

Redcoat.

The street's comforting grey was lost in garish graffiti, which almost glowed in the twilight. Her footsteps echoed among the dwindling day, and she almost forgot where she was. Almost.

Her coat was going to get her noticed here, but she'd worked to wear it. The station had laughed at 'Red Riding Hood', had told 'Red' she was going to get herself killed, especially running a Forest job. She didn't care.

Red was delivering a rucksack of supplies to some stubborn pensioner living in the Forest, a rucksack which would never arrive without a Redcoat escort. This Forest-dwelling pensioner, dubbed 'Granny' by the rest of the station, had become somewhat of a celebrity for her boldness. Not even senior officers stayed in the Forest long.

Doing a milk run somewhere as depraved as this district would be enough for any rookie, like Red, to prove themselves. Still, the Chief Officer had advised her only to walk along open roads where she could watch herself. People disappeared in the Forest easily. Redcoats disappeared more than anyone.

'Oi, Redcoat! You bleed as bright as that coat?'

And when Redcoats weren't disappearing, they were being abused. Red kept walking despite the calls from the window above her, pulling her rucksack closer.

A distant gunshot reverberated across the block, followed by screams. It wasn't aimed at her. Red kept walking.

Another gunshot. Much closer. Red stopped.

Two rival gangs were dug into a firefight on the only open road ahead. Gangs happily shot other gangs. But anyone would rather shoot Redcoats.

Red dropped into an alleyway before she was seen; quickly being swallowed by shadow. She'd prefer walking shady blocks to coming back in a bag after following orders.

She was almost comfortable with the darkness when she caught it moving. Red was holding her sidearm before she knew it.

'Interesting... a Redcoat... in *my* Forest? And actually *wearing* the coat, no less? You're either new or suicidal, lady.'

She whirled to face the voice, and kept her own steady.

'Step into the light. Then don't move.'

'As you wish.'

A *Wolf* stepped out — casually — in front of her sidearm. She hoped it wasn't showing, but she was scared. Officers shouldn't engage gang members alone, *especially Wolves*. But she couldn't see another option.

'Tell me, why shouldn't I just shoot you now?'

'I'm a *Wolf*, lady. *Wolves* travel in packs. You'd be dead before I hit the ground. Instead, why don't you tell me what a *Redcoat* is doing here, and I might ignore you.'

That was police business. But she was out of options.

'...I'm delivering supplies, to an old woman living close by.'

'Oh, I see... somewhat degrading, for a *Redcoat*. If you want some real work while you're here, some... "flowers" are nearby. Worth some "Redcoat points", I imagine?'

'Why would *you* tell me about drug stockpiles?'

'It's not illegal to be a concerned citizen, lady. Now, I suggest you start looking before I change my mind. Run along, little *Redcoat*.'

Keeping her gun on him, she grudgingly backed into shadow. When she'd left, the *Wolf* laughed at the darkness behind him.

'*Wolves!* I believe we've found our dear, old, *Granny*... Let's hunt.'

Red found the *Wolf's* "flowers" after a few hours, and confiscated what she could. She found her way onto brighter, wider roads; and without too much time or incident, she soon arrived outside—

Red's back forced itself against the wall. Smashed glass, bullet scars and gore decorated the outside of *Granny's* flat.

Nobody was meant to know about this place.

Moving cautiously inside, Red steadied herself as she searched for *Granny*: it seemed like the outside's decorator had also worked on the interior.

She strangled her sidearm tighter, and in the next room almost dropped it.

Wolves lay dead or whimpering on the floor. Rookie or not, Red was still a trained *Redcoat*. She couldn't have cleared this many *Wolves* in a room alone.

Something wasn't right.

Plastic sharply clicked on plastic in the room adjacent.

Red moved through the carnage to investigate. A gasp slipped from her lips as she caught her foot among the bodies. Turning to dislodge herself, Red quickly lost her footing and fell as the wounded Wolf squeezing her ankle dragged himself above her.

He stumbled into a straddle over her, his body contorting. Bones cracked. Flesh tore. Her screams rivalled his as this freshly-formed, *literal* Wolf on top of her prepared to rip her insides out—

He exploded, with a moist *pop*, into a deluge of gore in front of Red's face.

'You must be the new Redcoat, dear.'

Swinging her head towards the soft voice, Red saw an elderly woman sat knitting in the room's corner, a smoking revolver on her lap. *Granny*.

Covered in Wolf, Red rolled the corpse off and ran to Granny, but found her voice failed her. Granny's happily chimed in.

'You've brought my things! Thank you dear, I do appreciate a young lady helping her elders.'

Wide-eyed, Red's shaking grip silently offered the gore-soaked rucksack. Granny took and inspected it, sounding positively ecstatic.

'Milk! I've been quite excited for a glass of milk... Ah, manners! Make yourself at *home*, dear. Take a seat. Excuse the mess.'

Strained speech heaved itself from Red's throat, choked by disbelief.

'H... How?'

'How am I okay, dear? Living as long as me, you learn to deal with *boys*. Even Forest boys. You'd be surprised what knitting needles can do, dear. Especially with a .44 involved.'

'...Such... strong... arms...'

Granny looked down at her arms. Like the rest of her figure, they were unexpectedly athletic for a "pensioner".

'Why thank you dear, all the better to save you with it seems.'

'Good ears... too...'

'All the better to hear your struggle with, dear. Not every old person is deaf.'

'You even... have... teeth.'

Granny glared for a moment, before lightening again.

‘That was a bit far, young lady. But, you're in shock. I think I'll let you off, dear. Care for a sweet?’

Red found her voice slowly returning as her disbelief turned to curiosity.

‘Who... *are* you?’

Granny smiled.

‘Why dear, I’m just the poor little girl the Wolves could never eat.’