



Little Red Riding Hood Revisited

By Jennifer Young, LMHC

Little Red Riding Hood walks through the forest on her way to grandma's house. A wolf stalks and follows her, hungry to eat her. He moves more quickly than her and finds his place in grandma's home, devours grandma, dons grandma's clothes and waits patiently for Little Red to arrive. I think we know what happens next. Or do we?

Little Red Riding Hood has been down this road before. She's a little older now and wiser. What the wolf does not know is that she remembers who he is and he is pretty freaking predictable. He is a carnivore with a one track mind. She knows he hunts and stalks, she knows that he is sly and cunning and she knows that he hides in places to make her think that he is safe to be around. She did not always know this but because she is smart, she remembers. And, because she remembers, she is not so afraid.

I know that you can relate to Little Red Riding Hood. You were stalked and followed. He moved quicker than you, he was more powerful from the start (you really did not stand a chance) and he was a master of making you feel safe. In fact, much like the wolf hid in grandma's clothes, your cluster b hid in society – pretending to be what you thought was safe. But once you are out of your pathological relationship you cannot hide at home, never venturing into the forest again. And, you cannot go back into the forest, pretending that wolves are out there.

When you are ready, you have to get back out there. But you have to do it differently. The key to dating again is spotting it and/or getting out quickly if danger presents itself. If we revisit Little Red Riding Hood the second time around she still takes the forest route because it is the most beautiful and provides the most excitement. But as she moves through the forest, she looks up and sees what is in front of her. She notices the trees, the small sweet animals and the dangerous wolves. And when she is quiet and peaceful, safely moving in the world she can really sense danger. This peacefulness allows her to do something different when danger is afoot and she does it.

You may have never been taught that there were wolves in the world. You may have grown up surrounded by wolves so that when a wolf arrived, you thought it normal. But, once you know the story of the wolves you have a new power. You can learn how people like this work, how they come with an intensity that is overwhelming, how they seek to control and violate boundaries, how they hide in society with titles and stories that have no facts behind them, and how they talk like us and pretend to love like us but are NOTHING like us.

You can learn to spot it – the wolf in granny's clothing. Once you see it, you have to choose to do something different. This is other part of the story that Little Red Riding Hood does differently. See, all of her life and throughout time, she might have been told how to spot a wolf but she was never really told that it was ok to dump the wolf. You might have learned a similar lesson. Women are often told to "make it work" or "just give him another chance". Women have been taught to believe that if *they* change, their situation will change. That's just not always true. When it comes to wolves, he's a wolf and there is no amount of love that is going to make him not be a wolf. If he's a wolf then your only option is to run.

Dating after a pathological love relationship requires that you have the skills to spot a pathological. You have experienced it first hand and often times the only gift that comes from that relationship is that you know what it looks like. So use it. As you begin to date, watch for patterns of pathological behavior. Lies,

boundary violations, intensity, stories that don't match, history of destroyed relationships or intense blaming of past partners, lack of genuine social connections, history of legal violations or violation of social norms are just some of things you might see. And remember, that not all cluster b's look the same but the underlying patterns are the same. So one may not do exactly what the last one did but a lie is a lie and a boundary violation is a boundary violation.

Be prepared to move on. You must be prepared to not have a second date, break up after a month or leave even after 6 months in, if that is when you see it. Any relationship requires that you hold on to you and at any moment, you must be Ok with leaving and not be an emotional puddle on the floor. You holding on to you means that you saw who he is, you know it's not you and you leave.

Little Red Riding Hood spends a lot of time with grandma now. The wolves move in the forest the same way they always did and often a wolf stalks Red. But she doesn't spend time in fear or worry about the wolf. She moves smartly, peacefully and quickly on her path to grandma's house. Head up, eyes open. She saves the fear for when she needs it, to sense danger and run. The rest of her days she works hard, cares for her kids, visits with friends and travels the world. The End.