

Red Riding Hood



In the far north, beside a river which froze hard as rock in the dark days of winter, there stood a great timber mill and a town built out of wood. The wood came from the trees of the deep forest which surrounded the town and stretched into the far distance.

In this town lived a quiet and shy little girl, called Red Riding Hood. Her real name was Nadia but everyone called her Red Riding Hood because when the cold came she always wore a thick red cloak with a hood. It had been given to her by her great-grandmother who had worn it herself, long ago, when she was a child.

Her great-grandmother still lived in a cottage in the forest and Red Riding Hood loved to visit her more than anything in the world; but she would never go alone because she was frightened to walk through the forest.

Red Riding Hood was frightened of many things. She was frightened of going up to bed by herself, she was frightened of dogs and of thunder and of people she did not know. But she was most frightened of the forest. The forest seemed strange to her for she had been born far away in a city in the south, where her mother and father had gone to be trained for their work in the great timber mill.

"Why do you never play in the forest like we did when we were children?" they asked her.

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"There have been no wolves in the forest since anyone can remeber," said her parents, laughing.

But her great-grandmother took the child to one side and said to her quietly, "Not everyone can hear that howling; they think it is only the wind in the trees. One winter day when I was a girl, out alone chopping wood for the stove, I was attacked by one of the grey wolves which speak."

"Oh, great-grandmother." whispered Red Riding Hood. "What did you do?"

I fought the wolf with my hatchet and killed it." replied the old woman, "for I was strong and agile when I was young."

But now the great-grandmother was very old and frail, and almost every day when school and work were over, Red Riding Hood went with her mother and father, or with some of the other children, to cook supper for her and to sit and talk.

Winter was coming. Snow Fell. It was dark before the children came out of school and the wind grew icy cold.

In the school the children were hard at work finishing the fur jackets which they had been making to wear during the bitter weather. They were very proud of these jackets, for all of them had cut out their own with great sharp knives and were sewing the pieces together with special, strong needles and thread. Only Red Riding Hood was not making a jacket. She wanted to wear her red cloak and hood and besides she was frightened that she might cut herself on one of the sharp knives.

Her mother and father worried that she would be cold without a jacket, for the red cloak was growing worn.

"We can see to that," said the great grandmother, as they all sat round her stove one evening "Bring the special sewing things with you after school tomorrow and i will help you make a sheepskin lining for your cloak."

"What a good idea," said Red Riding Hood's parents and Red Riding Hood thought happily about tomorrow as she walked home between them through the forest.

"Why don't you take some presents to great grandmother?" said her father the next morning. "Here are some brown eggs and some chocolate and a pot of the blackberry jam you helped us make." "We shall be busy this evening," said her mother, "but you can easily walk to great-grandmother's on your own. The path through the forest is cleared of snow every day and there will be a full moon tonight."

Red Riding Hood said nothing. She took a basket and carefully put into it the



eggs, the chocolate and the jam. She did not feel happy anymore. The other children were going to stay late at school to finish their jackets. She would have to walk through the forest to her great-grandmother's cottage all alone.

Red Riding Hood was frightened. All day at school she could think about nothing but whether she dared to walk through the forest alone. At dinner-time she did not want to eat because she felt sick. She borrowed a special needle and thread and a sharp knife and put them in the basket with the presents, but when school was over she did not set out for her great-grandmother's, although she was longing to see her. She turned her back on the forest and started to walk into the town towards home.

It was dark and quiet outside the school. The other children were still inside sewing their jackets. In the distance Red Riding Hood could hear the noise of sawing from the timber mill. Then she heard another sound, from quite close, somewhere near the edge of the forest. It was the howling of a wolf.

Red Riding Hood stood listening. She knew it was one of the grey wolves. But who would believe her? They would laugh and say she had imagined it. She thought of her great-grandmother, all alone.

What if a wolf had come again for her now that she was no longer young and agile? Red Riding Hood turned around and ran into the forest and along the path to the old woman's cottage.

She ran and ran until her side hurt and her heart thumped so fast she had to stop to get her breath.

The moon shone through the bare branches of the trees onto the snow and the frozen earth. It was very still. Then a gust of wind blew snow into the air and through the wind Red Riding Hood thought she heard a cold voice calling: "Run home, little girl, run home. This is the night of the wolf."

Then she heard a low growl, and staring through the flurry of snow she saw a



Streak of grey moving towards great-grandmother's cottage.

Her mouth went dry and her legs felt as if she could not move them, but she made them walk on until at last she reached the cottage.

"Great-grandmother, great-grandmother!" she cried, rattling the door latch. "I'm here!".

"Lift up the latch and walk in," called a thin quavering voice.

"Great-grandmother, are you ill?" cried little Red Riding Hood, and she opened the door and ran into the bedroom.

In the high, wooden bed there was a shape huddled down under the bed clothes. It was hard to see with only the moonlight coming through the window. Red Riding Hood peered at the shape and moved closer to the bed.

"What big eyes you have, great-grandmother," she said.

"All the better to see you with my dear," said the thin, quavering voice.

"And what big ears you have, great-grandmother"

"All the better to hear you with, my dear," said the voice.

"And what a strange nose you have, great-grandmother," said Red Riding Hood, Moving a little closer.

"All the better to smell you with my dear", said the voice, and Red Riding Hood could see a mouth full of yellow pointed teeth.

"And what big teeth you have!" she cried, backing away.

"All the better to eat you with!" snarled the shape, leaping from the bed. It was a grey wolf.

Red Riding Hood screamed and as she screamed she heard her great-grandmother calling. "Quick, child, quick! Let me in!"

Red Riding Hood flung open the door into the kitchen and there was her great-grandmother pulling a blazing branch from the stove. With this branch she advanced on the growling wolf, old and bent though she was.

The wolf was frightened of the flame. It circled fiercely around the old



woman, trying to get behind her and spring on her. Red Riding Hood shrank back against the wall. She could see that soon the branch would be burnt out and then the wolf would spring on her great-grandmother. Suddenly she remembered how easily the other children had cut through skins to make their jackets. She reached into her basket and pulled out the great sharp knife. Just as the branch burnt out and the wolf gathered itself for the kill, Red Riding Hood leapt forward and plunged the knife deep into its heart. The wolf gave one terrifying snarl and fell dead on the ground in a pool of blood. Red Riding Hood and her great-grandmother threw their arms around each other and wept tears of joy.

With the help of her great-grandmother Red Riding Hood skinned the wolf and together they made a lining of its fur. "Listen, great-granddaughter," said the old woman, as they worked together stitching the lining into the red cloak, "this cloak now has special powers. Whenever you meet another child who is shy and timid, lend that child the cloak to wear as you play together in the forest, and then, like you, they will grow brave."

So, whenever she met such a child, Red Riding Hood did as her great-grandmother had said, but the rest of the time she wore the cloak herself and for many years it kept her warm as she explored deeper and deeper into the great forest.

Authors' Notes

This story is one of a number which were going to be published originally as a book called Once and Future Tales for which we wrote this introduction.

This is a book of traditional fairy tales rewritten by four women in Merseyside Women's Liberation Movement.

We have been told by some people that we have no right to alter traditional fairy tales - they are part of our heritage. It is true that we are attacking a heritage; the heritage of a competitive and acquisitive society where the majority of people are inevitably under the control of a rich and powerful minority.

We have also been told that such work is trivial; we should be involved in direct political action. Fairy tales ARE political. They help to form children's values and teach them to accept our society and their roles in it. Central to this society is the assumption that domination and submission are the natural basis of all our relationships. This is clearly seen in the models provided by fairy tale heroes and heroines. Boys are required to go out and seek their fortune. The most daring and resourceful of them win power, riches and property - possession of the princess and half the Kingdom. Girls are required to be pretty, dutiful and compliant. The lucky ones will be rewarded with a life of decorative idleness as the wife of a prince. Traditional fairy tales encourage children to admire these values; acquisitive aggression in men and the dutiful nurturing of this aggression by women.

This book of stories has been written in the belief that our society can never be fundamentally changed while children's imaginations are imprisoned by its myths.

LIVERPOOL 1972

This story was collectively written in 1972 by Audrey Ackroyd, Marge Ben-Tovim, Catherine Meredith and Anne Neville, and illustrated by Trevor Skempton.

In collaboration with the authors and for FACT's (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) season dedicated to the exploration of gender, identity and representation, we have reissued a limited edition of Once and Future Tales.

Join us in celebrating the feminist retellings of Snow White, Rapunzel and Red Riding Hood and pick up your own limited edition from FACT for £2 each or a set of three tales for £5.

Enjoy a series of fairy tale inspired events throughout April, May and June 2019 including two special events where we'll be reading the Once and Future Tales aloud and hearing from the women who rewrote the stories in 1972.

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