

THE BALLAD OF RED RIDING HOOD

Deep inside the forest,
Along the Appalachian Ridge,
High above the Schuman's farm
And past the Parker Bridge
They say you'll find a cabin
Where a hermit woman lives.

They say that once upon a time,
Not so long ago,
She lived alone with just her Ma
In a house in Green Hollow
And wore an antique riding hood,
As soft and white as snow.

She was a dark-haired, dainty girl
And a very pretty child
With little dimples in her cheeks
That showed each time she smiled
She even had her dead Pa's eyes
That glittered gray and wild.

Her Grannie lived up in the hills,
In a cabin in the woods.
The girl would come to visit her
As often as she could,
Weaving through the towering trees
In her white riding hood.

For each full moon her Grannie
Went outside at night;
Stood out in the dark and cold,
Her grey eyes glowing bright;
Then changed from a woman to a wolf,
And roamed until first light.

And so the girl was sent to help her

Until the moon's demise,
Tending to her wearied Grannie,
When she was too tired to rise,
For the girl was never frightened of her
In either wolf or woman's guise.

It was a cool midsummer day
The sky a hazy bland;
Dressed in her white riding hood,
With a basket in her hand,
The girl set out for Grannie's house
Across the hilly land.

She hiked into the mountains
With the sun upon her hair,
Skipping over rocks and stones
And breathing summer air,
But when she reached her Grannie's house
She stopped in her tracks to stare.

Hawks hovered high above it,
And blood ran beneath the door.
Inside there stood a hunter
Looking down upon the gore:
A fur-clad hunter gazing
At the corpse upon the floor.

It was the body of an old wolf,
Lean and steely gray.
The girl let out an anguished scream,
And stared on in dismay,
For it was her own dear Grannie
Who on the cold stone lay.

She fell beside the body,
And began to cry:
"Why'd you kill my Grannie?
She never hurt a fly!

What did she ever do to you?
Answer, stranger! Why?"

He said "I am a hunter,
And slaughter's what I do.
Long ago I killed your Pa,
And now your Grannie, too,
And when at last you come of age
Then I will hunt for you.

"Your Ma may not have told you,
But I see it in your eyes:
Your blood betrays your secret
With a trait you can't disguise.
Yes, soon you too will prowl
Beneath cold and moonlit skies."

The girl stared on in horror,
As he stripped her Grannie's skin,
Severed her gray, noble head
And carried them off with him.
She watched him go in silence,
But burned with rage within.

So she took her Grannie's rifle
And filled it up with lead
She raced after that hunter
And shot him through the head
Oh, she took her Grannie's rifle
And shot the hunter dead.

She stole the hunter's grizzly prize
And left him in the woods,
Found her way to Grannie's house
And buried her as best she could,
Then headed home, in bloody clothes,
And her blood-red riding hood.

And when she got back home again,
She hugged her ma and cried:
"I finally understand, Ma,
Just how my Daddy died;
And now I've shot the huntsman,
Who took poor Grannie's hide."

She closed her eyes and swallowed,
Spoke the words she feared to say:
"How long do I have, Ma,
'Till the full moon has its way?"
Her mother wept and sadly said
"Until your next birthday."

So on her fourteenth birthday
Just as the first snow fell,
The girl packed her belongings
And kissed her Ma farewell.
She was a lonely figure
With a sorry tale to tell.

She moved into her Grannie's cabin
And they say she lives there still;
And on the night of a full moon
She roams the shadowed hill,
Hunting now with teeth and claw
She stalks her frightened kill.

Prowling in her wolf-skin
She climbs the mountains high;
Howling to the white moon
Her head raised to the sky;
Screaming to the bright moon
Until her tears run dry.

—*Olivia Varney*