a light basket and held it while her mother laid the bottle and the cakes inside, then walked with joyful steps into the forest. As she was strolling on her way, completely unsuspecting, a wolf came along. The good child knew nothing of wolves as yet and had no fear. When the wolf had come closer, he said, “Good day, Little Redcap!” “Thank

you very much, Mr. Greybeard!” – “And where are you off to so early in the morning, my dear Little Redcap?” asked the wolf. “To my old grandmother who isn’t very well!” Little Redcap replied. “And what will you do there? You’re taking her something, I suppose?” – “But of course! We’ve baked cakes and mother gave me wine to take along too, she’s to drink that to become strong again.”

“Pray tell me one more thing, my dear, charming Little Redcap, where does your grandmother live? I would very much like, if I walk past her house some day, to evince my respect.”

“Why, not far from here at all, just a quarter of an hour, the house is right beside the forest, you must have gone past it before. There are oak trees behind it, and hazelnuts grow on the garden-fence!” chattered Little Redcap.

Oh you delightful, appetising hazelnut that you are – the false, wicked wolf thought to himself. I have to crack you, that is one sweet kernel – And he behaved as if he wished to accompany Little Redcap a short stretch further, and said to her: “Just look at how, over there, and over yonder, there are such beautiful flowers, and just listen to how delightfully the birds sing! Yes, it is very lovely in the forest, very lovely, and such good herbs grow here, healing herbs, my dear Little Redcap.”

“You must be a doctor then, dear grey sir?” Little Redcap asked. “Because you know the healing herbs. So you could show me a herb that will heal my sick grandmother!”

“Child, you are as good as you are clever!” the wolf praised her. “But of course I’m a doctor, and I know all the herbs, you see! Right here is one

of them, Wolf's-foot, there in the shade grow Wolfberries, and here on the sunny slope blooms Wolf's-milk, while over there you will find Wolfswort.”*

“Are *all* herbs called after the wolf, then?” asked Little Redcap.

“The best ones are, *only* the best ones, my dear, pious child!” the wolf said with real scorn. For all the ones he had named were *poisonous* herbs. But Little Redcap, in her innocence, wanted to pick these herbs and take them to her grandmother, believing them to be healing herbs; and the wolf said, “Farewell, my good Little Redcap, it has been a pleasure to make your acquaintance; I must rush, I’ve a weak old invalid to visit!”

And with that the wolf hurried away and went post-haste to the grandmother’s house, while Little Redcap picked pretty woodland flowers for a posy and gathered the supposed healing herbs.

When the wolf arrived at the house of Little Redcap’s grandmother he found the door locked, so he knocked. The old woman could not get out of bed to look and see who was there, so she cried: “Who is that without?”

“Little Redcap!” the wolf cried in a disguised voice. “Mother sends dear grandmother wine, and cakes as well! We’ve baked!”



“Reach through the hole at the bottom of the door, the key is there!” cried the old woman, and the wolf did this, then opened the door, walked into the house, into the parlour, and devoured the grandmother without further ado. Then he put on her clothes, lay down in her bed, pulled the bedclothes up over him, and drew the bed-curtains. After a while Little Redcap came; she was astonished to find everything so open, for her grandmother usually preferred to keep herself under lock and key, and she almost felt uneasy in her young heart.



Now when Little Redcap walked to the bed, her old grandmother was lying there; she had on a large night-cap and only a little of her could be seen – and that little looked truly dreadful. “Oh grandmother, what big ears you have!” cried Little Redcap. – “All the better to hear you with!” was the answer. – “Oh grandmother! What big eyes you have!” – “All the better to see you with!” – “Why grandmother, what big hairy hands you have!” – “All the better to grasp and hold you with!” – “Oh grandmother, what a big mouth and what long teeth you have!” – “All the better to eat you with!” And the wolf leapt furiously out of the bed and gobbled up poor Little Redcap. She was gone.

Now the wolf was full, and he liked being in the old woman's parlour and soft bed very much; and he lay down again and fell asleep and snored, making a sound like the wheels clattering in a mill.

By chance a hunter was passing by, and hearing the strange sounds, he thought: "Well, well, the poor old woman in there is a bad snorer, she may even have the rattles and be on her deathbed! You must go in and have a look to see what's the matter with her." No sooner thought than done: the hunter entered the house, where he found Mr. Isegrim lying in the old woman's bed, and the old woman herself was nowhere to be seen. "So you're here?" said the hunter, snatching his rifle from his shoulder, "Just you come to me, you've run away from me often enough!" – He was taking aim – when it occurred to him: "Hold on – the old woman isn't here, perhaps the fiend devoured her bones and all, she was just a scrawny little woman, after all." And so the hunter did not shoot, but he drew his sharp hunting knife and very softly slit open the stomach of the soundly sleeping wolf; then a little red cap peeped out, and under the little cap there was a little head, and then cute, delightful Little Redcap came out, saying, "Good morning! Oh, what a dark little chamber that was in there!" – And behind Little Redcap the old grandmother came wriggling out; she was still alive but had been pressed for room in the wolf's stomach. The wolf was still sleeping like a log, so they picked up stones, just like the old goat in the fairy tale of 'The Seven Little Kids,' stuffed the wolf's stomach with them, and sewed up his belly, after which that they hid themselves, the hunter stepping behind a tree to see what the wolf would do. Now the wolf woke up, got out of bed, went out of the parlour, out of the house, and hobbled to the well, for he had a raging

thirst. On the way he said: “I really don’t know, I really don’t know, there’s a wobbling in my stomach, to and fro, to and fro, like boulders – is that the grandmother and Little Redcap?” – And when he came to the well and bent over to drink, the stones dragged him down and he toppled over into the well and drowned. So the hunter saved a bullet; he pulled the wolf out of the well and stripped off his pelt, and all three of them, the hunter, the grandmother, and Little Redcap, drank the wine and ate the cakes and were thoroughly content; and the grandmother became hale and hearty again, and Little Redcap went home with her empty basket, thinking: “Never again will you stray away from the path into the forest, when mother has forbidden you to.”

*Wolf’s-foot is used to translate “Wolfsbast” which is actually spurge laurel; Wolfsbeere is herb Paris; Wolfsmilch is spurge; and Wolfswort is also known as wolfsbane or aconite. All are poisonous except Wolf’s-foot, which is explosive.