

## If Little Red Riding Hood Had Shown Empathy by Penny Chrimes

As every child who has been paying attention knows, Little Red Riding Hood does not end well for the Wolf.

This is the way the story goes.

A small (well-fed) girl skips through a frozen winter forest in a cosy red cape, carrying a big basket full of food to share with her granny.

Along the way, Red Riding Hood – let's call her Red – meets a wolf.

But Red is very cosy in her new cape and she's in a hurry for her tea.

Although, it has to be said, she's not long had her lunch. I'm sorry to say, Red is rather a greedy child.

'Where are you going in your nice warm cape?' asks Wolf, wistfully. 'And what are those delicious smells from your basket?'

But Red doesn't hear the wistful.

'I am going to see my granny in her nice warm cottage.' She barely gives Wolf a second glance. 'Sorry – can't stop!' And off she skips with her little freckled nose in the air, swinging her basket.

Red doesn't notice that Wolf is just a shivering bag of bones.

Red doesn't notice the tears trickling down Wolf's muzzle.

Red doesn't notice the wobble of hunger in Wolf's voice.

The rest, I'm afraid, is history. Wolf runs ahead, gobbles down Granny for starters and climbs into the soft feather bed to wait for Red.

And then, of course, there is the whole 'What big ears you have...', 'What big eyes you have ...', 'What big teeth you have' rigmarole.

This time Red is paying a bit more attention. But it's too late for talking now, and Wolf gobbles down a plump Red-shaped pudding.

Fortunately for Red and her granny, a woodcutter comes along and discovers the Wolf sleeping off his dinner. He chops Wolf open to find the pair of them none the worse for their ordeal. Unlike poor Wolf.

But the point is, none of that needed to happen.

If only Red hadn't been in such a hurry.  
If only Red had stopped to listen.  
If only Red had taken the time to ask the Wolf how he was doing.

Wolf might have told Red how long it was since he had eaten, because all the rabbits were staying warm in their underground warrens and all the squirrels were staying warm in their tree-top dreys.

He might have told Red that Mrs Wolf was waiting for him back in their den, under a thin shelter of saplings through which the wind howled remorselessly every night.

He might have told Red that Mrs Wolf had hardly any milk left to feed their skinny, listless litter of pups.

He might have told Red that the rest of his pack had died in the harshest winter in wolf memory, and how lonely that felt.

And the tears might have trickled down Red's little freckled nose just like they trickled down Wolf's muzzle.

She might have put her arms around Wolf's bony neck and opened her cosy red cape to share her warmth.

And she might have carried her basket to Wolf's den, and given Granny's dinner to Mr and Mrs Wolf and their starving pups.

It could all have been so different. If only Red Riding Hood had shown a little empathy.

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