

## LITTLE REDCAPE

There was once a sweet little girl who was loved by everyone who so much as looked at her, and most of all her grandmother loved her and was forever trying to think of new presents to give the child. Once she gave her a little red velvet cape, and because it suited her so well and she never again wanted to wear anything else, she was known simply as Little Redcape. One day her mother said to her: 'Come, Little Redcape, here's a piece of cake and a bottle of wine; take them out to your grandmother, she's sick and weak and she'll enjoy them very much. Set out before it gets hot, and when you're on your way watch your step like a good girl and don't stray from the path, or you'll fall and break the bottle and grandmother will get nothing. And when you go into her room, remember to say good morning and not to stare all round the room first.'

'Don't worry, I'll do everything as I should,' said Little Redcape to her mother and promised faithfully. Now her grandmother lived out in the forest, half an hour from the village. And as Little Redcape entered the forest the wolf met her. But Little Redcape didn't know what a wicked beast he was, and wasn't afraid of him. 'Good morning, Little Redcape,' he said. 'Thank you, wolf.' 'Where are you going so early, Little Redcape?' 'To my grandmother's.' 'What are you carrying under your apron?' 'Cake and wine - we were baking yesterday, and my grandmother's ill and weak, so she's to have something nice to help her get strong again.' 'Little Redcape, where does your grandmother live?' 'A good quarter of an hour's walk further on in the forest, under the three big oak trees, that's where her house is; there are hazel hedges by it, I'm sure you know the place,' said Little Redcape. The wolf thought to itself: This delicate young thing, she'll make a plump morsel, she'll taste even better than the old woman. But I must go about it cunningly and I'll catch them both. So he walked for a while beside Little Redcape and then said: 'Little Redcape, just look at those lovely flowers growing all round us, why don't you look about you? I think you don't even notice how sweetly the birds are singing. You're walking straight ahead as if you were going to school, and yet it's such fun out here in the wood.'

Little Redcape looked up, and when she saw the sunbeams dancing to and fro between the trees and all the lovely flowers growing everywhere, she thought: If I take Grandmama a bunch of fresh flowers, that'll please her too; it's so early that I'll still get there soon enough. And she ran off the path and into the forest to look for flowers. And every time she picked one she seemed to see a prettier one growing further on, and she ran to pick it and got deeper and deeper into the forest. But the wolf went straight to her grandmother's house and knocked at the door. 'Who's there?' 'Little Redcape, bringing you some cake and wine; open the door.' 'Just push down the latch,' said the grandmother, 'I'm too weak to get out of bed.' The wolf pushed down the latch, and without a word he went straight to the old woman's bed and gobbled her up. Then he put on her clothes and her nightcap and lay down in her bed and closed the curtains.

But Little Redcape had been running about picking flowers, and when she had collected so many that she couldn't carry any more she remembered her grandmother and set out again towards her house. She was surprised to find the door open, and when she went into the room everything seemed so strange that she thought: Oh my goodness, how nervous I feel today, and yet I always enjoy visiting Grandmama! She called out: 'Good morning,' but got no answer. Then she went to the bed and drew back the curtains – and there lay her grandmother with her bonnet pulled down low over her face and looking so peculiar. 'Why, Grandmama, what big ears you have!' 'The better to hear you with.' 'Why, Grandmama, what big eyes you have!' 'The better to see you with.' 'Why, Grandmama, what big hands you have!' 'The better to grab you with.' 'But, Grandmama, what terrible big jaws you have!' 'The better to eat you with.' And no sooner had the wolf said that than it made one bound out of the bed and gobbled up poor Little Redcape.

Having satisfied its appetite, the wolf lay down on the bed again, went to sleep and began to snore very loudly. The huntsman was just passing the house at that moment and he thought: How the old woman is snoring; let's see if anything's the matter with her. So he came into the room, and when he got to the bed he saw the wolf lying there: 'So I've found you here, you old sinner,' he said, 'I've been looking for you for a long time.' He was just about to take aim with his gun when it occurred to him that the wolf might have swallowed the old woman and she might still be saved – so instead of firing he took a pair of scissors and began to cut open the sleeping wolf's stomach. When he had made a snip or two, he saw the bright red of the little girl's cape, and after another few snips she jumped out and cried: 'Oh, how frightened I was, how dark it was inside the wolf!' And then her old grandmother came out too, still alive though she could hardly breathe. But Little Redcape quickly fetched some big stones, and with them they filled the wolf's belly, and when he woke up he tried to run away; but the stones were so heavy that he collapsed at once and was killed by the fall.

At this all three of them were happy; the huntsman skinned the wolf and took his skin home, the grandmother ate the cake and drank the wine that Little Redcape had brought, and they made her feel much better. But Little Redcape said to herself: As long as I live I'll never again leave the path and run into the forest by myself, when mother has said I mustn't.