



The Big Bad Werewolf

The story of Little Red Riding Hood was first published by Charles Perrault in 1697. True to previous oral versions of the story, the wolf swallows grandma and after a brief exchange with little red, jumps out of bed and swallows her up too. End of story. No Grim brother's happy ending.

Interestingly, in some of the early versions of the story, the villain is not merely a wolf, but a werewolf, making the cautionary tale relevant to the times when people attributed the loss of livestock and the disappearance, abuse and death of children to the werewolf.

In 15th and 16th century Europe, shape shifting was a common accusation. The wolf was a fearful animal lurking at the edge of light, hiding in the shadows, and creeping along on silent paws. This nightmare beast with glowing eyes, bloodstained claws and mighty jaws dripping with gore, was a well suited visage for the murderous and licentious human to assume in exacting vengeance and satiating forbidden, aberrant desires.

When the villagers apprehend the convicted offender, the cost was brutal. 1589, the German city of Cologne, "The Werewolf of Bedburg", Peter Stubble was put to a grisly, excruciating death. After confession under torture that his magic belt, received from demonic, infernal powers, enabled him to become a wolf, he was broken on the wheel, limbs fractured and bunt with red hot pincers, beheaded and cremated on a pyre. His complicit daughter and mistress were flayed, strangled and burnt along with him. Lycanthropy is the word. From the Greek, Lycos: Wolf; and Anthropos: Man. Hence; the Wolf-man.





Having been bitten or scratched by a werewolf, and under the influence of a full moon, to increase the “Luna-tic” urges, or as a result of excommunication, and according to St. Thomas Aquinas, within the capacity of all angels both, good and bad, to command, one can be metamorphosed into the Werewolf. With superhuman strength, speed, invulnerability and with inhibitions and animalistic appetites released, one can have an exhausting night romp, leaving a trail of epic destruction, and perhaps, in the morning, wake weakened, and not remembering a thing.

Remedies fall into medical, surgical and spiritual categories.

Treatment with wolfsbane (a perennial herb containing aconitine, a potent neurotoxin) which often proved fatal; Striking the forehead with a knife, piercing the hands with nails, preferably silver instruments; and finally exorcism and conversion to Christianity may return the lost to propriety and civility.

I suppose the claim: “The Devil made me do it”, then absolves the penitent from all culpability. But what’s to prevent a relapse into that former raucous night life?

Not all wolves are of the same sort: There is the kind with the amenable disposition, tame obliging and gentle, following the young maids in the streets, even into their homes. Who does not know that these gentle wolves are, of all such creatures, the most dangerous of all!

O villain, villain, smiling, damnèd villain! That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain— Oh, My; What big Teeth you have!



In tribute to the late
Warren Zevon:

I saw a Werewolf drinking a
pina colada at Trader Vic’s...

And his hair was perfect! Bit!

AAH-OOOOOO,
Werewolves of London!